

## Testimony in Support of SB 2190

Good morning Chair Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

My name is Robin Nelson. I write this testimony in support of SB 2190, a bill that relates to the child care financial assistance program.

I reside in District 41, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Red River Valley in Fargo. Ours is a non-profit organization that operates 12 licensed child care sites in which we serve approximately 600 school-age youth every day.

It is widely acknowledged that our state is experiencing a child care crisis with regard to availability, affordability, and access. We are thankful that you as legislators are taking actions to help address this issue as it not only affects children and their families, but also the workforce and economy. To recycle a quote from one of my colleagues, child care is the business that keeps other businesses in business.

We support this Senate Bill 2190 for the following reasons:

1. It creates a streamlined process – the current application process is often overwhelming for families, and especially for those with language barriers and/or limited access to technology. The proposed process therein utilizes forms that have already been gathered and submitted.
2. It provides an annual escalator for benefit amounts.
3. It helps create more awareness of the financial assistance program – something that is typically left to child care providers, and that often happens when a family asks about scholarships or falls behind in payments.
4. This bill will help the many families that fall into what is commonly referred to as the “gap” category – those who earn too much to qualify for a certain percentage of assistance (referred to in this bill as a sliding fee), but are still unable to pay for that gap due to escalating costs of child care services. In the past, our organization has used a scholarship fund to assist families that fall into that gap; but, since the stabilization grants are expiring, all of our available funds will be routed to increased staff compensation in order to retain and attract employees, while trying to not increase the tuition we charge families.

I respect there will be more bills introduced that are related to child care, and many of the components of various bills may be combined into a singular version.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of the Red River Valley supports the concepts of this bill, and we respectfully encourage the committee to recommend a “do pass” on Senate Bill 2190.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions.