

I am writing in regards to the childcare licensing Reform Bill #SF2135. My name is Brandy Sroga-Coons and I am the Executive Director for Creative Kids Academy which has 13 locations located throughout the Twin Cities. I have been in the field and with this company for nearly 27 years.

I am writing to support that bill that will be heard on Wednesday. Since I entered the field there have been minimal changes to licensing regulations, Rule 3 was written in the 1980's a lot has changed since then.

The current licensing system fails to meet the needs of the current providers in the field. Instead of being a worrisome punitive visit that we receive each year we need the opportunity for a better system that works as a team to provide quality care for children. We should not get a citation because a toilet is unflushed and now the center is dirty. I would love for anyone to try to get 20 3 years olds to flush a toilet with no reminders. Sometimes they forgot sometimes the teachers are too busy taking care of other children and miss the unflushed toilet.

There is too much of dotting the I's and crossing the T's for licensing that takes away from the curriculum we plan. These visits cause increased stress and nervousness for the staff who sometimes wait months for the licensor to show up.

This bill takes away so many of the unknowns and miscommunication that the rule causes now. We get the same citation if baby wipes are in reach of children as if we let bleach sitting out. We need to give the opportunity for everyone to clearly understand a citation.

There are definitely centers that should not be in business but our current licensing system not often enough does anything about these programs. I have heard horror stories over the past 27 years but yet some of these programs are still open today.

We need a just system that takes care of the parents, children's and staffs needs not just the state's needs.

Again, I hope you hear and believe in Bill #SF2135. I thank you for your time and would be more than willing to provide further details. I can be reached at director@ckakids.com or 763-360-6730

My name is Courtney Greiner, and I'm a owner and director of Esko Minis Childcare and Preschool in Esko, Minnesota. Thank you for the opportunity to share our bill today, and thank you for your work on behalf of Minnesota's children and families.

I'm in support of the bill to create a right-sized and supportive regulatory system for childcare in Minnesota.

As it stands, Minnesota's regulatory system for childcare is outdated, overly complex, and often disconnected from the realities of working with young children. Providers want to offer safe, high-quality care—we always have—but we're being buried under excessive paperwork, inconsistent rule interpretation, and inflexible policies that make it harder, not easier, to run programs.

These regulations don't always improve quality—they just increase stress, limit capacity, and contribute to burnout in a field already facing a staffing crisis. They also don't stop bad characters from doing bad things or help the good ones from doing the good things. We need a system that supports providers, keeps kids safe and healthy, and has a deep understanding of early childhood development.

Our experience with the licensing system reveals a pattern of interpretations and regulations that create significant obstacles to our ability to operate successfully. For instance, in 2021, we received a citation for 'prohibited disciplinary actions' due to our use of potty charts, a positive reinforcement tool designed to encourage children's potty training. The licensor's interpretation, that these charts shamed children, disregarded our intent and the positive impact the charts had on potty training efforts.

Our recent licensing visit further highlights a systemic issue that makes it difficult to operate successfully. For instance, the citation stating 'the program's space was not clean' fails to capture the full context. Our teacher was actively mopping the classroom after lunch, during nap time, when a child awoke. She appropriately prioritized the child's comfort, putting down the mop to soothe them back to sleep. The citation, however, focused solely on the unattended mop, ignoring the teacher's reasonable response to a child's needs.

Furthermore, we were fined \$1600 for a clerical error: failing to check a box confirming employee background check consent. While we acknowledge the importance of compliance, this additional, easily overlooked step in an already complex regulatory process resulted in a substantial financial penalty. We had completed the background checks and fingerprinting, demonstrating our commitment to safety. This fine adds significant financial strain to an already challenging operating environment, suggesting a system that prioritizes penalties over practical support.

We are losing providers across our state at an alarming rate. Centers are closing, home providers are walking away, and families are left with fewer options and higher costs. The

current system is not only unsustainable—it's shrinking access to care when we should be expanding it.

It's especially difficult in Greater Minnesota, where childcare deserts are growing, and where small providers simply don't have the resources to keep up with ever-shifting compliance demands and workforce issues.

This bill is a critical step toward building a regulatory system that supports—not punishes—providers. A right-sized system means maintaining high standards, but doing so in a way that is consistent, transparent, and rooted in real-world understanding of early care and education.

