



PROTECTED CHILDCARE CENTERS

The goal of Protected Childcare Centers legislation is to restore safe and healthy environments where young children can play and learn. This bill would prohibit law enforcement from entering daycares for immigration enforcement without a judicial warrant or other specified exceptions.

THE PROBLEM

Hundreds of federal agents were in Minnesota as part of “Operation Metro Surge,” an unprecedented project by the federal government. Since December 2025, there have been numerous reports of ICE and Customs and Border Protection agents conducting aggressive raids where they assaulted, harassed, and intimidated people.

Arrests and immigration enforcement at childcare centers could lead to very dangerous situations and could put the safety of children in jeopardy.

Parents have the expectation that their children will be safe at daycare, and federal agents with guns and military gear running through daycares would not be acceptable to most parents.

THE SOLUTION

The ACLU of Minnesota supports the Protected Childcare Centers bill as it would:

- Restrict law enforcement agents’ access to childcare facilities for immigration enforcement.
- Require law enforcement to obtain a judicial warrant before entering a childcare center.
- Ensure that if entry is granted to law enforcement, agents will be limited to areas where children are not present.

Child Care Stability Survey

Think Small conducted an anonymous survey of more than 300 metro-area early educators to understand their needs and experiences. Respondents reported increasing absences, decreasing enrollments, and significant increased strain as they navigate families' rising needs and new financial and operational pressures.

Program Impacts December 2025–February 2026

27%

had to close their program unexpectedly

35%

saw increased absences

27%

saw decreased enrollments

Financial & Operational Strain

36%

worry about having to close permanently in the next 6 months

75%

say their programs would be negatively impacted by federal funding freezes or losses

59%

are worried about families being able to pay



Children using Child Care Assistance or Early Learning Scholarships are allowed 25 days absent in a calendar year.

Of those educators who are serving children using these programs:

41%

say half or more will hit 25 day absent limit

11%

say ALL will hit the 25 day absent limit



March 2, 2026

Dear Members of the House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of Think Small, I am writing to express our support for H.F. 3415 which sets guardrails for federal immigration enforcement at child care programs. H.F. 3415 aligns directly with Think Small's mission to advance quality care and education of children in their crucial early years by ensuring child care centers remain safe, stable, trusted environments for children and families.

Think Small recently conducted a survey of child care programs across the seven-county metro area to understand the impact of recent federal enforcement activities. From December 2025 to February 2026, 27% programs reported experiencing increases in child absences, 35% saw declining enrollments, and 27% experienced unexpected program closure days, with many stating these impacts were directly related to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity. Not only do these disruptions threaten the sustainability of already-strained child care programs, but they also interfere with children's continuity of care which is foundational to early learning and healthy development.

Families must feel confident that child care centers are safe spaces. Providers must be able to focus on nurturing young children. H.F. 3415 provides the clarity and protection that both families and providers need and safeguards children's emotional well-being and sense of security.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue and for your commitment to supporting young children, their families, and the early childhood workforce. Please contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

Cisa Keller
President and CEO, Think Small

Hello members of the committee,

My name is Lauren Palan, and I am a parent of two children at a Spanish immersion daycare in South Minneapolis. I am submitting this written testimony in support of H.F. 3415.

We chose to send our children to Spanish immersion school for the same reason we live in this beautiful city - when you know people who are different from you, you can't ever be convinced to fear or hate entire groups. We want our children to welcome and celebrate diverse perspectives because that's what our world needs, maybe more than anything else.

On January 7th, my children and I arrived at school just as ICE was leaving with one of my children's beloved documented staff members. My children asked about the scary men they saw. They asked about the SUVs in front of their school. They watched in fear as their teachers shouted for their friends to run inside. They saw every adult around them crying in agony. The experience of this event will live in my children's bodies for their entire lives. For weeks, I had to try and explain to a four-year-old why people she sees every day can just be thrown in cars and taken away. I had to try and convince her she was safe, even when the people she loves are not.

No child should ever have to live in a world where adults can be grabbed in front of them. No child should have to live in fear of going to school. We need to protect our children and ensure institutions of learning and growth remain safe places for them.

-Lauren Palan

Hello members of the children and family finance committee.

My name is Pearl Elliott, I am a 26 years old, born and raised Minnesotan. I speak very little, less than “poco” Spanish and I have no kids - so why am I writing to you today? It's because I've watched my neighbors be terrorized over the past several months. Because their wellbeing directly correlates to mine.

