

Senate Workforce Development Committee
SB 2301
January 26, 2023

Chair Wobbema and committee members, my name is Alexa Ducioame, and I am providing testimony in support of SB 2301 as a working parent of two small children in Fargo.

The childcare workforce supports the entire workforce.

Several surveys were collected in 2022 in North Dakota and just across the border and found:

- 57% of Horace respondents said the lack of childcare affected their careers.¹
- 29% of East Grand Forks parent respondents withdrew from the workforce or declined employment due to childcare arrangements.²
- 27% of East Grand Forks employer respondents said it impacted their ability to attract employees.²
- 30% of surveyed ND businesses said the lack of access to affordable and high-quality childcare negatively affected their organization's performance.³

My personal story is as a parent who struggled with work during unexpected childcare closures, criminal child abuse cases, and finding any other childcare. My daughter (2.5) has been on a wait list for our preferred center for 3 years. My son (1) was able to get in at 6 months, but there's still 700 people on their wait list. When neither child could get into that center initially, we enrolled them in another that we thought would be okay. While we had some initial struggles, the larger issues occurred in 2022. In January through April, we had 26 days where we unexpectedly had to stay home due to weather or staffing. In April alone were 12 of those closings (57% of the working days). I'm a civil engineer and my husband is in IT, so our work can be flexible and we did our best to work from home, but it was not sustainable. We started to look for other childcare options. Some centers wouldn't even put us on a waitlist because it was already so long.

Part of the time the center was closed in April was because they lost their license, but then they reapplied under a different name and reopened. On May 31st, a Fargo Detective and Cass County Human Services called me to let me know they were investigating abuse at the center. A reported incident occurred on May 5th and after reviewing the tapes the detective also named my daughter as a victim. The center did not report the incident that required medical care, and they did not have any communication with parents. Our search for childcare became more urgent. We were finally able to line up care at a different center that cost 50% more for October 3rd, and her last day at the old center would be September 29th. That day, we received a call from the new center that they were awaiting fingerprints and pushed back enrollment to November 1st. My husband stayed at home to take care of her for that month.

¹ City of Horace, "City Survey Results: Childcare Services in Horace," October 2022. [Online]. Available: https://www.cityofhorace.com/community_news___events/city_survey_results.php.

² First Children's Finance, "Rural Child Care Innovation Program, Community Solution Action Plan for Child Care: East Grand Forks, Minnesota," May 2022.

³ J. Bitzan, Ph.D., "North Dakota Business Conditions and Climate Survey 2022," Sheila and Robert Challey Institute for Global Innovation and Growth, NDSU, 2022.

The portion of our story regarding unexpected staffing-related closures and the struggle to find childcare is not uncommon. I have multiple coworkers whose children attended different centers and also navigated unexpected closures in early 2022. One coworker couldn't line up childcare until 1 month after she returned from a 3-month maternity leave. It is frustrating when parents cannot find reliable care for their child and must worry about the quality of care provided. Not just whether the child has enrichment activities, but whether they are safe. We are grateful for our children to be at the two wonderful centers they're at now but know that other families are still struggling. Rural areas have additional challenges.

Childcare stabilization funds proposed in SB2301 could be used to increase the wages of staff, improving recruitment and retention. From my personal experiences, I also greatly appreciate the considerations for provider quality and correction orders. This would improve the quality of care provided without burdening parents with increased costs. If the childcare workforce grew, it would support parents who want to join the workforce in other fields as well.

The median wage for childcare workers was \$11.19 an hour in 2021, or \$23,275 per year working full-time.⁴ The way SB2301 is currently framed, those employees may see a \$1-2 an hour increase in wages. This is not enough to be competitive with other available jobs. **The monthly payments should be increased to reflect the value of the business that keeps everyone else in business while caring for our most precious family members.**

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Alexa Ducioame

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics: North Dakota," May 2021. [Online]. Available: https://www.bls.gov/oes/2021/may/oes_nd.htm#39-0000.