It's time to shift the focus from regulatory burdens to the human beings at the heart of our work. Children deserve our undivided attention, and those who care for them deserve a system that supports, rather than hinders, their efforts.

March 24, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Kaitlin Erpestad and I am the director of Hartley Nature Preschool, a program of the non-profit Hartley Nature Center in Duluth, MN. I have been an educator for almost 20 years and had the honor of starting Hartley Nature Preschool. The preschool is a licensed child care center serving children ages 3-5 with the mission to inspire life-long connections with nature through education, play, and exploration while supporting the whole child's development. The preschool focuses on spending as much time outside as possible every day in nature. This year we are proudly celebrating 10 years of connecting children to nature in Hartley Park! Our program opened in 2014 with 64 children in half day classes and now has a total enrollment of 105 across eight full- and half-day class options.

I am writing today in support of a bold, visionary redesign to Minnesota's child care licensing system. Minnesota's current child care licensing system is filled with repetitive, excessive paperwork and systems, inflexible policies that often do not reflect the reality of working with young children, and inconsistent rule interpretation. As a nature-based program with a mission of taking children outdoors for free play in nature daily, it breaks my heart that this inconsistent rule interpretation gives some home and center based programs the perception that they cannot take children outdoors, cannot play with nature items, or cannot let them participate in age-appropriate risky play, such as climbing low trees. There are decades of research supporting the benefits of time in and interaction with nature, loose parts like sticks, snow, ice, sand, and mud, and risky play like age-appropriate climbing, balancing, running, and so forth. All children deserve access to these benefits every day in their child care program. Their access often depends on how the specific licensor interprets Rule 3. And, if the licensor changes, they may tell a program that they can no longer do activities that had previously been approved with no rationale or route to appeal.

One of the biggest challenges of our current licensing system is the punitive, unsupportive relationship between many licensors and programs. You may already know, but currently licensors drop in unannounced to programs once a year. The license visits often feel punitive, in a "gotcha" type of way that can feel like the licensor is meeting a quota of things a provider is doing wrong instead of acting as a partner in this hard, critical, already undervalued work. License visits can lead to citations for things like having chapstick on the counter, but our current system calls everything from a tube of chapstick to an open bottle of bleach the same "access to hazardous materials." Going forward any new licensing system should include plain language for citations so that families and providers get accurate information that conveys the scope of the infraction, i.e. chapstick vs. bleach, at a given program.

I support transparent, common-sense licensing that ensures basic **health and safety** without burdensome levels of regulation, focuses on current **research-based, developmentally appropriate best practice** in early childhood education, and **partners with child care providers and families**. We love the children in our care and want to offer safe, high-quality, educational, life-changing, loving care and education every day. However, Minnesota's current child care system and the proposed draft 1 and 2 child care licensing standards are pushing high-quality programs to close, delaying the opening of new programs, and pushing talented, passionate, experienced providers out of this career. We have a crisis in child care already in our state; we cannot afford to lose any more providers.

I support SF2135 as a much needed, bold step towards transforming child care licensing in Minnesota. I believe that we can take the best parts of both Rule 3 and draft 2 of the licensing standards and combine them with a visionary, supportive, transformative new system of child care licensing to create the national model for child care licensing. Our state, our families, our providers, and, most of all, our children, deserve nothing less.

I deeply appreciate the opportunity to share these insights and invite your committee to reach out with any follow-up questions. I am committed to serving as a resource and advocate as we work together to transform Minnesota's child care system.

Sincerely,

Kaitlin Erpestad

Director, Hartley Nature Preschool

Hartley Nature Center | Duluth, MN

I'm writing in support of the child care licensing reform bill SF2135 amendment. My name is Christina Killion Valdez, and I'm the director of Listos Preschool and Childcare in Rochester, Minnesota. As the director of a small, independent, nonprofit center, I want to thank you for your work on behalf of Minnesota's children and families and ask that you keep up the positive changes.

We are fortunate to have bold, proactive elected officials in our state who created the new Department of Children, Youth and Families. Now I'm calling on you to take that same proactive approach to modernizing the child care licensing system. As we move away from the Department of Human Services, we should also leave behind the old, outdated child care licensing system of Rule 3.

