

House Industry, Business and Labor Committee
Hearing on SB 2301: Child Care Workforce Stabilization Program
March 7, 2023

Chairman Louser, members of the committee, my name is **Erin Laverdure**. I live in **Stanton**. I'm co-founder and board president of Energy Capital Cooperative Child Care in Hazen. I'm also a member of the ND Child Care Action Alliance, an ad hoc group of child care workers, providers, and advocacy organizations. I work in community relations at Basin Electric.

I'm **in favor** of Senate Bill 2301. I helped found the only child care with a center license in Mercer County. I formed a coalition of employers in the county, all of whom were facing employee recruitment and retention issues relating to child care accessibility. Our founders are some of the sharpest business minds in a cross-section of industries – energy, banking, health care, education. We've worked hard since 2017 to balance fair employee pay and benefits, with fair tuition to our families. I believe to my core, if this balance were possible, we would have achieved it.

At the child care center, we've increased pay and benefits over time, but not to the level they deserve. We've struggled with employee retention, and have had to cut families and hours. We've raised tuition rates for families, but not to the level necessary to sustain operations. If we did that, we'd price our families out of the center, and consequently, out of the workforce. We rely on the continued generosity of the businesses that helped found us, but not all are in a position to continually donate – particularly the nonprofit clinic, hospital, nursing home, and school.

A consistent, substantially funded stabilization program would give our child care center the certainty needed to pay wages to our hard-working staff.

Child care is a unique labor issue that affects all other workforces. SB2301 will help to expedite placement and ensure high-quality care. It helps keep the cost of child care down for working families by not passing additional expense on to families, providers, and businesses.

To address this crisis, I support the provisions that encourage high-quality care and recommend a higher funding level of \$150 million annually.

Child care workers hold in their hands this state's legacy. Help us as child care providers pay them the living wages and benefits they deserve. Mercer County's economic vibrancy depends on the availability, stability, and quality of child care, and a stabilization grant can drive all three.

The child care stabilization program is the innovative solution we need to fix and sustain the fractured child care system in North Dakota. I encourage a **"Do-Pass"** recommendation. Thank you for your consideration.