

House Appropriations – Human Resources Division

HB 1012 and funding for Early Childhood Education.

My name is Linda Schroeder. I live in West Fargo, and I have operated my in-home childcare business for 34 years or about 82,000 hours invested in providing care to children and supporting their families. It was not until Covid that childcare started to receive appreciation and support for the service that is provided to children and families. I like to think it was a piece of silver lining in a time that was very challenging. I never closed my program during Covid. The parents of the families were working at the hospital, banks, maintenance, driving trucks, and many other providers were right there on the front line's day in and day out. Without quality childcare people can't show up for work. The unfortunate result during this time was that many of the people that pulled their kids and stopped paying for childcare, yet they were still being paid and receiving unemployment. Many providers did not initially qualify for unemployment. As a result, they left childcare because of no income. When the workforce took steps to reestablish itself many providers took other jobs that paid more than what they are making caring for children.

North Dakota started to really look at childcare and recognize how vital it is in the process of building a strong economy, establishing and reaching goals. Each year more opportunities, programs and support systems are included in this crucial business that supports our workforce. This needs to be addressed annually with steps for improvement in the forefront of our minds.

It is my hope that you fully fund the Early Childhood Programs and not consider any recommended cuts. The needs of the children, providers and families continue to escalate. Food prices are constantly increasing. Ongoing training is needed to navigate the many behavioral, emotional and academic needs of children. I have more therapists than ever before coming into my program to provide services and offer support to children. The challenges that schools deal within unprecedented numbers we see in our programs first as they are with us before entering school. We are faced with trying to navigate the growth and development of children while trying to support the families which are often overwhelmed. We need help with supplies, equipment, and training. School systems have a staff an in-home provider does all of this alone. My day starts with self-care for kids as many come straight from bed without even having used the bathroom. Their hair still has the ponytails that I put in the day before. This care and nurturing continue throughout the day. I have washed and changed clothes, clipped nails, brushed teeth and provided dignity to children and grace to overwhelmed parents. These and many more challenges are present in 90% of the families I have supported.

When discussing and allocating funds please think of your children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, friends and neighbors now and in the future. We need to focus on not only recruiting early childhood educators but also supporting the providers we have so that they don't leave the early childhood workforce. Our future depends on it. North Dakota can lead the way!

Smiles

Linda Schroeder

