

My name is Lafayette Butler-Robinson and I am writing in support of the child care licensing reform bill SF2135. I am the director of Brookdale Learning Center and I also work as a consultant for several childcare centers throughout the 7-county metro area. I want to begin by thanking you and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families for the ongoing conversations on how to transform the way we do childcare licensing in Minnesota so that it is one that supports and centers children and families.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of SF2135. As a provider and a consultant, I feel like I have seen it all and then I am surprised yet again by how unclear, arbitrary, and impractical our current licensing system can be.

One of the most challenging aspects is licensor interpretation. This is the unclear and arbitrary part. As a provider, you are at the mercy of how your licensor feels the day they walk into your center for your annual inspection. Some licensors are very good, and some are not so great. Regardless, what one licensor is ok with, another licensor may not be. So not only are you trying to follow Rule 3, you're attempting to guess at which interpretation of Rule 3 you need to be following based on the licensor. We just got a new licensor, so it will be a guessing game once again.

Then there are the impractical pieces. Rule 3 states that pacifiers for infants must be labeled. Infants put pacifiers in their mouths. They chew on them and suck on them. How exactly can we label a pacifier in a way that is safe if it is going to be in their mouths? Tape and labels can come off and become a choking hazard. Permanent marker will eventually rub off into their mouths as they suck on them. The options to keep children safe, only only introduce more options that are potentially unsafe.

We can do better. SF2135 will separate health and safety standards from quality standards, and narrow the scope of health and safety to those issues that truly affect the health and safety of children. For example, an unflushed toilet is a common occurrence in childcare centers (and homes!) everywhere. The appropriate response is to flush the toilet, which happens regularly as teachers are monitoring kids in the bathroom, not to cite a childcare center for a health and safety issue that will be listed on their license for four years as "the program space was not clean."

I strongly urge you to pass SF2135 so we can continue working with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to create a licensing system that ensures childcare providers and teachers can spend their time focusing on their teachers, kids, and families, and not on paperwork.