

Chairman Lee, Vice-Chair Cleary, and members of the Senate Human Services committee:

My name is Kathy Busche. I own and operate two childcare programs in Hazen. One program is a group facility licensed for 30. I own the facility and operate a 0-5 program with a current enrollment of 33 children. The second program is my home where I operate a school age program with a license for 30 with 25 children enrolled. The facility is Step 2 in Bright and Early QRIS. Our home program is Step 1 QRIS. I have been operating my business out of my home since 2007 and purchased and renovated the facility opening the second location in January 2022. I have a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education from MSUM and providing quality childcare is my passion.

I am sorry I cannot be present to testify in person, but unfortunately, I do not have the backup staff required to be away from our programs at the present time.

I am writing today in support of SB 2190. Of the 58 children I care for between my two programs I care for 21 children who currently receive child care assistance. The process for parents to reapply for childcare assistance can be daunting. The month prior to the expiration of their certificate for assistance parents are mailed an information requesting updated information. They are told in their paperwork not to begin filling out the paperwork until the beginning of the month of expiration. This timeline is frustrating as a provider as the state allows up to 30 days to process the paperwork from parents. This means that more often than not parents child care assistance certificates expire leaving their providers waiting for certificates to be processed in order to receive payment. Streamlining this process would be greatly beneficial to parents and will hopefully reduce the processing time for re-certification.

Although not directly addressed in this bill I do have a complaint in regards to the maximum payment for license types in the sliding fee scale created by the state of North Dakota. Currently the maximum payment for an infant in a center-based program is \$913.33 per month whereas a family/group program maximum payment is only \$700. This discrepancy doesn't take into account programs such as mine that are group facilities with the same staff and overhead as a center program. I recently raised my rates and my new full-time rates come to \$780 per month regardless of age of the children which although not much higher than the state maximum payment for a group license for infants and toddlers it is significantly higher than the payment for preschool and school age children. My families receiving assistance simply cannot afford the excess payment which increases as their children get older. In fact, a number of current families have been forced to drop their children down to 3-4 days per week in order to keep their child care fees are under the state maximum. This is a workforce issue. Parents who qualify for assistance need high quality care in programs such as mine but are often forced to decrease their hours at work in order to stay under the state maximum payment.

My recommendation to the committee and the Department of Health and Human Services is to amend the sliding fee scale to create a flat rate maximum for all licensed programs in the state of North Dakota which provides parents the ability to continue in the workforce full-time.

Thank you for your time and I am available to answer any questions the committee may have.

Kathy Busche

701-748-2084

kathybusche@gmail.com