On my high school the words “Children are the future” is engraved, and I believe those words. So what future will we have if the children's teachers are ripped from their homes or their cars on the way to work? What future is there of children watch their teachers abducted in front of their schools. It's no wonder people my age don't want to have kids. This country squanders the people who would be there to help raise them. It's no wonder people are leaving the profession of teaching when they can't ensure they can teach safely.

I don't need to speak Spanish or have children to understand and FEEL the injustice here. So, I stand outside the Spanish Emersion Schools near me. I wear a vest. I wear a whistle. I watch. I do this almost everyday, usually an hour or two a day. And I will keep doing this as long as the teachers of this school feel unsafe. But how despicable is it that we, the state of Minnesota, cannot make our teachers feel safe. I am ashamed.

I urge the committee to feel the pain in these testimonies and pass HF3415. Please.

Thank you.

Testimony in Support of HF3415

Minnesota House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee Regarding the Impact of Operation Metro Surge on Our Community

Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my written testimony. My name is Grace Fowler. I am a parent in South Minneapolis, and I am here to tell you what Operation Metro Surge has done — not in the abstract, but in the rooms and hallways of our children's daycare, and in the hearts of the families who depend on it.

On the morning Renee Good was murdered, ICE agents came to our Spanish immersion daycare in Minneapolis and took a staff member right as she was arriving for work. I had just gotten home from dropping off my kids when a text from another parent stopped me cold. My husband and I rushed back to the center. What we walked into was devastating. The fear in every room was palpable. Teachers were terrified — terrified for their colleague who had been taken, terrified for themselves, and terrified for their children, partners, family and friends. These are people who spend their days caring for babies and toddlers. They perform some of the most important and least appreciated work in our society. That is who ICE targeted that morning.

Despite being here legally, despite having no criminal record, despite ICE having no warrant, the staff member who was taken was detained for over 20 days — taken from her children, her husband, her colleagues, her church, and her community. No justification. No due process. Just absence.

Back at the daycare, the remaining teachers had no choice but to put on a brave face and keep showing up — for the children in their care, for parents like me who depend on child care to be able to work, and to support their own families. No one came to protect them. No agency, no official, no institution showed up. So we did it ourselves. Other parents and I stand outside the center in the early morning hours and into the evenings, making sure teachers can arrive and leave their jobs without being abducted for no reason. We organize grocery runs and errand trips so that our staff members wouldn't have to choose between their safety and feeding their families. Many of our teachers had watched family members and friends be detained — not because they were undocumented with criminal records (as some in our government espoused), not because warrants existed. But because they were Latino. I want this committee to sit with that for a moment. These are the people we leave our children with. Our kids are the most important people in our lives, and we entrust them each day to these educators because we love and trust them completely. They are extensions of our family. And our own government made them unsafe. They're not criminals. They're not a threat. They are educators at a daycare — and our

government put a target on their backs. And then it wasn't just ICE they had to fear. It was also agitators, emboldened by national rhetoric that dehumanizes communities of color and signals that their harassment is acceptable.

The political climate created by operations like Metro Surge does not stay contained to immigration enforcement.

We are incredibly fortunate to have the talented, brilliant, dedicated teachers and staff of our daycare in our city and our community. They chose to dedicate their professional lives to the care and development of young children — a calling that demands patience, love, and skill. What they did not sign up for was being targeted, surveilled, detained, and terrorized by our own government. By extension, we as parents who rely on childcare centers demand that you ensure the safety of our babies and small children by removing the tremendous target on our daycare center that our own government has created.

I urge this committee to pass HF3415. The children of Minnesota deserve a community where the adults who care for them can come to work without fear. Our families deserve better than this. Please act.

Tony Aarts
1878 Juliet Ave.
St Paul, MN 55105

Dear Chair Rep Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn and members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee:

My name is Tony Aarts, and I live in the Mac-Groveland neighborhood of St Paul. I am writing in support of HF3415, *Access to child care facilities limited*. I am a parent of two small children. My oldest is now out of daycare, while our younger son still attends our Spanish-Immersion daycare center. Both of our children have been very fortunate to attend our daycare center. These are our children's first teachers. My daughter and son have learned their ABCs, counting, playing in their social circle, early literacy, art projects, and many other pivotal early development skills.