As it stands, Minnesota's regulatory system for child care is punitive and often disconnected from the realities of working with young children. The current system is filled with repetitive, excessive paperwork, inconsistent rule interpretation, and inflexible policies that make it harder, not easier, to run programs. These regulations haven't kept up with the research of brain development. They also don't stop bad characters from doing bad things or help the good ones from doing their best work.

During our most recent licensing visit, Listos was cited for children having "access to hazardous chemicals." In reality, that morning a family had replenished their preschool-age child's bathroom wipes with a new package, by leaving it in the child's cubby. Instead of writing up a citation that is published and requires a written response, the licenser could have used the opportunity to remind staff that families need to give the wipes directly to a staff member to be stored properly. The proposed risk-based tiered licensing idea would not have improved the problem. Instead that approach creates more confusion and work for licensors. Only by working together - as early childhood educators, families and government officials - can we better serve children.

I'm in support of creating a transformative, transparent and supportive regulatory system for child care in Minnesota. Early childhood educators want to offer safe, high-quality care—we always have. And we want to work side by side, in partnership with licensors to ensure that we are doing just that. We need a system that supports providers, keeps kids safe and healthy, and has a deep understanding of early childhood development.

Our focus should be on building up what children need to grow and develop and ensure families and children have access to affordable child care options that meet their needs and provide consistent quality learning environments. To do this we need to attract and

support the best educators and providers. This bill is a critical step toward building a regulatory system that supports that work. Together we can maintain high standards in a way that is consistent, transparent, and rooted in real-world understanding of early care and education.

This is the time to shift the focus from regulatory burdens to the human beings at the heart of our work. Minnesota's children and those who care for them deserve a system that supports, rather than hinders, their efforts.

My name is India Salter and I am one of the directors of Summit School, a non-profit early childhood education center in Duluth MN. When I started at Summit seven years ago, I quickly found my passion in caring for our youngest learners. Everyday, I would show up ready to support the classroom however I could, and when the opportunity arose for me to lead the school, I knew I could continue to guide our teachers to be the best they can be. When I took the position of director, I was excited to find new ways to support the classrooms and especially the teachers. I wanted to ensure we focused on our mission to support the highest quality of developmentally appropriate learning experiences and I knew that the best way to do that was to support my teachers. I was ready to jump right in with classroom observations and feedback loops that could encourage continuous professional development to be the best we can be here at Summit. I knew that if I focused on that, our program would continue to stand out amongst families looking for care and would continue to be a place parents were proud to send their children- not just a daycare, but a school where their kids were loved, cared for, and educated everyday.

In my first year as director, I was inundated with all the different aspects of the job and learned very quickly that while I knew where my focus needed to be, I would not be able to devote the amount of time and attention to my goals that they deserved. Every day, my focus falls on the administrative side of things in order to keep our school compliant with licensing requirements, most of which are arbitrary. Despite my tireless efforts to comply with these requirements, Summit is still cited for the most minor things- most recently an outlet cover that was left off the outlet (because it was in use) while our licensor was here walking around the building. While this may seem insignificant, it is written onto our license as children having access to hazardous materials or our building being in disrepair with no further explanation. We are not the only center with an experience similar to this one, and while the health and safety of our children is paramount, this does not reflect the quality of care we provide.

Throughout my seven years at Summit, I have prepared for licensing visits as an aide, an assistant teacher, a lead teacher, and a director. In the current system, these visits are stressful, unnerving, and punitive when they do not need to be. The regulation of childcare is vital to the success of the field. Every day parents are entrusting us with the care of their children and we should be held to a standard that reflects that responsibility. However, the current system is not designed to support providers in achieving their mission. We are asking for your support in bringing our expert voices to the table. To be given the opportunity to partner with licensing and shift the current punitive system to one that supports providers and gives guidance on how to be the best we can be. We are asking for your support of Senate file 2135 and we thank you for taking the time to hear our voices today.

