

SB282
Neutral Testimony
March 8, 2023

Staffing our early education center continues to be a challenge, in part due to regulations as well as an increase in the needs of our students in the form of challenging behaviors and developmental delays. We greatly appreciate the additional time spent on discussing options in and around SB 282 with the desire to support providers during this challenging time in early childhood education.

This testimony is specific to the unique needs of our individual center as we recognize that there are many other providers that find themselves in different circumstances, all the more making it difficult to write legislation that addresses all needs adequately. Your efforts are appreciated.

Christ Lutheran Early Education Center has had the privilege of serving students and families in our community through quality early childhood education for nearly 35 years. We are a licensed facility for 127 students with seven licensed classrooms. We have one classroom that is licensed for 12 or fewer children and six classrooms licensed for 17-20 children. Our staff of 13 provides half day and extended day learning opportunities for students 2 ½ - 5 years old, September-May, between the hours of 8:30-3:30. Note: we had been licensed for 139 students with eight classrooms but removed a room from our license in the fall of 2022 due to lack of staff.

Thoughts related to SB 282: Neutral

Staff Qualifications:

- An exemption was sent to licensed providers on 4/4/22, from KDHE now counting/acknowledging the experience for preschool professionals that have served in a non-licensed preschool program (like our local school districts), this is a great first step; however, it would be helpful to acknowledge the education, background and experience of professionals in other education and education related fields to be considered as well (examples include, but not limited to: early childhood education, elementary education, special education, speech pathology, occupational therapy, social work).
- Due to current regulations, without having three months of experience in a licensed center, these competent, educated and experienced individuals (as noted above), some who have managed classrooms of their own with 20 or more students, cannot be considered a lead teacher (left alone) in a room licensed for 13 or more students, even if there are 12 or fewer students enrolled in the class (this includes stepping into the classroom for a brief time in order for the lead teacher to step out for a bathroom break).

Continuing Education Hours:

- A reduction in required annual continuing education hours for staff would benefit our budget and to our teachers. While we work hard to find continuing education hours at a minimal cost, we pay our staff for the additional time spent outside the classroom to attending those training opportunities.
- Our classroom teachers and assistants are all part-time hourly employees that have a variety of outside commitments and responsibilities. For many on staff, working at our center is not a lifelong career, rather a short-term opportunity to use their gifts for a season that fits their personal schedule, making it difficult to find individuals that are willing to commit to the 16 hours of continuing education that are required annually.

- By reducing the number of required (KDHE approved) continuing education hours, providers have the option to request/require more of their staff, if desired.
- Currently, all continuing education hours must be KDHE approved. At times we have found additional quality training opportunities (not KDHE approved) available in the community related to specific topics that a staff member might benefit from. A reduction in the number of required hours provides time for staff to seek out non KDHE approved training opportunities (if desired), above and beyond those required, that better prepare them for specific needs in the classroom.

Teacher to student ratios:

- In recent years we have found that the needs of our students have significantly increased, both related to challenging behaviors as well as developmental delays.
- We have a greater number of students that qualify for outside services.
- Increased student needs impacts staff retention.
- We have had to reduce the number of students in a classroom (smaller teacher:student ratio) to accommodate for these needs in order to set the students and staff up for success (keeping students safe and provide more classroom support for teachers with the desire to increase staff retention).

Thank you for your consideration and efforts.

With appreciation,

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