

Members of the Family, Children, and Seniors Committee,

I, Shela Jones, am a licensed group home child care provider here in Michigan and I would like to express my support of House Bills 5975, 5976, and 5977. Thank you for the opportunity to share my support.

HB 5975 would allow increased ratios for child care providers. Child care is extremely difficult to find, especially for infants. I've had families on my waiting list for over a year and the list is often extensive. Increasing the ratio would allow providers to serve more families and ensure those families have quality child care, supporting both the work force and the future of Michigan children. This also provides more income for providers like me, which allows me to pay my employees better wages. This would help entice quality workers and encourage them to remain employed, reducing staff turnover. Child care providers excel at caring for children in large groups. I would be very comfortable adding an additional child or two to my group and still have the ability to provide the same level of quality care to each child.

HB 5976 would allow for providers to care for before and after school students in addition to the normal ratios. This would be extremely beneficial to families. My home is located right next door to an elementary school and I have received many calls for before and after school care. Unfortunately, I am unable to provide the service due to ratio limits. A before and after school child would still have to pay for a full time space, which just is not fair (to the family or me as the provider). This bill would allow me to serve the community. I could care for the siblings of my current families, which makes their planning easier. Instead of having to work out multiple plans for an older child, they can just use one provider. Before and after school programs in elementary schools fill up fast and are very expensive. I have received many calls from desperate families who were on the waiting list for before and after school care, but did not get in. One family pays almost as much for before and after school care at the elementary as they did for full time care in my home. Supporting home child cares with before and after school spaces is supporting working parents.

HB 5977 would allow 90 days of notice to providers to comply with rule changes issued by LARA. When the last set of rules were released, weeks before Christmas, providers were expected to comply within a matter of days. One rule required the purchase of new cribs for infants, which is quite an expense to undergo on such short notice. Another rule required assistants to have CPR before hire. The classes are seldomly held, so it's difficult to go from having 90 days to meet the requirements, to only a few. A 90 day time period gives licensing plenty of time to reach out to providers and give training courses carefully informing us of all the changes coming and how we can work to be in compliance. It gives us time to prepare and ensure we are meeting the rules to provide children with the best care possible. Also, it shows us that both licensing and the government support child cares and give us the time and guidance we need to succeed, rather than expecting us to make many changes very quickly, which led to more outrage and frustration than anything and fostered a negative relationship between providers and licensing, when the opposite should be true. Licensing holds a supportive role for providers and the relationship should be encouraged to be a positive and beneficial one.

In summary, these bills would all be wonderful, not only for child care providers, but for the families and communities we serve. I strongly encourage you to support them and in doing so, support Michigan children. Should you have any questions or concerns or require further information, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

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