

**Little Learners'**  
**Child Development Center, Inc.**  
2323 Linglestown Road, Unit #301  
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(717) 671-4825

To: Chairwoman Delozier and Members of the House Children & Youth Committee  
From: Lisa Whitworth, CEO  
Re: Keystone Stars  
Date: March 2, 2021

**Introduction:** Good afternoon, Chairwoman Delozier and members of the House Children & Youth Committee. My name is Lisa Whitworth. For the past 22 years, I have had the honor to own and operate, Little Learners' Child Development Center, Inc. located in Harrisburg (Susquehanna Township).

**Position:** I am here today to state my opposition to fully adopt the Keystone Stars program. I would also like to request that non-participants be labeled as "non-participant" instead of 1 star.

**Reason for Position:** For over 22 years, my team and I have maintained a thriving program that has proven to help children meet developmental, social, and cognitive goals all while instilling self-confidence and age-appropriate maturity to be successful in school. In addition, we have remained compliant with the state regulations and often exceeding the expectations of the state and families. Most of our success is credited to our ability to offer diversity and modifications with our approach to teaching children and offering proper guidance and age-appropriate discipline based on each child's personality. We offer the appropriate amount of structure to help children be at their best by often challenging them without forcing children who are not yet mature enough for structure and identifying their strengths. It is commonly stated that we do not make one mold for all children but make many molds to embrace the uniqueness and individuality of each child in order to guide them to success. Even the philosophy of Keystone Stars is, "Meeting the individual needs of each and every child and family". In reality are we not all asked to fit the Keystone Star mold?

Henceforth, the state and OCDEL mostly support participants of Keystone Stars. It is a fact that they are the only centers or home daycares that are awarded and supported while many other great centers and home daycares are ignored. During a joint hearing policy meeting, one of the Senators announced that she would have to leave immediately as she had just received word that one of her 4-star level centers in Philadelphia was on the verge of shutting down. She had stated that we could not let this happen. My immediate thought was whether or not the same attention was given to centers that had to shut down and were not Keystone Stars participants. We are denied increased rates for subsidized families when offering equal or better service. It is unfair and discouraging to have not received an increase in over 10 years unless you are a level 3 or 4 Keystone Stars participant. This is only one example of separating the Keystone Star rated centers/ home daycares and those of us who do not participate. We should not be penalized based on our decision to continue policies that are working for the children and

families. It is possible to have great programs that do not have other accreditations. Have you visited any of us?

According to the 2019 MRS data, Keystone Stars is not embraced by over 50% of our industry. For a few of my colleagues, it is simply because it is often unrealistic and not appealing. Of course, we would appreciate grant money to help with staff scholarships and increased wages. Keystone Stars imposes a great deal of regulatory paperwork in an industry that is already overwhelmed with paperwork. We should be spending our time interacting with the children and getting to know families. In my research of families who have visited our center, I find that parents have little to no knowledge of Keystone Stars. Most families simply reply, "I don't know much about it. I was told by a friend to ask if you participate". Years back, I met one family who was only interested in a Keystone Star's participating facility. She was a Captain in the Army who was relocating to our area. Due to a misunderstanding, we were unaware of her desire for Keystone Stars center during the tour. After the tour, she inquired about our star rating. After realizing that there was a misunderstanding, she confidently stated that she was only interested in a Keystone Star rated center (preferably 3 or 4 star). She carried a binder full of research about the program. Fortunately, she allowed for me to continue to share about our program and answer questions. I thanked her for the opportunity and wished her the best. Two weeks later, she called to enroll her children. She had shared that she appreciated my honesty and felt that I was genuine, very invested and proud of my program. Furthermore, I met a family who moved their children from a 4- star level center simply due to the fact that father was asking the Director on multiple occasions to address a concern. Her last reply was, "I will address it as soon as I can. We are currently busy working on getting our 4<sup>th</sup> star". Was this the intention of the Keystone Stars program?

In addition, we find that employees who have had experience working at a Keystone Star's participating facility are often relieved to know that we do not participate with the program. Most of them state that they are very stressed with the lack of guidance and discipline when handling children with behavior concerns. I have heard that teachers are experiencing inappropriate behavior problems from preschool age children and feel that there is neither guidance nor assistance.

It is also very dispiriting to find that many 3 and 4 star rated facilities are often found non-compliant with state regulations. My resources are from state findings that are available to the public.

**Conclusion:** I am asking that the committee and state re-evaluate their position on the Keystone Stars and award facilities that are succeeding and prospering with the same benefits as 3 and 4 star rated facilities without demanding changes. Perhaps even adopt already working policies from some of these facilities. We need to work together as an industry to share ideas and make it realistic to implement modifications. Neither I nor my colleagues have been approached for input of any kind. I feel that it is very important that we have more conversation with the folks who are involved daily with the challenges and efforts to run a great program. I am aware that the committee had folks who were in the field; however, it is a very different time and needs an updated observation.

I am a strong supporter of quality childcare. I am a huge supporter of educating the staff. I have a strong desire to increase the wages for hardworking caregivers without making childcare unaffordable.

One can always improve. However, I feel that in order for it to have long term success, we need the industry to feel that it is realistic, flexible, and convenient in order to properly meet the needs of "every" child and family. May we please offer positive reinforcement for those centers who excel who may not participate in Keystone Stars, however, still maintain an excellent program?

Thank you, Chairwoman Delozier and members of the House of Children & Youth Committee for your time and opportunity to share my position with the Keystone Stars. My hope is that we may all work together to realistically and effectively prosper our programs for the benefit of the children, families, and staff.

Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Whitworth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "W".

Lisa Whitworth/CEO

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