24 March 2025

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Jackie Benoit-Petrich and I am the Executive Director of Civic League Day Nursery in Rochester. I am writing to voice my support of the childcare licensing reform bill SF2135 amendment. I was first introduced to childcare center licensing in 1991 when I was a teacher/owner of a preschool program. I've been the director at Civic League since 2015. During my long tenure in the early care and education (ECE) field, I have had many experiences with programs, facilities and licensing rules. I strongly support this bill amendment as I believe it will lead to a more and much needed collaborative approach between licensors and providers.

I want to make it clear that my main objective in regards to regulatory reform is what I just stated above, to create a collaborative approach *and* to use this approach for the upmost benefit for the children we serve. Also, for the record, I have a great relationship with my current Licensor and I feel I can call, email and visit with her, she is fair and helpful. Of course, I have had citations throughout my years and while some citations are necessary to flag things that are an immediate danger to a child, others seem to have no bearing on the quality care or safe environments of our centers. In my earlier years, I remember being cited for "The space was not clean" and "hazardous objects were available to children." What was the hazardous object? A toilet plunger in the corner of the bathroom. During those years a child couldn't be alone in the bathroom anyway so hardly would be able to touch or mouth said toilet plunger. We were cited and dutifully put the plunger in the locked utility closet. A few weeks later, one of our stools plugged, then overflowed with real "stool" spilling out. I needed to leave the child in the bathroom, his shoes and socks wet with toilet waste as it continued to run, go get the key, unlock the closet, get the plunger...do you see where this is going? What was more "hazardous" and more "unclean"? The plunger stored in the bathroom for quick access *or* human waste backing up all over the floor? Nine years ago, I had another "Hazardous object" violation. This time it was moist baby wipes. I had

come up with the idea of having them accessible for the OLDER children to clean up their art tables when finished painting or gluing. They are clearly labeled to be safe on human skin. We also use them at diapering of course but also for a gentle nose wipe if the nose has crusty boogies. 😊 So, the violation wasn't that we couldn't use them on the children nor that the children couldn't wipe their own tables. The violation was that the wipes were *accessible* to the children. An adult needs to physically pull the wipe out of the package and hand it to the child to wipe the table. The wipes cannot be on the art shelf for the child to pull out of the package themselves. The time and energy *on both the provider and licensors is exhausting* for these small and seemingly insignificant misdeeds.

I was once cited for "medication that was not properly stored." The culprit? Cherry Chapstick was in a 5-year-old child's cubby.

If we look at the wording of the citations in comparison what the actual offense was, the public citation can sound at best, that the program is subpar.

The new bill would allow for collaborative solutions for these minute discrepancies. I strongly support this bill and I thank you all for your consideration!

I also think it would be wonderfully supportive if in place of (or along with) citations, there would be a system of all the things *that were right with center*. "The center was clean and well organized." "The children were actively engaged in various activities" "staff and children were happy and engaged." There was an aire of joyfulness."

Very sincerely,

Jackie Benoit-Petrich, Executive Director
Civic League Day Nursery, Rochester
execdir@cldnmn.org
507-282-5368

Testimony for Licensing Reform in Minnesota

Good morning Chair Wicklund and Committee Members. My name is Karin Swenson, and I'm providing written testimony in support of SF 2135 and to urge reform of our Minnesota licensing system, which has become overly punitive rather than supportive for providers.

Our current system too often operates under a "gotcha" mentality, where minor infractions happen and many are unrelated to actual child safety. Providers live in fear of citations, not because they don't care, but because regulations can be inconsistent, difficult to navigate and are left up to the interpretation of a licensor. Instead of fostering improvement, this system drives good providers out, worsening our already critical shortage of childcare options.

Here are a couple of examples of citations I have received in the past.

1. I was updating my Emergency Preparedness Plan, so I had pulled it out of my indexed binder. The licensor walks in... I got cited, because it was not in my binder. Really? I was working on it. Well, when you go to the MN child care look-up site, it says I was cited for "the emergency preparedness plan was not included with other program policies and/or given to parents". This makes it look like I did not have a plan and I might or might not have shared it with parents.
2. We are required to have documentation that staff have received orientation. As part of that training, new staff members are required to have 30 minutes of Abusive Head Training. But, because I didn't write 30 minutes in a tiny box on my form, I was cited for "staff orientation training did not include all required items". This makes it look like I did not adequately orientate staff. It makes us look bad and makes it look like we are not doing our job.