I am continually in awe of the commitment and care and attention childcare workers give our children, and how much they do to provide a safe, supportive, and enriching environment. That said, the impacts of Operation Metro Surge have been horrendous for the safety of our children and childcare workers. The idea that masked, unidentified, armed individuals could enter our building is frightening and enraging. The provisions of this bill are asking for very commonsense standards of entry and interaction with such a sensitive location. Schools, clinics, and childcare centers are vulnerable locations where some of our youngest and most vulnerable people are found.

In these past months, I have lost count of the number of ICE sightings we have experienced as they have continually circled and surveilled our neighborhoods, businesses, clinics, schools, and our daycare centers. I have seen them pass my child's daycare center and flash sickening, mocking smiles at us, knowing many of us patrolling are the parents of these children. The idea that any politician would find this acceptable is morally void. Would you allow this for your child? Do you know how it feels to see masked, unidentified men passing the building where your child naps? Do you know what it's like to get text messages that read: "They are down the block and watching. They are at the bus stop. They have taken our center's teacher."?

I have worked with my employer to have added flexibility to work near home because my wife and I don't know what could happen if they try to enter our daycare center. I am a father, and when we learned federal agents were taking workers, walking onto property, attacking school areas, and waiting for children at bus stops, there was no way I could be so far from our child. Some days I work down the street just so I can be close to his building. We just want our children safe. We want to see the childcare workers safe. This is our community. The childcare workers at our center work, provide, and give our children an invaluable first step in their education and social development. All of this while entire communities shelter in place and are afraid to buy food, go to work to earn a living, have access to healthcare, or even take their own children to school.

HF3415 is asking for common sense provisions to not allow a federal agent within a childcare center without providing valid identification, a written statement of purpose, and a valid judicial warrant with approval from the center's license holder. These are the kinds of protocols and safety measures we talk

about when we consider entry to such locations, similar to schools and clinics. We have an obligation to safeguard these locations because they are children. I'm sure many of you are also parents. I am asking you to connect that reality in your own life to the letter of this proposed legislation. I implore all of you to vote aye on HF3415 so that we can provide baseline protocols that are about transparency, process, and most of all, safety for all of our children. Providing safety and support for children is one of the most foundational acts we can take part in as a society. I know Minnesotans value this deeply.

Thank you.

Dear Co-Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn and West and members of the House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee:

My name is Kylie Cooper, and I have been an early education professional for almost twenty years. As members of the committee, you likely already know that one of our annual training requirements is the review and comprehension of the Maltreatment of Minors Mandated Reporting law. This statute, 260E.03, dictates that a professional or professional's delegate who is engaged in child care has a legal obligation to report any known, believed, or suspected maltreatment.

This maltreatment includes (but certainly isn't limited to) "Mental injury," which means "an injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of a child as evidenced by an observable or substantial impairment in the child's ability to function within a normal range of performance and behavior with due regard to the child's culture." And Neglect - specifically the "failure to protect a child from conditions or actions that seriously endanger the child's physical or mental health when reasonably able to do so, including a growth delay, which may be referred to as a failure to thrive, that has been diagnosed by a physician and is due to parental neglect;"

Underlying these definitions is not just our obligation to react and report maltreatment, but also to do whatever we can in our power to prevent harm, abuse, and neglect.

As immigration enforcement actions have ramped up across the state, dating back to November but escalating significantly in January, we've watched the children and families in our care enter a period of fear and concern. Parents afraid to drive to work or school in the morning; employees who receive notification that armed, masked, and unidentified men are outside their homes while they're at work; children who melt down when their parents are just a few minutes late. We've provided the critical care and nurturing that trauma-informed teaching requires in these moments -trying every single day to provide a single environment that has stability, safety, and hopefully, joy for each child - a little respite from the fear they witness in their parents faces each day. Any educator you talk to right now can confirm that we are seeing the ongoing injury to children's emotional stability and well being. Children don't understand the intricacies of the adult politics right now, they just know that the safety and stability they once knew, is missing. This fear impacts every child, regardless of race, skin-color, or immigration status. They all perceive the stress we are experiencing.

