

Chairman Nelson and Members of the House Appropriation Committee – Human Resource Division:

My name is Kathy Busche. I own and operate two childcare programs in Hazen. One program is a group facility licensed for 30. I own the facility and operate a 0-5 program with a current enrollment of 33 children. The second program is my home where I operate a school age program with a license for 30 with 25 children enrolled. The facility is Step 2 in Bright and Early QRIS. Our home program is Step 1 QRIS. I have been operating my business out of my home since 2007 and purchased and renovated the facility opening the second location in January 2022. I have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education from MSUM and providing quality childcare is my passion.

I am sorry I cannot be present to testify in person, but unfortunately, I do not have the backup staff required to be away from our programs at the present time.

I am writing today to urge you to approve HB 1012, specifically funding for childcare. During the previous biennium funding was approved that greatly impacted my ability to provide childcare in an area where childcare is lacking. Mercer county is known as a childcare desert and because of the funding approved in 2023 I have been able to continue to care for 60 children in our community. Some of the funding that has been most beneficial was funding related to CCAP for employees. I currently employ 11 individuals. Five of them have children who are of childcare age. In previous years I would not have gotten paid for those spots in our program. I have increased my income by five spots. I have also been receiving increased income from CCAP in the form of quality rating payments and increased payment for infants and toddlers. The combination of these three funding sources has allowed me the ability to give my staff monthly bonuses to retain quality staff which has made providing quality early childhood experiences to the children in our community much easier.

The second funding source that has been of great importance to our program is the inclusion grant. Of the 60 children in our programs currently 21 of them have some kind of special needs ranging from speech delays to non-verbal autism. Caring for children with special needs is a passion of mine and having extra funding to provide staffing to care for these children has been essential. Currently ratio requires us to have 5 or 6 staff each day and because of the inclusion grant we are able to staff our program with 7 or 8 staff each day. This has allowed my staff to work one on one with children who have disabilities.

I greatly appreciate all that North Dakota has done in the past to support child care and urge you to continue to invest in the children of North Dakota at the previous biennium funding of \$7mil.

Thank you for your time, if you have any questions please reach out as I would be happy to discuss this more.

Kathy Busche

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