As in the bill language, licensing should be about health and safety in childcare and should focus on the fundamental well-being of children—things like sanitation, supervision, emergency preparedness, and nutrition. Quality, on the other hand, should emphasize the learning environment, teacher-child interactions, curriculum, and family engagement and should be regulated by accreditation,(via standards). Let's support providers and teachers with teams to help them. We need a system that prioritizes coaching over punishment, collaboration over fear, and practical solutions over bureaucratic hurdles. Let's shift our approach to support high-quality care through meaningful guidance, fair oversight, and reasonable pathways for correction. Our current punitive system does not serve children, families, or providers—it only creates barriers to access and sustainability.

Our focus should be on the deep bonding relationships the children in our care deserve. I urge this committee to consider reforms that balance accountability with support, ensuring that providers can succeed in delivering the quality care our communities depend on.

Thank you.

Karin Swenson

My name is Kayley Spencer, and I am the Director of Lakeside Early Learning, a childcare center in Duluth, Minnesota. I am here in support of SF2135, which takes important steps toward reforming the childcare licensing system.

While regulations are essential to ensuring health and safety, the current system often penalizes providers for minor, technical mistakes that have no bearing on child safety or well-being. For example, this past summer we received a citation for a clerical error on a staff person's orientation record. The staff member had completed all necessary training prior to caring for children, but due to missing the date of a training and a signature on the form, it resulted in a citation.

During an earlier visit, a teacher was required to remove their entire play kitchen from their classroom for a missing knob. The missing piece did not leave any sharp edges or hazards and was simply cosmetic. Yet again, it resulted in a citation that stated "program materials were not in good repair".

I have dedicated my career to providing high-quality care for children, and I am deeply passionate about creating an environment that is both safe and welcoming. However, the current licensing system often distracts us from this mission by focusing on technicalities that have little to no impact on child safety. Instead of penalizing providers over small, non-safety-related issues, we need a system that fosters collaboration, provides clear guidance, and supports continuous growth. A system where we can focus on what truly matters- ensuring children's

well-being and giving our teachers the tools they need to succeed. SF2135 is an important step in the right direction, and I urge the committee to support it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Leo Augusta Children's Academy
Written Testimony Senate Hearing SF2135
Jessica Kremer, Director

- We just recently had our 2025 licensing visit that also turned into an investigation specifically targeting our breakfast items. The licensor asked to look at our chocolate muffin and apple donut. Upon review the muffin's sugar content was too high per USDA standards, but the apple donut was OK. They then continued to check all our snack items to which about half of them were just outside of the 6 gram sugar limit. The kicker in all of this is that we have had our doors open since 2022 and the items in question have been served at our facility since we opened our doors. We spent the first 2 years of operation participating in CACFP in which these items are reviewed and approved for federal dollar support. In early 2024 we decided to forgo CACFP due to the intensive time and effort that staff would need to put into this program since we moved to family style serving and the majority of our lunches are homemade.

Currently USDA standards note that "*Through Sept. 30, 2025, breakfast cereals must contain no more than 6 grams of total sugars per dry ounce.*" There is no mention on the USDA CACFP meal pattern about sugar content in snacks or none breakfast cereal items like muffins or pancakes. A citation was given due to the sugar content in these items. We are now frantically trying to locate items that fit this sugar content regulation, but finding that we will most likely need to have a very repetitive menu.

- Our licensor also noted that the way we do our orientation of new employees is not appropriate. Day one usually consists of them completing SUIDS and AHT training and about half of the other orientation items noted on form DHS-7953A before going into a classroom for observation. They are never left unsupervised. This is typically the date I note for first direct contact. On day 2 we usually finish up the orientation record and start specific classroom orientation with our assistant director. This orientation can take about 3 days to cover all areas as the new employee gets to spend most of the day in each classroom under the supervision of the lead teacher staff or assistant director. The date of the 1st unsupervised contact is when they have completed all orientation requirements including CPR and first aid. Licensor stated that all items on the orientation record need to be completed prior to having direct contact. So because I am

giving my new employees a brain break so they can interact with kids for a few hours is now being viewed as inappropriate.

