Testimony of Amy French-Wilson

Infant Teacher, Town & Country Learning Center

Before the Human Services Committee

March 12, 2015, SB 1044

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Committee,

I wanted to take the time to show support for Senate Bill 1044 pertaining to the low wages paid to early childhood teachers.

I have been teaching and working in early childhood for 18 years. I have seen so many successful changes happen in the education of young children, beginning at 6 weeks old in this time. However, with the many advances and degrees now needed to uphold a teaching position in this younger age range, there is still minimal pay that early childhood education (ECE) teachers are compensated for. On a small salary we are unable to attend colleges to obtain bachelor's degrees without taking on large student load debt. Sadly, many people still call it "daycare" or think of us as "babysitters" and don't realize the hard work, planning, evaluating, dedication and educating of not only the children, but their families.

Our days as teachers are just as long and important as the educators teaching in public schools, actually far longer in most cases, and year round. I take 20 plus hours of continuing education per year to ensure I am able to provide the best experience for young children. I earned an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education, but my real education came from hands on experiences in my classroom. I needed an Associate's Degree to work as a head teacher in a NAEYC accredited program, so I made sure to do just that. By 2020 I will need a Bachelor's Degree. On my salary, as a full time working mother of two school age children, I am not sure how I will be able to afford to continue my education.

You may wonder what an Infant Teachers day may look like. You may picture an Infant Teacher being able to sit and rock with a baby on our lap in a glider as they sleep peacefully, that my job is simply to change them, feed them and coddle them when they cry. There are moments when this is the case, but with the many other demands of the job, this is not all I do, I do so much more.

As a head teacher I am responsible for 8 babies per day; however some babies my not attend 5 days a week. With part time children I have had up to 11 different babies schedules, routines, likes and dislikes, families, interests, milestones, progress and education to think about, all at one time. I complete evaluations and assessments 4 times per year on my infants. The assessments are long and detailed in regards to their personal, social/emotional, physical and cognitive development. I conduct these assessments based on my time with them and the observations I make and record on each infant in their individual assessment binders. I complete monthly individual lesson plans for each infant in these areas to help them strengthen their skills they need more assistance with, and evaluate what they need to be working towards to be reaching new milestones and for the infant to eventually advance and be prepared to transition to the toddler classroom. I have also made referrals to birth to three to help infants who showed signs of needing additional support and worked with the infants Occupational, Physical and Speech therapists and their families during this time. A great deal of the time I am answering endless parent questions and helping to educate them on what they should do or can do to help their baby grow and thrive. I am usually the one who helps the baby make a routine or schedule for feedings and naps; to help a baby learn to self soothe. In fact, the majority of the time babies learn to do things with us for the first time; such as drink from a bottle, pick up food, use a sippy cup, sleep in a crib or on a cot, and even crawl, and pull up or take their first steps. We then relay this information so their families can then do the same things at home. Many times the children in my class spend more time at our childcare center then they do with their families. I offer resources and packets of information for my families regarding teething, what foods should be introduced and when, diaper rash, fevers, etc. I also go above and beyond and prepare welcome packets for my families when their children start in my classroom.

Beyond this I prepare a packet to give to my families a few months prior to when I feel their child is ready to advance and transition to the next room which prepares them for changes that will occur in schedules, and routines. I am the one that speaks to our Director about advising when a child should move to transition to the next age group and when.

It is also my responsibility to introduce the babies to sensory activities through art, outdoor time and bringing outside elements indoors. We dance, listen to varieties of music and sing songs and do finger plays. There are many different toys offered to our infants, soft, cuddly, hard, small, large and gross motor activities with ramps, tunnels and activity tables. It is my responsibility to make sure we have all the toys needed and ensure they are age appropriate. My center is NAEYC

accredited so we have many items that are mandatory for us to cover, have and through them observing us and looking at our extensively detailed portfolios we create, they honor us with this distinction. As I stated, I do have moments where I do get to hold a baby sleeping in my arms for a short time, before I have to place them in their crib to change another baby's diaper, assist a baby trying to get down from pulling up when they are stuck, hold a baby to drink their bottle and teach a baby to pick up their food and sippy cups. Then I may be asked to answer a phone call from a concerned parent who needs me to reassure them their baby is alright after they have been worrying about their child who didn't sleep well the night before, or they ask me if I think they are teething, have an ear infection, or how to go about letting them "cry it out" at night. We also have IPads in our classrooms to take pictures to send to parents who might be missing their baby during the day or to email them to bring in the diapers, wipes, clothes or bibs which are needed daily.

I strongly hope and encourage you to support Senate Bill 1044 for not only an educator like me, but for the many out there who are just like me, and ones who will come after me. We are in it for the love of what we do, after years and years of minimal pay it wouldn't be the small salaries we make that keep us in our careers. We will be unable to keep the jobs we love without the pay we need to further our education or support our own families; we all continue to struggle paycheck to paycheck even with all we do each and every day to ensure education begins right from the start. Without high quality early childhood education settings what would happen to children when they enter preschool and elementary schools; the big picture is their love of learning starts with us. Experts tell us that 90% of all brain development occurs by the age of five, what we do as early childhood educators carries into their future. I do believe I do incredibly important work; increased compensation only makes sense for all the hard work and dedication early childhood educators do and will need to have to further our education.

Sincerely,
Amity French-Wilson