

Chairman Lee and Members of Human Service 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 to you today in opposition of SB 2323 as it is written. This senate bill will not solve the childcare crisis in North Dakota. When Best in Class was presented to the providers in North Dakota we were told that in-home or group providers would be able to offer Best in Class 4 year old classrooms in our programs. As the program sits it is nearly impossible for programs such as mine to qualify. Programs of my size can't offer a classroom of only 9 children from low socioeconomic families. That leaves only programs in public and private school being able to qualify as they have less overhead due to being in a school. On the DHHS website it shows the programs who have been recipients of the current Best in Class grants and you can clearly see that only public and private schools have received this funding. https://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/news/2022/5-10-human-services-announces-early-childhood-best-in-class-grant-recipients.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3xoVN1sxe83_F8d80Dr8oP3V6e23X8Kz45rVKVEvGtza70MELkaQBc7YM

The Best in Class 4 year old program is essentially publicly funded preschool in programs such as public school and Head Start programs where they already receive federal funding.

In my opinion SB2323 is simply another push for universal pre-k in North Dakota and the cradle to college agenda we have seen in the past. Parents of children in North Dakota want to be able to choose programs that are the best fit for their children and often that is not in a public school setting.

Children who attend Best in Class classrooms still require wrap around care, meaning their parents need childcare before and after their child's preschool day. This is a strain on childcare in our state. Children who attend these Best in Class classrooms are still requiring a childcare space in our programs. As a state we do not need to add \$30 million dollars to the Best in Class 4 year old program budget, we need to spend this money in quality early childhood programs that offer full day childcare to the parents in North Dakota. Those programs are the ones keeping our workforce afloat.

I would happily support money being used as grants for early childhood programs, afterschool programs and quality rating system creation for afterschool programs, but I am opposed to giving more money to programs that focus solely on 4 year olds (or the year before Kindergarten) or giving money to programs that already receive federal funding such as Head Start programs.

Thank you for your time, if you have any questions please reach out as I would be happy to discuss this more.

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