

February 14, 2024

To: Committee Members

(Opposing SF610 – daycares ability to deny exemptions)

I'm writing you today to express the ***huge feeling of dread*** that comes upon me when thinking of this bill being passed. I'm a mother of 2 children (8 and 5 yo) living in Crystal, MN and can recall how **stressful** it was figuring out childcare for my kids already, without the added burden of finding a center that will accept my child given my strongly held convictions about not administering the full schedule of childhood vaccines to them.

With my first, Elisabeth, I had no idea that daycares had **waiting lists a mile long** for infant care. How would I know that, as a first time mom with no other close mom friends who would give me the advice to start looking ASAP? So I waited until I was 6 months pregnant, only to find that my preferred daycare (one that was on site at my job and would be most convenient) would be full, and I could only be placed on the waitlist. I put my name on the waitlist, and started looking elsewhere. Out of all the sites I looked that were between my home and my job (both centers as well as in home care), **only one had any openings**. I put our name down for that one, but later heard that **there was a staff member who had been accused of inappropriately touching toddlers**. That REALLY didn't sit well with me, but unfortunately, there was really not much I could do, as **there were no other openings at the time**.

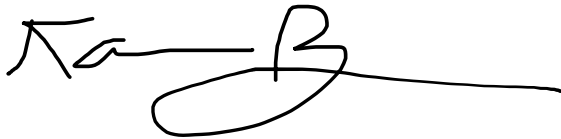
Fast forward to me being pregnant with my second, Malcolm. This time I started the process earlier in my pregnancy, however with 2 kids, **the daycare centers were out of the question – I just didn't make enough for it to make sense to pay that amount of money for two**. Instead I began searching for licensed in home centers. I had to again expand my search because the ones that were between my home and my work were unable to take an infant and toddler. I found one that was just beyond my work, but when I brought up that we used the conscientious exemption that MN allows for both schools and daycares, **they told me that they (illegally) did not accept exemptions**. Could I have pushed them? Yes, but who wants to try to **force** someone

to care for your children? I didn't want my kids to be treated differently or any retaliation be done to them because I forced the issue. **I ended up having to find a stranger who was not a licensed daycare provider** to watch my kids so I could work. I didn't feel entirely great about this choice either, but it was my **only option**.

I tell you my story because it happened ***before*** there was an ability for daycares to exclude based on parent's strongly held beliefs, ***before*** parents will have to choose between going back to work for much needed income, or staying home with their children to maintain those convictions. I tell you my story because **the fears of discrimination** that I, and so many parents have, **have already happened** even without this bill having been passed. Daycare is already hard to get into, let alone without having additional ways for people to be excluded.

I beg you all to vote NO on this bill – for the sake of families like mine, who want quality care for their children and are already finding it difficult with the status quo.

Thank you for reading,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kara Brown', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kara Brown
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