



## **TESTIMONY ON SB 221 AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE**

Good afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak, Senator Hwang, Representative Rutigliano and Members of the Labor Committee. My name is Georgia Goldburn and I am the director and owner of Hope Child Development Center.

I would like to raise concerns about the unintended consequences to the childcare industry of raised bill SB 221. For many childcare businesses, women represent about 80 – 100% of our employees. Women are the ones who get pregnant and are also the caretakers when there is a sick child or family member.

SB 221 would afford these women the opportunity to be able to do so and be compensated at 100% of their salary. While as a woman I applaud the spirit and intention of this bill, as a business owner I am extremely concerned about my ability to provide high quality, predictable childcare to my other mothers who need to go to work to provide for their families if I have staff members out for up to three months at a time each year.

Hope Child Development Center has four staff member who has gotten pregnant within a short period of time. One staff member just came back from maternity leave in November of last year, one is currently out and two are getting ready to go out in August and September. We pay for one month of maternity leave for our staff, because we want to ensure that they have the time to bond with their baby without the stress of losing their income. All of our staff return to work after six or eight weeks. Even with staff returning within those six to eight weeks, it puts an incredible strain on our program to staff the current absences and a strain on the other staff members who are pressured to be at work because of licensing regulations.

Childcare centers are required by OEC to maintain adult to child ratios and group size in order to be compliant. As such, my administrative staff are often called upon to cover in the classrooms for my staff that is out. Two administrators cover the other times when at least two staff people are out either because of illness or personal appointments and I cover when we have multiple staff out for the day. These absences often means that administrative tasks are left unaddressed sometimes for days, resulting in delays in responses to parent concerns, collection of tuitions and completion of paperwork for the OEC and or other regulatory agency.

Having staff available to work is not a nicety but a necessity for our continued operation and compliance. It ensures the safety of the children and their healthy development when they are exposed to a stable nurturing environment with a consistent caregiver. SB 221 would mean that childcare providers would have difficulty guaranteeing their staffing patterns from day to day. This would result in a drop in the quality of care for the children and families that we serve.

Currently, our industry does not have a substitute pool to pull from like the K-12 system and even as the regulations are written, we could not use substitutes even if a pool becomes available. Additionally, as stated, it is incredibly important for children in the early years to be exposed to a consistent caregiver over a period of time. There are children between the ages of 6 - 18 months that developmentally respond adversely to strangers. Additionally, children who are autistic require an even greater level of consistency and predictability. Having different substitutes in their rooms daily would be very disruptive and traumatic for these children and would move us away from what we know to be developmentally appropriate for these children.

A solution that proponents of SB 221 would propose would be for providers to hire extra staff people who will act as floaters in the event that multiple staff are not available to work. However, many providers are struggling with current labor costs and this unfortunately would only be a solution for larger providers like Kindercare and Tutor Time. Unfortunately, small childcare providers who do not benefit from the economy of scales will be making decisions about whether to operate their business outside of compliance OR closing their centers for the day, thus leaving families without childcare and without notice if and when they lose staff for extended periods of time. Either solution choice will be an untenable one, thus having the impact of driving smaller providers, many of whom are minority owned businesses, out of business.

We urge the committee to think of the impact on childcare small business owners as they consider this legislation. As this bill may simultaneously help moms to be at home longer with their children while reducing the quality of and access to care that those children receive when those moms need to leave them in a childcare setting. Thank you.