

As a parent of a child in need of child care and as a long-time early childhood care provider, I come with the support and following testimony for Bill 2301.

Early childhood care and education is my life passion. Research has shown repeatedly that the brain development in the first five years of life lays a foundation for the rest of life. The way that adults provide care and the environments that the children spend time in make a difference not only how those children one day move through school, but also through all of life. The investments that a state makes in its youngest children will return exponentially in a thriving workforce and in a decrease of incarceration as these children grow into adults.

I have my Master's degree in Early Childhood Education and have worked in the field in many different roles from center teacher, center director, family child care owner, and Head Start management. I believe that the current system does not serve families and children well in the following ways:

1. As a business, it is very difficult for a private child care owner, whether center or home-based, to create a quality environment with quality care given by staff when they are not able to make a profit. If they are not making a profit, or simply breaking even, child care businesses will no longer be able to operate. . This affects North Dakota's economy and workforce in every single sector.

2. The cost of child care tuition has increased for families significantly. From the perspective of a child care business owner, I understand why they need to do this, but it is very difficult for 13% of our income to go towards child care costs. For any family who has more than one child in need of care, it is nearly impossible to make this work. They are generally forced to stay in lower paying jobs so they qualify for Child Care Assistance or go to lower quality/lower cost care situations.

3. It is very difficult to retain any child care workers, let alone ones who have training and education in the field. Experience is important, but it is absolutely vital to ensure that child care providers are educated in the latest research on developmentally appropriate practices. While caring is something we've been doing since the beginning of humankind, we are continually learning through the lens of science which of our care practices are what developing brains need. Care providers need this knowledge to make decisions on a daily basis.

The stress of this job pays a toll on child care workers, on families, and unfortunately on the well-being of children. At Head Start we have data that shows an increase of children on behavior support plans in the past two years. We have struggled to hire support staff for classroom teachers and this exacerbates both stress of the staff we have, makes retention harder, and makes the situation even more stressful for children. We are at a time where it is absolutely urgent to support early childhood programs.

The state of North Dakota gives business incentives (such as tax exemptions) to encourage economic growth. Beyond this stabilization funding, legislation could also be passed to give

essential services such as child care businesses tax exemptions or other business incentives to make them more profitable.

I support the stabilization funding but hope that legislators will do their thorough research as to how much is going to be helpful to providers.