

**Little Learners'  
Child Development Center, Inc.**  
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Date: October 21, 2022

**Re: Child Care Regulation Certification Rewrite Project**

Dear Madam Chairwoman Delozier, Madam Chairwoman DeLissio, and Members of the Children and Youth Committee:

My name is Lisa Whitworth, and I am the Owner and Director of Little Learners Child Development Center, Inc. located in Dauphin County, Susquehanna Township.

First, may I say that I am honored to have the opportunity to share my testimony regarding the proposed Child Care Regulation Certification Rewrite Project?

Little Learners Child Development Center opened its doors on March 1, 1999 and has been servicing children ages six weeks to school-age for over 22 years. We started as a very small center in a strip mall until an amazing man by the name of Ralph Vartan decided to offer us the opportunity to build a 14,000 square-foot center in Susquehanna Township. With this opportunity, we became owners of our own building which was large enough to service many more children.

Prior to the COVID pandemic, we had over 180 children enrolled, and a waiting list that was over a year long. For the past 22 years, we have had an excellent record maintaining compliance with the current regulations. I have always respected and followed recommendations and regulations to the best of my ability. Although there were a few regulations that were questionable, I respected and followed them just the same.

The implementation of the Keystone Stars program was my first indication that there was a disconnection between the state's expectations and the successful, realistic expectations when it came to my program. I had an opportunity back in March 2021 to testify to this committee regarding my decision not to participate in Keystone Stars program. During this meeting, I had shared that I felt that I was pressured to accept another ideology that would completely restructure what we had in place for years that proved to be successful. How do we measure that success? We measure the success by the feedback that we receive from school officials, school teachers, and parents once the child has moved on.

I am aware that this meeting is not about Keystone Stars. However, my reason to reflect on Keystone Stars in this testimony is due to my discovery of the overwhelming similarities of Keystone Stars and the Child Care Regulation Certification Rewrite Project. Is this a coincidence? I fear not!

Regardless of our differences in opinion, I think it's fair to state that the past couple years have been the most stressful times in our industry. Therefore, to think that during this time, the state would consider rewriting regulations and putting even more stress on an already stressful situation is unfathomable and quite honestly, "a slap in the face"! This decision questions the authenticity of the support that we expect from OCDEL with our current, struggling issues.

After reading the draft, it is very apparent that it is another push for every center and home center to honor and comply with the Keystone Stars program. Is this the only goal that OCDEL is pursuing? Can we please address the real problems that we are facing today? The problems that are actually putting great child care centers out of business! We are now an industry that is trying to find a way each and every day to continue to care for our children and uphold the current regulations. Is OCDEL aware that centers close rooms on a daily basis to meet the ratio requirements? It's become a normal routine for some. This causes parents to flock to find a center not because of choice or quality, but because of convenience! It's heartbreaking to hear the voices and tears of desperate parents looking for someone, anyone, to care for their child while they work! Why are we not addressing these issues? Perhaps, rewriting the regulations is way overdue. Could they be improved? Yes, I believe that everything and everyone can improve. But now is NOT the time!

My personal feeling is that it is a very disrespectful, sneaky way to make mandated regulations, so that there will be no personal choice in the matter. I believe that it's taking advantage of us when we are not able to focus on anything but our day-to-day operations. I am almost certain that there are many centers and home care programs that are not even aware that we are discussing this today. We have been inundated with emails for the past three years. They are often repetitive, and therefore, it's reasonable to assume that many emails are overlooked.

As I have always stated, if there were any realistic reasons that I should change the way that I have been operating my center for the past 22 years and be more successful, I would make the changes before it was mandated. However, I do not feel that neither my center nor many other great centers should have to succumb to changing when we have been successful for years.

The state constantly reminds us that we must individualize our approach in working with children. Yet the state is constantly pushing for us to fit into one mold, its mold.

By reviewing the draft of some of these new regulations, it appears that we are all being subjected to inappropriate findings of others in our industry. I do not feel that every proposed new regulation is unrealistic. However, I do have a strong disagreement with a few. For example, I am shocked that anyone should have to address putting a child in a dark closet as a form of inappropriate discipline. Is this a common practice that makes it so that we all have to announce to the parents and staff that we will not tolerate it? If I am a parent or potential staff member reading this, it will definitely put questions in my mind regarding possible, inappropriate behaviors occurring in an industry that already struggles with that reputation. It is imperative that we establish a trusting relationship with our parents and staff alike. This type of behavior is not simply an error in judgment. This behavior reflects someone's

character! We have to do better! I prefer to not have to “wear this scarlet letter” if you will! To parents, having a stranger care for their most prize possession is extremely sensitive and overwhelming. Second example refers to formula vs breast milk. Once again, the sensitivity is absent when we require parents provide permission for their child to be on formula. I am not a pediatrician and don't feel that it is my responsibility to make a parent feel as if formula is a risky choice. Any time you have someone give you permission, you are asking to be relieved of risks. When did giving your child formula become a risk? When did we decide that we needed a permission slip for a parent to make a personal decision with their own child? This is what's frustrating for me. I am the one that has the relationship with these parents. I am the one that takes care of these children every day and understands their needs, developmental levels, and personality. How many people who are pushing for these new regulations have worked this closely with the families in the past few years? If you did, you would realize that some mothers are devastated by the fact that they cannot breast-feed. They simply cannot produce the milk. Do you know how devastating this would make them feel to have us ask them to write a permission slip in order to feed their child formula? Yet, we don't have to do this with breastmilk?

