

## Friday 2-11-22 Essential Worker Pay Hearing

*My name is Alyssa Ingle and I am a leader with Kids Count on Us. I have been a lead teacher at 3 different childcare centers. I am here to advocate for frontline worker payments of \$1,500 to every essential worker, including childcare workers, and others who were required to report to work at the height of the pandemic.*

*Throughout the pandemic childcare has been the glue that kept our state functioning. In fact, it has always been the backbone of our society, allowing people to participate in the workforce. During the pandemic, which is still ongoing, we were required to remain open to care for children of other essential workers such as nurses and doctors, so their parents could be on the frontlines. In June, my center in Fargo was granted money from the state, which my boss graciously distributed to all of us employees. I received \$150. Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have received no raises for hazard pay and no time off. Meanwhile, my younger sister who works at Caribou received \$1 per hour in hazard pay, and was earning more than I was.*

*\$150 went down the drain fast. I spent several dollars on my own masks, and prepared to take unpaid time off work if I felt ill after being vaccinated. Most of our children are too young to get vaccinated, and parents are exhausted from quarantining their children every other week. Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have been exposed to COVID over a dozen times, just from the kids I care for.*

*Before getting vaccinated, my fiance and I gave up time with our families to keep them safe. I remember visiting my parents in winter of 2020 in the garage, seated six feet away from them. The garage door had to stay open for air circulation, and we planted a space heater between us to keep warm. I couldn't visit extended family because we were constantly exposed to COVID from the children we cared for. We had no option to work from home or avoid close contact with the children we worked with.*

*As our communities became fatigued with masks and mandates, they dumped their illnesses on childcare workers. COVID has run rampant through our center, sending teachers into quarantine in droves. We're exhausted. We're sick. We're underpaid. And we're essential.*

*\$1,500 could be worth two paychecks for a childcare worker, and we've **earned it**. Childcare teachers - even those with higher education - rarely earn more than \$15 an hour. Ironically, many childcare teachers need financial assistance to put their own children in daycare. We've been underpaid since long before the pandemic, and somehow our struggles are still being neglected in our communities.*

*Some legislators want to reserve funding for healthcare workers to give them a bigger check. I say healthcare wouldn't survive without childcare. How can our healthcare workers be on the frontlines if there is no one to care for their children? It's past time to acknowledge child care's role in getting us through this pandemic, and it's well past time we were compensated for it.*