

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As it stands, Minnesota's regulatory system for childcare is outdated, overly complex, and often disconnected from the realities of working with young children.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.