

To whom it may concern,

I am the Director overseeing both Hope Center for Learning locations in Fargo, ND. We have been licensed since August 2009 and August 2010. We have been participating in Bright & Early since 2017. We are currently rated Step 3 and began our renewal process in January 2025.

I was the director who opened both centers in 2009 and 2010 within Hope Lutheran Church facilities. One thing I strived for from the beginning was providing a high standard of care. The policies and procedures of the center are continually evolving based on the knowledge we have gained through our involvement in Bright and Early. The support provided for the staff from the Bright and Early coaches and educators has been an invaluable asset to us providing high quality care to our children and families.

In addition to the support and education provided to us from Bright and Early coaches is the funding that we receive to help us continue to provide a high level of care for the children and families we serve. We received \$8,000 for each center in quality Improvement grants in 2022, 2023, and 2024. Past grant dollars have been used to maintain and upgrade childcare spaces such as adding new carpeting and having the rooms painted. We have also used this funding to purchase additional furnishing including shelving, chairs, changing station, etc.

The 2024 grant dollars will be used to send all full-time staff (14 staff total) to the ND Early Childhood Conference in Bismarck in April 2025. With these funds we will be able to pay for wages, lodging, food, registration, etc. Being able to provide teachers with quality education opportunities helps us retain high quality early childhood teachers which is the key to any early childhood program. Funding to help us provide education and opportunities for staff is especially important now, when it seems like being able to hire qualified staff is becoming increasingly difficult.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Nicole Darling