

Good morning. My name is Michelle Roeszler. I am currently working as a mother's helper in Fargo but previously have owned and operated a home-based childcare for 15 years. I have operated legally unlicensed, held a family license, held a group license, and held a group non-residential license. I also admin a Facebook group for people working in childcare across the state of North Dakota with just under 400 members.

I am testifying today in opposition of HB 1347. After speaking with Representative Bosch to find out the context behind the introduction of this bill I remain supportive of the philosophy behind this bill but feel that this change in century code will impact childcare negatively in North Dakota for several reasons.

1. The change in definition shifts a voluntary registration for caregivers in the child's home to required. I do not support required registration of caregivers a parent chooses to bring into their homes. This change would require every afterschool babysitter and full-time nanny to register with DHS. While I support parents having information on the background of their caregiver it is the responsibility of the parent to obtain that information. There is no proposal to require background checks for the other countless individuals parents invite into their homes such as housekeepers.
2. By adding caregivers in the provider's home to the definition of in home caregiver and requiring registration the bill proposes to add new regulations to legally unlicensed caregivers in their homes. While I understand the reason for this proposal, I feel that it is the responsibility of parents to become informed about those who they choose for the care of their child. Unlicensed caregivers are an important option for families in our state. They have lower overhead costs thus cost less for parents who live in the gap between affording childcare on their own and qualifying for CCAP (childcare assistance). In some communities legally unlicensed care is the only option available for parents. The reasons for operating legally unlicensed vary but I would guess the majority are not legally unlicensed because they have a criminal history. The alternative to requiring registration of legally unlicensed caregivers is to educate parents on how to ensure the care they choose for their child is qualified by checking court databases and seeking a private background check of the caregiver before enrollment.
3. By requiring registration of legally unlicensed caregivers in their own home we are starting down the path of requiring a license to provide care in their homes. I believe that our state needs to maintain a legally unlicensed option as it fills a need in many communities.
4. In speaking with Representative Bosch he indicated that this bill came out of situations where unlicensed caregivers abused or neglected children in their care. It is unfortunate that adults are willing to harm children but requiring registration of legally unlicensed caregivers in their homes as well as private caregivers in the child's home will only impact a small section of those adults who harm children.
5. I have a concern of how DHS will enforce this further restriction of legally unlicensed care in the state. At the present time when a report to DHS (or their agents in the

human service zones) is made of providers in their homes operating out of compliance with current law they are sent a letter informing them of the complaint and educating them on the laws. The information I have received from citizens about their experiences reporting providers out of compliance is that it does no good. They continue to report those providers and nothing happens. If we don't have effective enforcement of the current regulations how can DHS enforce additional regulations?

6. The fiscal note indicates that this bill will require appropriations over \$500,000 per biennium to process the additional applications and complete background checks. The note does not indicate that these funds would be for enforcement. The fiscal note also indicates a need for funds over \$18,000 to reimburse the Attorney General's office for background checks. That predicts a large number of background checks are anticipated. To me that indicates the potential for a large number of providers operating legally unlicensed at the present and a large number of potential for non-compliance.

In closing, I can understand the reasons this bill was proposed and see how further regulation might seem like the way to prevent abuse and neglect in unlicensed care settings. However I cannot support additional regulation of legally unlicensed caregivers and especially the regulation of private caregivers in the home of the child.

Childcare is a vital service for the workforce of North Dakota. By increasing regulations on legally unlicensed caregivers the unintended consequence will be a reduction in available care options for parents, a sharp increase in non-compliance, a sharp increase in the need for enforcement, and an appropriation of over half a million dollars to process applications and complete background checks. In a time when budgets are stretched thin and will need to stretch more, the cost of this bill outweighs the potential benefit.