- We were also asked to keep our infant fall zone safe under the outside infant climber year round. In past years with our previous licensor we were told we could use a mat that can be brought in and out based on when the infants are outside. I shared with our new licensor that given we are non-profit entity I do not have the funds to buy a new fall safe mat every year because the current one is worn due to being outside year round. The infant play yard is fenced in and only used by the infants. Staff plan ahead and make sure the fall safe mat is outside when they will be taking the infants outside.

The main issues we are seeing between each year is a new licensor and inconsistencies between each of these licensors. Given that we are also a Parent Aware rated facility there are things related to play that Parent Aware states are good for a growing child, but licensing frowns upon. As the director of a non-profit, I should spend most of my days searching and writing grants, but end up spending most of the day working with my assistant director ensuring my staff and classrooms meet licensing standards along with keeping up on our parent aware rating. To do this I have about half of my staff enrolled in a CDA program. My staff are very talented, but are overwhelmed by what is being asked of them to stay in compliance. This now includes my kitchen staff given that the items we have been serving for the past 3 years are now being questioned.



March 24, 2025

My name is Lydia Pietruszewski, and I am co-founder and director of two licensed child care centers in Bemidji, Minnesota. I am writing in support of SF 2135 and creating a bold transformation of a child care licensing system that is less punitive and more supportive to the hard-working providers doing this vital work.

Together, my two centers provide care for up to 130 children, with 70 of those children under 3 years old - the most demanded age category for early care and education. Along with the care provided by other centers and family child care providers, we are the foundation of the Bemidji-area economy. With a more supportive licensing system, we are more likely to stay in business and help our communities thrive.

Yes, programs need oversight and we have exemplary intentions to follow all rules to the very best of our ability. However, licensing regulations are open to interpretation, they are inconsistent, and the system is often punitive. One example is that I received a correction order for "a school-aged child occupying a non-licensed space." That was my own 11-year-old daughter spending time with me in my office because she didn't have school that day.

We need a licensing system that prioritizes collaboration, consistency, and a coaching approach that encourages providers to continue the work they are doing to keep children safe and healthy in environments that focus on the overall well-being of children, teachers, and providers. We need a system that balances coaching with accountability so providers have the support needed and desired in order to focus on quality care needed by working families and our early learning programs that give children the best start in education possible.

Sincerely,

Lydia Pietruszewski, Director
Pine Pals Intergenerational Learning Child Care and Preschool
Pine Pals Nest Infant-Toddler Child Care
Bemidji, Minnesota

Testimony

Testimony in Support of SF2135

Megan Schmitz

Childcare Worker & Parent

3/24/2025

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Megan Schmitz , and I am an early childhood educator, parent and advocate. I am writing today in strong support of the licensing reform bill amendment SF2135, which seeks to develop and implement a standardized timeline and standards of licensor conduct, allow for more accredited coursework from an accredited post secondary that is relevant to any skill be counted towards being teacher qualified, and to have a background study liaison.

As an educator, I have seen firsthand the challenges that exist within Minnesota's childcare system. I have witnessed a passionate, hard working, and fantastic individual with great experience and some coursework come to work but could not be left alone because she was not teacher qualified. This person was more than capable of being with children alone and most importantly keeping them safe. She was confident, valuable, and reliable yet unable to be teacher qualified. This needs to change. I have also fell victim to receiving a citation due to not having a diaper bin correctly labeled or having ten less blocks than what is required.

This bill is a crucial step toward ensuring that childcare providers can meet licensing requirements in a fair, transparent, and supportive manner while maintaining high standards for child safety and development. By reforming our licensing visits and giving our providers a voice in our licensing system, Minnesota can strengthen its early childhood system and support working families.

I urge you to support SF1235 and help create a more effective, accessible, and sustainable childcare system in our state. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would love the opportunity to provide any more information, if needed.

Sincerely,

Megan Schmitz

Mlynnyoder1@gmail.com / 218.639.2675

03/24/25

My name is Monique Webb Stumon. I am the director of School Readiness Learning Academy in Minneapolis since 2009 and a leader with Kids Count On Us. I've been in the education field for 30 years and my passion is all about supporting children throughout their most important years of development. I am here today to urge you to create a bill that helps us support our youngest Minnesotans and their families.

