

March 14, 2022

To whom it may concern,

My name is Viktoria Bjerke, I am 24 married and have 2 kids ages 1 and 2 years old. **My kids are my world and I want them to have every opportunity possible as would other parent out there. We are a working family. I am a just graduated medical assistant and my husband is union machine operator making 53K a year.**

Daycare assistance gave us 50 hours for 2 weeks. CCAP did not cover the full amount of tuition for our child care and we had to pay the 177\$ on top of our 77\$ co-pay we were paying around 250\$ a week. I ended up going back to work while in school so I could cover the cost of daycare. I was working at Burger King while in school making 19,500 a year. About 3 months after enrolling our kids in our center in Shakopee, we got a scholarship that would pay the difference that CCAP did not cover and the weekly co-payment. We are truly grateful to get the help we are getting.

While I was working, **I got offered the general management position. Starting salary would be around 36k a year, so I called and checked with the county worker to let her know I got offered the position and what the starting salary would be. I was told that if I took the position, I would lose my daycare assistance because you can't make over 88k a year.** Our Gross income would be about 89k a year we would be 1000\$ over. **If I took the position, I would lose my daycare and still would not make enough to keep my kids in daycare, so I turned the position down.** I finished school and started my internship that was 8 weeks receiving no income at the time. I finished and went back to work at Burger King in the meantime waiting to take my exams. **I passed my exams and started to look for work in the medical field. While looking I saw that starting pay was around 15-16\$ an hour. Knowing that would put us over for our daycare I decided to just stay at Burger King.** In the medical field I would be making more money but I would not make enough to cover the 815\$ a week to have both kids in daycare.

After some time at work my boss asked me if I would like a raise. I called my worker and asked how much more I could make without losing our daycare and she told me that I was going to most likely lose it at redetermination because the annual income exit level is 69,698 and we would make over that. I asked if there was anything I could do to keep it and she said that unless we pay a monthly medical and dental premium there wasn't. My husband gets medical and dental through work but doesn't pay a premium, it's rated at 7 dollars an hour I asked her if that would work and she said no.

So here I am trying to figure out ways to keep my kids in their daycare. Their teachers spend more time with my kids then I do so I want my kids to be comfortable where they are at. Both my kids have gained so much from our center. When my oldest started he had a speech delay and only could say about 3-5 words. The teachers have worked so hard with my kids my 2 year old just a year later is talking and can hold a 2 year old conversation. I 100% know that was the daycare taking time to work with him when I could not.

Since finding out I will be losing my assistance I have been so stressed out it has consumed me. I could stay at home but then all our bills fall on my husband and he still doesn't make enough to cover them all. We do not live in a fancy house or drive fancy cars. We can barely afford to take a vacation to see family let alone 800\$ a week. **As a parent I feel like my kids deserve a good education so why can't I**

give them that because we make just over the allowable income? We work and pay our bills like we are suppose and live a quiet life; I find myself putting stuff back at the store now so I can have the extra money to put in my daycare account. We are considered a middle class family and I don't make enough for my kids to be in daycare.

It's hard as a parent, my kids don't get everything they want **but I never thought I would be thinking about divorcing my husband to get daycare assistance on my income alone or taking out loans and asking our parents to help to keep my kids in daycare. We never thought that our 40 hours a week jobs wouldn't be able to pay to keep our kids in daycare.** All these things have been in my head and we just don't know what to do as a "middle class" family. We should be able to afford to give our kids a good solid foundation for them to start school. I've cried many times because my kids have friends in this daycare, the teachers are like family and love my kids like I love them and it makes me feel secure to know my kids are being loved and taken care of and to think they may no longer be able to continue to go there.

I refer people to our center. I write reviews for them I think they are amazing at what they do and couldn't ask for a better daycare. **By no means am I saying I shouldn't have to pay. We are willing to pay we just flat out can't afford 800+ a week we have worked and reworked a budget and it doesn't fit.** We would be negative 400+ a month just to be able to give our kids an education we think and feel they deserve. So, I like any mother would started looking for help and there are none beside the scholarship we already have.

I told my husband I felt like a crazy mother, but I wanted to write this letter and hope someone listens to know this a problem not only for me but a lot of "middle-class" families. If this never helps us but it saves another family from the stress and heart ache or possibly having to take their kids out of daycare and quit jobs, then I've done something right. I am not looking for a free hand out I'm looking for help, help to make it possible for the middle-class family to give their young kids good foundation and a caring environment. I've never been one to beg. I've always just gone out and worked for it but I'm willing to beg for my kids they deserve a right to a quality education. **Everyday I come home I dread checking the mail knowing that sometime soon I will have a letter saying we make too much money and no longer qualify for daycare assistance.**

I hurt as a parent for my babies because there the ones that are going to lose out. I keep asking myself one question what am I going to do? Who do I turn to for help when there is none available for us? I find myself wanting my kids to grow up so I can afford daycare and so I don't have to worry about how all my bills are going to get paid or if I'll be able to afford to keep them in a place they love. **As a parent you never give up on your kids and I never will, I will continue to send this letter to people looking and asking for help not only for us but other families as well.**

Yours truly,

A middle-class mom looking for help

Viktoria Bjerke