Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Education and Innovation Policy Committee:

I am Lisa Swenson a licensed Family Child Care Provider (Parent Aware rated 3 Stars) from Coon Rapids.   I need to share with your committee how strongly I am opposed to HF46 and desire for that your committee oppose/kill the bill in committee and not include it in the Omnibus bill.  I look at this from two stand points, as a Child Care Provider with a small home business and as an advocate of young child.

Looking at this first from the point of view of the child, which is the most important.

* Young children learn best in an environment that they can play as they learn and explore. Study after study supports this. The Home Child Care setting is the best environment for this. We don’t just love the children we care for, we know their individual needs. We can more easily change our program to help them when they are struggling or encourage them and challenge them when they are succeeding to continue exploring more. Our program is more pliable then a school or center based program.
* Most four year olds are not ready for all day preschool. Many are still take 2 hour naps in the afternoon. They are not mature enough to spend 7-8 hours in a classroom/ pre-school setting. They need to be moving. Forty-five minutes to two hours of pre-school 3-5 days a week is more than enough structured learning for a four year old child to handle. (I provide that in my child care as do all the providers I know.) Not to mention emotional readiness, very few have developed the skills to handle a long pre-school setting. In most preschool rooms the ratio is 1 teacher to every 10-15 kids having 20 -30 kids in a classroom. In home child care we know our kids because the majority of them started in our care at 3-4 months old.
* Small children learn best around multiple ages. The younger kids see the older kids, cutting paper, coloring, climbing and the list goes on. There is a since of accomplishment the younger kids get when they can start doing what the old kids can do. The older kids in turn like having more privileges and want to be the helper because it make them special they are now the big kid. By taking the four year olds out of the home child care setting it hampers this important learning cycle for all ages.   If this was something all parents wanted they would choose a daycare center which separate the ages. Are you telling me that the parents whom choose to use the almost 10,000 home child care MN setting have not thought of the benefits there child receives in these setting.
* What are the parents to do with their child the 1-4 hours they are not in school? Full-time Preschool is roughly 7 hours a day. Most parents have their children in home child care 8 hours for some kids but most are in our homes 9-10 hours a day. Is there going to be before and after care provide at the preschool. Is that free to parents as well? If not, will it be affordable to the parents? Is busing going to be provided back and forth from home or to daycare?   Many of my parents are having a hard time with their 5 year riding a bus let alone a 4 year old. Will the parents even have home daycare as an option? Most Daycare will not be able to hold a part time spot for a 4 year old and parents will not want to pay full-time rates for a part- time child. What will there child care options be? How many of home daycares are going to remain open if they lose the 4 year old income?

From the stand point of the Home Child Care Business these changes will greatly affect our lively hoods.

* Me for example: I am a divorced mother of three, this is my only income. I have been out of the corporate working world for over 13 years. I was a corporate trainer and curriculum developer. I have a Bachelors degree in Criminology/Sociology of Law so not a degree that would get me hired in an educational field or as a director of a Preschool center. I couldn’t afford to live on what they make in the center care setting often $7.00 - $10 an hour. Before taxes and business expenses (which when you are in daycare are largely home expense deductions) I will make between $50,000 and $60,000 thousand last year before deductions). Taking a job in the public sector I would be luck to make in the $30,000 - $35,000 range and now could not deduct my home expense from my take home pay. (I know this to be true watching friends/family educated men and women whom have lost their jobs and unable to find work for 18months or longer take ½ their former wages. I would lose my home. Or if I get a second job, then when would I be home for my children 11 and 13 years? The age you really need to be there for them after school.
* That last example was just me, but how about the 9000 plus tax paying home daycare providers? We all can’t get jobs in center base care or preschools. Nor could most of them afford to. Many think when you are married and doing daycare that it is just a little extra income to help the family out. While that may be true for the minority. When I started home child care I was married and it was so we could replace the $40,000 income I received working outside of the home. All the providers I am friends with need this income because it is their families’ largest income source.
* If HF46 goes into effect Fall of 2016, I would lose 2-3 children in my current care. I am licensed for 10 kids: 2 school agers often part- time positions, 5 preschoolers 2-4 year olds and 3 infant toddlers all full-time. I like to run at 6-8 kids. But most providers I know run at 10 -14 kids. For me that is $ 320 -480 a week of lost income that would be extremely difficult to replace. For some providers they say they will lose 3-5 kids. As a home child care business we build from the bottom up. We can only have so many infant/toddlers (6 weeks -23 months) that are our bottom/ our base. Then we build upon it with our 2- 4 year olds. When we lose a 2 – 4 year old before they go off to school, often we don’t refill that spot. People get comfortable with their child care and don’t change unless they really need to.
* As a business owner I would have to look at the loss in potential clients and strongly consider if A) Could I stay in business? Where would those families go especially those with infant/toddlers, whose spots are hard to find. B) If I do stay in business, can the families afford the rate increase I would need to make to compensate the loss in income? Most families could not afford a raise in their rates, probably $50 a week. Maybe less if one can keep some of the 4 year olds part time. But not much less.
* If we are able to keep the 4 year olds part-time we need to worry about them getting back and forth from the bus. This creates a supervision issue 2 times a day. We would need to bundle up 6-10 kids to stand outside for the bus hopefully at the end of our driveway. If not then walking to the corner with a stroller on unplowed streets keeping the kids off the roads and safe. No sidewalks in our neighborhood. Even on the 20 below days out with babies to keep them in sight and sound.
* Many of us providers have joined the Parent Aware child care rating program. We were excited to have the opportunity to let parents know why we are in care and how our programs can benefits their children. We have devoted many hours outside of our normal business hours going to classes, showing that we are following best practices. Offering the tools to our child to be school ready. For many of us it was just learning the states terminology to describe what we are already doing. This seems like a slap in the face. Why did we need to prove we were already following best practice if you are going to take the children out of our care?
* I understand that HF46 is being considered with good intentions. As are all the other Child Care rules for the lowest denominate of possibilities that could happen. The problem with this and many of the other rules is that you are treating the good licensed providers which are the majority of us like we are idiots. You are taking away the role and responsibility of education away from the parents. Teaching children is a joint effort, between the child care provider and the parents. A child success depends on both. When I teach preschool to my kids I know which ones are supported at home and which ones are not. Having 4 years old in all day preschool is not the answer, the ones not being supported at home will still struggle. Parent education is what is needed.
* Passing HF46 will help some but it will also hurt more. The relationship between Home Child Care providers often doesn’t end when they go off to school. We remain friends with their families, attend major events in their lives and when in care long enough, they bring their children to us. It will hurt families because many Home Child Care business will not be able to stay open or if they do remain open will not be affordable to the average family. This will hurt families because they will have to look to unlicensed care most running illegally caring for more than one family. Not following the rules of the state. Not paying in taxes for their unclaimed income. They are out there and they are the ones giving licensed providers a bad name.

I truly hope that you will consider all sides of this issue. I know on the surface it sounds like a great idea, but HF46 will cause more problems for our schools and families than it will benefit.

Sincerely,

Lisa Swenson Child Care Provider