

HB 1119

Senate Workforce Development Committee Hearing

March 6, 2025 11:00 am

My name is Michelle Roeszler. I live in Fargo and operated a childcare program in various forms 2005 through 2020 and now bring Story + Play sessions into childcare programs throughout the Fargo/Moorhead/West Fargo community as well as coordinate an online support group for childcare providers from across the state of North Dakota.

I am submitting my written testimony on HB 1119 relating to the study proposal that was sent over from the House. I wish I was able to testify in person and be available for questions but I am unable to reschedule with the tiny humans I get the pleasure of playing with at the time of the hearing.

While I am glad to see that the previously proposed overhaul of the licensing structure has been amended to a study, I feel strongly that the proposed amendment including an advisory board was not included in the amendments adopted by the House Human Services Committee.

I feel very strongly that a study of the licensing structure and policies is necessary and just as necessary is having an advisory committee for that study made up of a cross section of current license-holders, (at least 2 from each license/registration type) as well as legislators, licensing specialists, and other key stakeholders who are working daily within this system.

My biggest fear with a study without an advisory committee is that we get to the same place we were in the beginning of the session with DHHS requesting sweeping changes based on the input of a handful of people and research of what other states have for a licensing structure. Just because other states are doing something doesn't necessarily mean that North Dakota should follow suit.

Since I am unsure what verbal testimony will be offered on this bill, I would also like to address comments made in the House hearing about the potential of changing the child-to-adult ratios as well as the minimum square footage per child. I strongly disagree that these should be altered. While we could absolutely follow a handful of other states to increase ratios for the youngest children to increase spots, I personally do not believe that we should. Many programs in those states who have increased ratios have chosen not to do so in their programs because it is not in the best interest of the children to increase the ratios. The first 6-12 months in a child's life have the greatest impact on their long-term social emotional well-being with the bulk of that social-emotional development coming from caregiver interactions and response times to basic needs. And reducing the square footage requirement from the already paltry 35 square feet per child will impact a child's ability to freely move around their learning environment. Children already are working hard to develop their proprioceptive and vestibular systems and they need the space to learn about how their bodies move in space among furniture and other children.

To conclude, I am in favor of the proposed study but would like to see this amended to include an advisory board to ensure input is received and considered from those working hard day-to-day in North Dakota childcare programs. My hope would be that DHHS and the Legislature would include town hall style meetings, live and/or message board style to truly get input from every program in the state on how the current licensing structure is working, not working, or how proposed changes would impact their business and/or the likelihood of their continued operation.