Restricting access for federal agents to schools and child care programs, as outlined in HF 3415, is literally the minimum we as adults can do to protect children from harm in this period of time. Requiring due process, legal documentation, and limited access enables us as educators to insulate the children from undue harm, fear, and anxiety. As a committee who has been so clearly committed to the health and safety of children, approving this legislation seems like an obvious choice. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kylie Cooper

Testimony in Support of HF3415

Minnesota House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee
Regarding the Impact of Operation Metro Surge on Our Community
3/4/26

Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HF3415. We are Charles Anderson-Weir and Eleanor Croce. We live in Minneapolis and are the parents of a four year old who attends a Spanish immersion daycare in our neighborhood.

On the morning Renee Good was murdered, agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement came to our child's daycare and detained a staff member as she arrived for work. She was legally present in the United States, had no criminal record, and was held in detention for over 20 days before being released.

The impact on our daycare community was immediate and lasting. This was not an abstract policy debate. It happened in the building where we leave our child each day. Teachers we trust were shaken. Families were afraid. A place that should have felt like a sanctuary suddenly felt uncertain.

In the weeks that followed, we and other parents organized shifts outside during drop off and pick up, coordinated rides and errands for staff, and did what we could to reduce fear in our community. No parent should feel responsible for providing informal protection for a daycare center. No early childhood educator should have to question whether it is safe to come to work.

Childcare centers and schools must be places of safety, learning, and stability. When enforcement actions enter those spaces without clear protections, children and caregivers bear the consequences. The trauma does not stay contained to one event. It ripples through families and the broader community.

We are not asking you to resolve federal immigration policy. We are asking you to use every tool within your authority to ensure Minnesota schools and childcare centers are protected spaces. That includes clear judicial warrant requirements, firm guardrails around enforcement in sensitive locations, and strong protections so children and educators are not placed in harm's way.

Our child deserves to walk into daycare thinking about friends and books, not whether his teachers are safe. Every child in Minnesota deserves that same sense of security.

We urge you to pass HF3415. Minnesota's children deserve a community where the adults who care for them can show up without fear. Our families deserve better. Please act.

Sincerely,

Charles Anderson-Weir

Eleanor Croce

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Minnesota Chapter

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March 4, 2026

Dear Members of the House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of the over 1,000 members of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics committed to improving the health of children and adolescents across Minnesota, we write in strong support of HF 3415.

Minnesota's pediatricians serve diverse communities. In recent months, our members have seen the profound impact that fear and instability can have on a child's mental and physical health. Exposure to traumatic events, such as witnessing a parent or caregiver being detained or deported by federal agents, are at increased risk for anxiety, depression, and developmental delays.

Childcare facilities are more than just places for supervision; they are environments that foster trust, learning, and healthy development. When federal immigration enforcement agents enter these spaces, even for a brief moment, it undermines the foundational trust children and families have in these institutions. A 2017 study published in the journal *Pediatrics* found that children in immigrant families exposed to enforcement actions showed increased behavioral and academic difficulties compared to their peers. The mere presence of enforcement personnel can cause children to withdraw, disengage, or exhibit symptoms of trauma, which can have lifelong repercussions.

As pediatricians, our top priority is to protect the health and emotional security of children. To fulfill this duty, we must advocate for policies that keep childcare centers safe, welcoming, and free from the threat of immigration enforcement. Banning federal immigration agents from these facilities is not just a matter of policy – it is a matter of public health and moral responsibility. By ensuring that all children can access early education and care without fear, we are investing in the long-term health and success of our communities.

As the medical professionals responsible for the health and well-being of the next generation of Minnesotans, I urge you to support HF 3415.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Smentek".

Katie Smentek, MD

President, Minnesota Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics



Representatives Nolan West and Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn
Chairs, Children and Families Finance and Policy
Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 4th, 2026

Chairs and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Start Early Funders Coalition, we are writing in support of HF3415 to prohibit federal agents from entering licensed child care center or certified license-exempt child care center programs.

Access to quality child care and early learning programs has been a top priority for the Start Early Funders Coalition for over a decade. All families deserve access to child care and early learning. Early learning programs allow parents to work and contribute to our economy. These programs are foundational in supporting healthy cognitive and physical development of young children, and a supported early childhood system is one of the most impactful way our state can make towards a healthier and more vibrant future for all Minnesotans.

The impact of Metro Surge has been devastating to our children and to our child care system. Children are afraid that federal agents will take their parents. Staff are unable or fearful to come to work, impacting the quality and ability of programs to operate under their licensing requirements. Parents are making difficult decisions about bringing their children to child care programs with fears of themselves, or the programs being monitored and targeted by federal agents.

