To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Deb Wimmer and I was the co-chair of Small Blessings Childcare and Preschool in Detroit Lakes. Small Blessings has been a group family childcare housed in the United Methodist Church in Detroit Lakes for over 12 years. The childcare was started when some of our members heard that there was a dire need for childcare in Becker County. It was decided that the church would make it a mission to provide this much needed service to our community. The church has received nothing financially from this mission. In fact the majority of the cost to start the childcare was raised within the church members. We did receive a start-up grant from West Central Initiative Fund. The church has not charged the childcare anything for rent, electricity, water etc. over these many years. It was quite a challenge to get licensed for a childcare at the church. We held a C3 license, which were told at the time was the only license available to us.

February 4, 2018, the Board of Directors voted to close Small Blessings Childcare and Preschool as of March 6. We tried to give the parents as much time to find alternative care as we could, while still providing quality care. We are not the first childcare to close in the last several years in Becker County and we will not be the last. There are several reasons for this and I will outline some of them in this letter. I have included in this letter a snapshot of what providers are saying and feeling about their field of expertise. The comments I have included are from dedicated professionals that only have the best interest of the children in mind. The quotes I have included are from providers who have been in the field for at least 3 years to some over 16 years. I hope after reading this you will consider having some current providers included when you to change these rules and regulations or when you are considering adding new regulations. Thank you for taking the time to address these concerns. I truly believe that if some of this isn’t addressed soon, we will have even more of a crisis in Becker County than we now have. It takes a special person to be a good provider, we need to reward them and appreciate them for what they do. One of my fears is that we will see a rise in unlicensed childcares, because the provider doesn’t want to have all the regulations cast upon them. Some may be good providers, but also some will think it is just a good way to make some money and not provide the care that is needed for the children. And without plenty of good licensed providers, the parents may have no other alternative.

Substitutes:

Each substitute has to have a background check for each specific day care they wish to sub in, even though the background checks have been done by the same agency, in the same county. Background checks can take up to 4 weeks to complete. Each individual sub should have a background check completed once per year. The background check should be good at any licensed childcare facility in that county for the year it was obtained, instead of numerous providers having to do background checks on the same individual. As an example: A Becker County licensed daycare provider with a current background check could not substitute for another licensed provider, if she didn’t have a background check specifically for that other childcare. The subs need to have training in SIDS and Abusive Head Trauma. This isn’t so much of an issue as they can be obtained by an online course. To sub for more than 30 times a year, they must have an additional 30 hours of training that can’t be obtained on line. This is required even if they are subbing and working with a fully certified and licensed day care provider. An example for Small Blessings, when one of our providers is absent, but the other is present, the sub has to have these extra hours if they have subbed for us more than 30 times that year…that is not 30 full days, it is 30 times, so if we needed someone for 2 hours one day while our regular provider took her child for a doctor’s appointment, that constitutes one time.

Fingerprinting

It has been decided that fingerprinting is a better option than background checks, which no one has a problem with. However, for a provider to be fingerprinted, rather than going to the DL Police station or sheriff’s department, they must go to Perham. This is rather difficult when most of them work from 7:30-5:00 or 5:30. Also on the fingerprinting, if one of their own children turns 13, that child must also be fingerprinted. If the Mom providing daycare has been doing it since this child was an infant, the child has been in the house for 13 years and now all of a sudden he needs to be fingerprinted? “Providers, as parents should be able to decide whether or not their child gets fingerprinted. Not the government.”

First aid supplies:

First aid supplies must be with you at all times. Disposable gloves and bags and eye protection to protect from bodily fluids, as you will need these items to attend to a child. You can’t just help a child without having gloves and protective eyewear. So in other words, if you have a child that has fallen outside and has a bloody knee or perhaps he has vomited. If you didn’t have all of those things right with you, you would have to leave the child where he/she is and take the rest of the children inside with you and get the eye protection, safety glasses and disposable bag prior to going over to the crying child and comforting him/her. I am assuming this is for the protection of the provider, but if you are a good daycare provider your first instinct is to comfort that child and take care of his needs, not your own protection, as it should be. If a provider feels the need to protect themselves first, let them make that decision.

