

My name is Shea Ripley and I am the owner and director of Building Blocks Learning Center and Child Care in Fairmont, MN. We are the ONLY child care center in the entire county.

The current licensing system is outdated and more of a hindrance than anything else. The licensing system that guides and regulates providers should be one built alongside providers, as we are the ones that know what works and what doesn't work. We have the chance to do it right and to lay the groundwork for future success of child care centers across the state—which, as we all know, is not currently thriving, but rather in a severe state of crisis.

I'm currently expecting my licensing inspection any day. My staff and I have spent weeks paging through violations of other centers and what little guidance is available online for us to prepare for the visit. Things as punitive as how many blocks we have to a second dentist listed for an infant are things we are stressing over - taking away from our ability to fully care for the children. We need a licensing system that puts the children first, and to do that, providers need to be at the forefront of any decisions being made.

I strongly support SF2135 to move us toward that goal. I am grateful for the conversations that have been happening between providers and DHS and now the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, but the fact remains that the scope of childcare licensing is too wide. It is unreasonable for me to spend my time looking for tiny details like whether a second dentist is listed to ensure we don't get cited. The way citations appear online currently, there isn't a way to tell whether I would be missing emergency contact information, which is very important, or the name of a second dentist, which is really not necessary. If I'm in need of calling a dentist at all, I'm already in communication with the child's parents.

I also strongly support detaching health and safety regulations from quality. The number of blocks we have doesn't determine the quality of our programs, what we DO with the blocks does. I would very much welcome support in continuously improving our quality as would childcare providers across the state.

Change is needed and the time is NOW. We have an amazing opportunity before us. I urge you to support this bill.