

House Select Committee on Early Childhood Education Improvement
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My name is Kim Haley and I am from Rockingham County. I have a degree in Elementary Education and taught Kindergarten in the public school system for more than 10 years.

For the past 14 years, I have owned and operated three 4-star licensed private child care centers. My centers are licensed to serve 300 children. I had a More at Four classroom at one my centers for nine years.

When More at Four began in 2001, our county [Rockingham] *solicited* private child care centers to make space available for classrooms for the More at Four program. We eagerly jumped into the program and opened our More at Four classroom in January of 2001. We maintained that classroom until August of 2010 when our “local partnership for children” [Smart Start] sent us a letter *just six days* before the start of the 2010-2011 school year informing us that we would no longer have a More at Four classroom at our site.

Why? (That is what we asked!) We were told that due to cuts in funding the partnership was asked to look at various factors for More at Four site retention and that we were cut because we had been in the program for so long – and because we had some teacher turnover. I don’t know about you, but I believe that experience adds value for the families and children we serve. I would *never* have thought that nine years of experience would be a detriment to our center when it came to preparing “at-risk” four-year-olds for Kindergarten. As for teacher turnover, it is my understanding that teacher turnover is fairly prevalent these days – not only in private child care centers, but also public schools.

Amazingly, the same school year that we lost our More at Four classroom (2010-2011) – with all of the budget cuts and media reports about the negative impact they would have on schools – the elementary school located one mile from my center was given a *second* More at Four classroom.

What happened to our private center marks a trend occurring in our county. Our county started with eight More at Four classrooms in private centers in 2001-2002. This year our county has 18 More at Four classrooms with *all but one* of them housed in public elementary schools. With that being said, all of the private centers in my county are currently operating at only about 75 percent capacity. My three centers alone all have openings for four-year-olds.

I am here to tell you my story today because I want to make sure that you are aware that there are lots of high-quality private child care centers in this state ready and willing to serve at-risk four-year-olds. These centers – like mine – have invested time and resources in teachers, facilities and materials to provide

positive, safe, enriching learning environments for children that go way beyond “day care.”

Another issue that I believe needs to be brought to your attention is this: Just this school year, which started in late August, six children who were enrolled in my center have moved to NC Pre-K classrooms. One child was a private pay family and the other five were already receiving subsidy from the state for child care. While these six children and families had to undergo transitions, there are still children on the waiting list for NC Pre-K and for subsidy in Rockingham County. In other words, the children who are *not being served at all*, or who might be in a 1- or 2-star center and could have used the “boost” to NC Pre-K, are still not being served.

In closing, here are a few other thoughts for you to consider as you work to on NC Pre-K solutions for the future:

- Private licensed child care centers are among the safest environments for children. Our classrooms are monitored. Our kitchen is monitored. Our playgrounds are monitored. Public school classrooms may be licensed, but even those who are licensed are issued exemptions. For example, they are not required to wash hands in warm water as we are in centers. They are not required to use separate sinks for hand washing after bathroom trips and hand washing before meals. Their playgrounds and athletic fields have legal exemptions, and so on.
- High-quality licensed childcare centers with capacity to serve at-risk four-year-olds are an important part of the NC Pre-K program now and in the future, especially considering the issue of overcrowding in some public school systems. Schools shouldn't have to add mobile classrooms in order to serve NC Pre-K children when private centers have experience and capacity. Likewise, taxpayers shouldn't have to fund new school buildings unless there is a lack of high-quality private centers in a community to serve these children.
- Would the millions of dollars being spent on NC Pre-K be better spent if invested in child care subsidy (DSS)? This way parents would have an opportunity to get at-risk children into high-quality licensed centers before the age of 4. Wouldn't two or three years of early education in a safe, positive learning environment be even better for at-risk children than just one year? Wouldn't they be even better prepared for Kindergarten?

As a business owner and provider of valuable childcare services in my community, I look forward to working with you all to ensure that private licensed childcare centers continue to serve at-risk four-year-olds in North Carolina. I appreciate the opportunity to share these comments with you today.