Ratios and Group Sizes:

Take a look at the ratios of teacher to child and the numbers in each age group. As an example: C3 license. We had to have two staff with a maximum of 14 children. One of which had to be school age. Most schools are now offering preschool programming. We have not had a school age child since Detroit Lakes school district started their preschool. So we were then limited to 13 children, of which 4 could be infants and toddlers (6 weeks to 24 months) with a maximum of 3 infants (6 weeks to 24 months). So for a C3 license, of our 13 children, 4 could be infants and toddlers and 9 had to be age 24 months-5 years, of which there are no 5 year olds due to ISD 22 preschool. Oftentimes we were unable to run with 13 even as we may have had older toddlers, but not enough preschoolers. There were variances, which helped sometimes. We ran with a variance, I would say, close to 100% of the time. If we can run with a variance that often, maybe there should be a change in the rule.

Emergency Plan:

It is understandable that providers think of situations in which they will have to protect the children, but the emergency plan now in place, that has to be filled out is redundant and cumbersome. Hopefully, everyone that cares for children will do their absolute best to care for and protect the children should an emergency arise. We can not think of every situation in which an emergency “could” occur. Also, to provide the parents a copy of this seems ridiculous. I don’t think most parents care, except that we will protect their child. This wastes paper and is an added expense and adds additional time to an already long day for a child care provider.

From here on, I am going to give you some quotes from a Facebook page of Becker County providers, since these last regulations have come out:

“disposable gloves, bags and eye protection. Since most scraped knees, bloody noses etc will occur outside, we will need to have these items with us at all times because otherwise we would have to leave the bloody child to continue to bleed and bring all of the other children into the house while we get the eyewear and gloves.”

“ the licensor told me to be sure to have my disposable bags, eyewear and gloves. Right…like I am going to put on eyewear and gloves while a child is bleeding and crying”

“I am waiting for the day that we have to goggle up for each diaper change”

“Yes, along with our hazmat suits”

“Someone called DHS for clarification of what they consider combustibles and a heat source(combustibles must be 36 inches from heat source) DHS couldn’t give an answer and plan to review it with licensors and then make a determination. WTH they made the rule. Is it any wonder we are losing it!”

“It is all about the regulations they have thrown at us! They expect us to know all of them. There are things that have come up that we are supposed to do that we have never heard about! Also what about the off year when licensor is supposed to come around and just go through our house checking hundreds of things. Also, what about everyone needing to be fingerprinted.”

“ The uncertainly of the checklist ( licensor checking the house in the off year), is stressing me out. Why kdoes it need to be a secret what they are looking for? I am sure a lot of the things we have taken care of but it seems that there are looking to “catch us” doing something wrong. Been doing daycare for 17 yearws and still don’t know where to find stuff.”

“Also, all these regulations and some we don’t even know about”

“ Childcare is not for everyone. It is stressful and underpaid. I too have an issue with all the new regulations that we must follow in order to keep compliant. I also feel that it is very stressful dealing with some of the parents, that expect more from you and don’t reciprocate. Parents who don’t follow policies, pay late, pick up late, bring sick children and basically expect you to raise their children for them. This job has made me feel that I am walking on eggshells and they are waiting for me to fail. I definitely don’t think I will be in child care for much longer because of this.”

Several people responded to this comment agreeing with her.

“Regulations now having to have our fire/storm log. The emergency plan that needs copies for all the parents and in the vehicle and other areas. The background checks that can’t be provided to multi prooviders! Not allowing the kids to be out of your site! This makes using the restroom very difficult! There are many more! I believe as a provider we want the best for the children. WSe know the children sometimes better than their parents do and know who is capable of doing what without our eyes on them constantly. Allowing children to learn consequences for their actions is a good trait for the children to have as they go to school and beyond! This also teaches them what theyr can be capable of doing!”

“The fingerprinting is just plain stupid, if that passes. Many of us have children that would have to be fingerprinted. I feel that we as parent should be able to say yes or no to that. The emergency plan is just plan ridiculous. Don’t think I need to say any more about that! The cost of doing all the tests we have to do, background checks, etc. $$$!!! Paid little for long hours. Lots of negatives, but also positives. Not many positives for being “licensed”.

This is just a window into how providers are feeling about all the regulations and never being involved in the decisions and consequences to all of these regulation.

I hope this is helpful for you and I will certainly answer any questions that I can answer. The people that you need to get involved are the direct providers.

You can also check into the rules for a group family daycare in a church. Definitely make it almost impossible to do. And a church is a perfect place for daycare.

You also may want to check with Katie Lundmark, the Director of Ecumen in Detroit Lakes. They wanted to open a day care in the Nursing home, but changed their minds after finding it was cost prohibitive.

Thank you for taking an interest in this, I just hope that some good will come from Small Blessings closing and some changes will be made as a result of it.

Deb Wimmer, Board of Directors

Small Blessings Childcare and Preschool

1425 Long Avenue, Detroit Lakes, MN 218.234.1679