Early childhood learning programs help our communities by providing families with learning tools to help our children be successful in their learning journey. We are the bridge to give children a better start in life. It is crucial that this bill supports providers instead of working against them, while also maintaining high standards in the safety of the children.

We are currently under outdated childcare systems that often create obstacles that are quite frankly unnecessary and out of touch with the actual circumstances of caring for children. This current system often makes it hard for providers to best serve their families, by continually adding and never taking away any outdated systems and practices for example.

During our last licensing visit at one of our locations, the licensor verbally exclaimed that the space was exceptionally clean, however on the correction order we received, it stated that 'the program's space was not clean'. I called my licensor and asked them to further explain the citation and I was told that it was due to an unflushed toilet. Keep in mind that both of SRLA's locations are 4 star rated and nationally accredited and we follow the national accreditation cleaning criteria.

In order to create a framework that encourages providers rather than penalizes them, this law is an essential first step. The emphasis should be shifted from regulatory constraints to the people who are at the center of our work. Children deserve our best and adults who look after them should have a system that encourages their efforts rather than gets in the way.

Monique Webb Stumon, CEO
School-Readiness Learning Academy {SRLA}
"A Better Start For Young Minds"

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Renee Olsen-Gravelle and I fully support the child care licensing reform bill SF2135 amendment. I currently own and operate Little B's Learning Center in Barnum Minnesota going on 18 years. Within the past year, we opened a second site in a neighboring district (Willow River). I am familiar with licensing both for an older center and one operating under the "Early and Often" program. I am all for change and staying current on licensing procedures and policies. I feel like both of our centers strive to achieve the highest ratings possible, offering not only quality care, but also maintaining relationships with families and safety for children and staff as a priority.

With proposed changes, I feel as if providers have had little -to no- say in what is important to us or even what we also feel should be changed. I feel as if my relationship with Licensing should be a priority. For example, I have been at the Barnum center for almost 20 years (we had a center before moving here) and I've never had a licensor more than 3 visits. (I was close this year, but recently received an email she was re-assigned elsewhere). I feel like I am always having a new visitor with different opinions and always starting over building a relationship and asking questions. I would love to have some consistency and build a base so that when I have a concern or question the licensor knows our center and WHO we are. I love the relationships we build with our Parent Aware Coaches. We meet with them often (Similar to the "Early and Often" program. We are working towards building/maintaining quality and always feel very supported by them. If they have a concern, they work with to make it better. No judgments, all supportive. (I understand a violation is completely different and needs to be acted on accordingly). I believe we deserve the opportunity to question and ask guidance when the licensors visit. I feel strongly that we should be able to question their judgment when the rules are not black and white but a perspective area instead of clearly stated.

One of the changes/updates important to me is the use of Experienced Aides. I feel as if the staff is over 18, meets the requirements of your centers policies, and has the experienced required by the state that staff should be able to continue to Open and Close your center. A Lead teacher still runs the main part of the day but an aide - Experienced Aide is perfectly capable of opening and closing with the required ratios. This allows me as a center to maintain full time positions for teachers during the main operation of hours and get help to open/close from others who may not want full time (retired paraprofessionals in my exact case). They would be more likely in crisis situation to make responsible/ professional decisions that someone fresh out of college with a degree but little experience)

Again, I am in support for positive changes and updates, I just would appreciate my time and experience in the field be respected and included. I absolutely love what we do and who we are as a Center (s) and want to be on the same side as the State, not opposing teams.

Thank you for your time,

Renee Olsen-Gravelle

Little B's & Little Willow Child Care Centers

ReneeOlsenGravelle@gmail.com

218 428-9993

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.

Hello,

My name is LaShonda Flowers. I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SF2135. I have worked in childcare for over a decade. I was an in-home provider for 11 years and began the process of buying a building and opening my own center last summer.

It was not an easy process, or a fast process. And this was the third time I've done it - twice before with locations in churches that then fell through. I finally received my license in December, and opened in February.

The process to get licenses was incredibly challenging—physically, mentally, and emotionally. I struggled to get my licensor to return my calls or emails. I could not get in contact with him until I called the main number and the licensor on call sent him a direct message.

