

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.