



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
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