

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 As we move away from the Department of Human Services, we should also leave behind the old, outdated child care licensing system of Rule 3.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.