

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