Regulations should be in place to ensure the safety and well-being of children and staff. They should not overburden us during an already stressful time. They should not pass judgment on parental decisions to care for their children, unless inappropriate. Henceforth, regulations should not change centers and homes that are doing such a great job in a very sensitive and stressful industry!

OCDEL promotes “positive reinforcement”! However, as an industry, where is our positive reinforcement! I understand that there can't be individualized regulations for each center based on ability to care for children appropriately! This draft of the rewritten regulations seems to be reactive to those centers or homes that require more strict regulations. Therefore, everyone has to absorb the added stress of a few?

In my 22 years, I have never had any other recognition, then my license renewal! But that's not what I'm trying to achieve. My recognition comes from all of the children who transition into school and adulthood still maintaining a lot of the positive things that we have instilled in them. I just wish that more of the higher-ups could experience the wonderful things that a lot of centers are implementing into their program to help children become successful through school and adulthood. Instead, we are pushing more policies, more paperwork to address those inappropriate behaviors and opinions.

I would also like to address the overwhelming hours of training! Is this simply a way to have something in place to show that an effort is being made to improve staffs ability to work with children? I find it a waste of time to think that someone who intentionally does something inappropriate will change due to a few hours of training. However, I do feel that training is necessary when staff needs ideas and guidance to care for children in a healthy and safe environment due to lack of knowledge or skills. I also believe that training would be more productive if it were associated more with realistic, real life experiences. It just seems that training can be redundant and very time consuming. Perhaps closing all centers for a day and requiring attendance at a location set up for large training on helpful topics could

be an option? It would require everyone to participate and offer interactions with other professionals that could share helpful tips!

Furthermore, I would like to know how we are to supply each classroom with a certified Teacher. This would require a higher salary, more benefits, more training, and more difficulty finding a qualified applicant. Realistically, most people who obtain a degree are not looking to work in a child care center or home program. If we are fortunate enough to hire this individual, it's usually on a temporary basis. We find that we are normally a steppingstone for something bigger. Some school districts are actually modifying standards with Teacher Certification in order to qualify enough staff to teach the children.

Lastly, I feel that proposing new regulations should require more input from those of us who are working for the same goal! This is not the right timing when everyone is distracted with the difficult challenges that are faced each day! The industry is suffering terribly with shortage of staff! Although I greatly appreciate the monetary grants that were available to help with retention and allowed us to offer a higher starting rate, it does not offer a long term solution. In fact, as a business we have acquired a state tax burden with these grants.

I do understand that it's not just our industry that suffers. However, if we could put more effort into finding ways to recruit more staff instead of drafting new regulations, we may have more success! It breaks my heart that so many daycares have to go out of business because of this situation. My husband and I had mentored a couple for a couple years before they opened a new center. Unfortunately, they close their doors just recently. If I'm being honest, the thought has crossed my mind on multiple occasions. When you see more stress in the near future, it makes it even more of an appealing decision!

I opened this daycare center over 22 years ago with no daycare experience not even as a child. I was simply waiting for an opening in a school district to come available in order to continue my career as a teacher. At the time, I was working for a private center as a Kindergarten teacher. I then discovered that all the children needed a good, loving, enriching program. This is when I had decided to make this career change. I did it for the children then; I do it for the children today! On the day that I'm forced to not put the children first, becomes the day that I will shut my doors permanently! With all the struggles and stressors that we have had over the past few years, I feel that that day is near! I will not allow myself or my staff to put their focus on paperwork and stressful regulations!

The only way that you can be realistic to our needs is to understand them! You don't understand them if you do not speak to everyone including us small businesses! Please do not forget us!

I can only ask that my voice be heard! I also understand that a solution is not to abandon the idea of rewritten regulations. I also understand that my role is not to combat these rewritten regulations and offer no support to assist with the overall goal! Therefore, I am offering my time to assist with rewriting policies that are more realistic for everyone. I have offered my support on multiple occasions!

In closing, I would like to thank Chairwoman Delozier, Chairwoman DeLissio, the Members of the Children and Youth Committee, and OCDEL for your time and services! Please receive this as my respectful testimony!

My Best Always,  
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