I was full of hope when he finally came, and those hopes were dashed pretty quickly. When I mapped out how I would use my center space, and therefore how much revenue I would be able to generate. There is not a lot of squish room in childcare, often none. To be able to pay my mortgage and run a center, I need to have a certain number of children enrolled.

I had planned to use the basement of my building for school age children. The previous tenant in the building was a childcare owner who did exactly that. But I was told by the fire marshal that I could not, even though the previous childcare owner had it specifically stated on her license. Suddenly, I couldn't have the 13 school agers I'd been planning on.

In the upstairs space, I had measured and calculated that I could have 36 kids, but my licensor measured and calculated that I could only have 28. So my first shock was the dramatic increase in the number of children I would be allowed to have.

My next shock came with the unexpected things that the licensor said I must have or do. For example, I had three play kitchens. He said that on two of them, because the hook to hang the hot pads was broken, I couldn't use them unless I replaced the hooks. On the third one, he said I couldn't use it because the play refrigerator didn't have a door, so it was just a set of shelves. He said I couldn't use that because it wasn't "complete." I sadly ended up tossing out the three kitchens.

After doing the things he had asked, I was confident when he returned that I would be licensed on that visit as I had made sure via phone that I had all of my paperwork and what I needed for the rooms. But when he came again, he said I didn't have enough manipulatives (hands on materials like blocks). I needed two sets of something so that there would be enough sets for X number of kids. All I could think of was how much money it would cost for me to purchase more materials.

I strongly support SF2135 because I want to see licensing be focused on health and safety, not the number of manipulatives I have. A checklist that only included health and safety issues would make much more sense and be much easier for providers to follow and get licensed.

I love the concept of having the question of quality be one of continuous improvement and support for providers. I can testify to the fact that the current process is not at all supportive. Childcare providers spend their days supporting and nurturing our youngest Minnesotans. The least we should be able to do is to support them.

I am excited to work with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to move forward with a new way of regulating childcare that puts kids and those who care for them at the center. I urge you to pass this bill to help us make those first steps.

Thank you.

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for the transformation of childcare licensing within our state, particularly as we embark on a new chapter with the establishment of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. This new department presents a unique opportunity to redefine our vision for childcare, shifting from a system of rigid, often nonsensical regulations to one that prioritizes the holistic development and well-being of our children. We need a vision that emphasizes quality care, accessible resources, and a focus on nurturing environments, rather than a system mired in bureaucratic minutiae.

My vision for childcare involves a streamlined licensing process that focuses on critical safety and developmental standards. This would involve a shift away from overly punitive rules that often miss the mark on what truly matters. Instead, we need a system that supports providers in creating enriching environments, investing in staff training, and fostering strong relationships with families.

We should focus on outcomes: are children safe, engaged, and thriving? Are providers supported in their crucial work?

The current childcare licensing system often operates with a level of rigidity that borders on the absurd. For example, equating the presence of a child's diaper to "hazardous materials available to children" is not only impractical but also demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the realities of childcare. Such inflexible interpretations of regulations create unnecessary burdens for providers, diverting valuable time and resources away from what truly matters: the children. These examples are not isolated incidents; they represent a systemic issue where compliance with arbitrary rules takes precedence over the actual developmental needs of our children.

The current system not only imposes impractical regulations but also fails to acknowledge the financial strain these mandates place on childcare providers. Implementing mandates, such as credible staff training in certain content areas or facility requirements requires significant investment. Without state subsidies to offset these costs, facilities struggle to comply and must subsidize the costs themselves. This is the number one reason why there is a lack of availability and quality childcare, exacerbating existing inequities. Therefore, it is imperative that any reform of childcare licensing includes a robust plan for subsidizing the associated mandates.

This disconnect between regulatory focus and child development is precisely why we need significant change. We must move away from a system that treats childcare as a mere checklist of compliance and towards one that actively supports and enhances the early learning experiences of our children. By focusing on the quality of care, the professional development of providers, and the creation of nurturing environments, we can ensure that our children have the best possible start in life. I urge you to support initiatives that prioritize the well-being and development of our children, and to work towards a childcare system that truly reflects our commitment to their future.

Sincerely,

Shawntel Gruba
IRON RANGE TYKES Learning Center
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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.