

To the Minnesota House Children and Families Committee Members:

We are writing this letter in support of HF 4312, modifying notification requirements for alleged maltreatment or abuse of a child.

Unfortunately, we have experienced two different incidents of alleged abuse within the same organization - one through the day camp arm of the organization, and the other through the year-round day care arm. Neither incident directly involved the alleged abuse of one of our children, but we saw firsthand how the notification requirements differ based on DHS licensing, and specifically, how the notification requirements fall short for programs currently exempt from required notification.

In the first instance, there was an allegation of sexual misconduct against our child's summer camp counselor, made by another camper in the group. At the time, these children were six years old. The summer camp program was exempt from notifying parents of the allegation. We were not informed of the allegation until six months following the incident. We were slapped in the face, confronted by the fact that there was a potential that our child, and other children within the group, could have also fallen victim and we did not even know. By the time we found out, all of the parents found ways to approach the topic with their children - but six months had passed in the lives of six year olds. Could they be expected to remember? Would they even be able to tell us if something happened given the passage of so much time? As parents, we absolutely should have been notified per the timeframes currently set by DHS licensing so we could have real-time conversations with our children, and further assess the situation. The organization was permitted to use its discretion in this instance, and it failed.

In the second instance, there was an allegation of physical maltreatment made against a teacher of the day care facility, involving another child in the classroom. This triggered a complete DHS investigation, which included prompt notification to parents. We were able to take timely and actionable steps in light of prompt notification.

We are, sadly, in a unique position having experienced this process with and without mandatory notification requirements. Timely notification to parents of alleged maltreatment and abuse is critical to ensuring the continued safety of our children while in the care of others, and to hopefully decrease instances of unreported abuse. We have seen this go both ways - prompt notification is always the preferred path.

Respectfully,  
Leigh and David Waterman