The research on the impact of trauma on brain development is clear. When young children experience traumatic events, it impacts their cognitive and social emotional development, and causes lifelong challenges as children grow up. Our vision as a Coalition is that every child in Minnesota is physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively prepared for school and lifelong success. Our coalition is committed to supporting policies that will benefit low-income, rural and Black, Indigenous and children of color and their families; and the programs that serve them.

Sincerely,
Allison Corrado,
Start Early Funders Coalition
Public Policy Committee Chair

Hannah Ramer
[HF3415](#) – in support

March 3, 2026

Dear Chair Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, and members of the Children and Families Finance Policy Committee,

I am writing in support of [HF3415](#) to strictly limit on immigration enforcement actions near schools and daycares. This is essential to protect Minnesota families and the dedicated educators who care for our children.

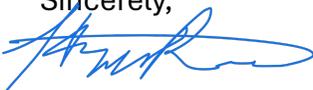
Since December, a third of my daughter's Kindergarten classmates aren't coming to school because it is not safe for their families to bring them. This extreme disruption **exacerbates educational disparities and inflicts a severe emotional toll**. For the students still at school, the staff have worked hard to foster a sense of calm, normalcy and safety. Despite their heroic efforts, in late January my daughter told me **"I feel safe when I'm at home, but at school, I think about what if we see ICE? I think about it all the time. I can't stop thinking about it."** More recently, my Kindergartener asked if she could have her own whistle in case she saw ICE. **Our kindergarteners should be playing and learning, not planning what do to if they encounter armed federal agents at school.**

My 2-year old son attends a Spanish-immersion daycare, and his teachers are skilled, hardworking, and incredibly caring. Despite their legal status, they fear being targeted by immigration agents because of patterns of racial profiling and violent tactics. Furthermore, many staff have loved ones who have been detained, and are struggling with grief, uncertainty, and financial hardship. The teachers continue to show up every day with genuine warmth and love for my child despite the terror of Operation Metro Surge. The psychic toll is immense. **At baseline, their work is incredibly demanding and woefully undercompensated in our society. They should not also have to fear being targeted by federal agents while caring for children.**

Like many other parents, I have stretched myself to give rides, participate in school patrols, and contribute money for groceries, rent, and other living expenses. It has been a sacrifice for my family, though it is dwarfed by the burden borne by the children, families, and educators terrorized by Metro Surge.

Safety is a necessary precondition for learning and healthy development. We must protect children, families, and educators from the threat of immigration enforcement.

Sincerely,



Hannah Ramer



March 3rd, 2026

Representative Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, Co-Chair
Representative Nolan West, Co-Chair
House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
Centennial Office Building
658 Cedar Street
St. Paul, MN 55155

Subject: Statement in opposition of HF 3415

Co-Chairs Kotyza-Witthuhn, West, and committee members,

I am a 33-year veteran of local law enforcement and have served the past four years as the public safety policy fellow with Center of the American Experiment.

In this capacity I have several concerns with HF 3415 which would inappropriately regulate the legal authority of federal agents with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

As written, the bill adds several requirements that would have to be met before a DHS agent with a judicial warrant could be granted access to a childcare facility. The bill ignores the legal authority granted by a judicial warrant and would place childcare professionals in a catch-22 by obligating them to obstruct federal agents.

The bill would require DHS agents in possession of a judicial warrant to first *provide valid identification, then provide a written statement of purpose, and finally obtain approval from the childcare center's license holder* before entering a facility. These requirements conflict with and undermine the authority granted by the judicial warrant.

First, on the issue of identification - the bill does not define "valid identification." Local police executing a judicial warrant identify themselves by wearing a numerical badge. It is improper to create a separate requirement for DHS agents.

Second, demanding a "written statement of purpose" is not a legal requirement for law enforcement conducting an active investigation in the field. It's improper to create this separate requirement for DHS agents.

Third, the bill would negate the authority of a judicial warrant, absent the approval to enter by the childcare facility. This is a clear obstruction of the authority granted by the judicial warrant.



Fourth, the bill would improperly restrict the authority of some federal agents, but not others.

Finally, the bill would violate the Supremacy Clause which establishes federal law as the "supreme law of the land," restricting states from passing laws that conflict with or undermine federal authority.

For these reasons I urge you to vote "no" on HF 3415.

Sincerely

David P. Zimmer

David Zimmer
Public Safety Policy Fellow
Center of the American Experiment