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To whom it may concern:

My name is Nicole Flick and I own a licensed childcare center in Dilworth, MN right next to Fargo/Moorhead Metro Area. My center is licensed for 175 children. We have been operating for almost 6 years now. I'm writing on behalf of my 45 employees who showed up to workday in and day out during the past 18 months and have worked for impoverished wages each day.

I want you to realize how hard these people worked and how much they sacrificed for their families and the families they served. When the pandemic hit, the governor asked us to remain open so the essential workers could get to work and help save lives or stock grocery shelves. We childcare center owners and directors told our staff, "We have to help" those of us who were not immunocompromised stepped up and we worked every day, keeping our doors open! Cleaning toy after toy, trying to keep infants from touching other infants. Toddlers from putting toys in their mouths and sharing with friends, keeping 3 year old's 6 feet apart all while trying to explain to them why we can't show affection or to calm the nerves of the young children asking why people are wearing masks. Cleaning and sanitizing until our hands started to bleed. Over and over for the last 18 months.

Myself, a mother of two ages 3 and 6 who owns a small business, who does not have health insurance for herself or her children, stepped up. My children came with me, they didn't have the option to stay home, if myself and my husband could not get to work, we could not operate. I made the scariest decision to come to work and take the risk for not only myself but my children, knowing too well that if I or they were to catch the virus we would not be able to afford the medical care to save us. I made that choice because it was the right thing to do and the only thing I could do to help people in this terrible pandemic.

My center was open 5am-8pm, our staff spent most of that time at the center cleaning. We couldn't afford a cleaning service as those prices had skyrocketed like so many others. We spent weeks fogging classrooms and bleaching and sanitizing toys. Running kids to and from the front doors to meet their parents so their parents didn't come inside, because if they did and tested positive, then we would have to close and quarantine.

We lost half our families and because our contracts were already in place, they were not required to pay me if they withdrew. I was offered loan after loan, but because I was a "for profit" entity that was all I was given at the time, unsure if I would be able to pay it back or not. It wasn't until almost 6 months into the pandemic did the state start sending us grant money to help with supplies. They wanted us to stay open and work but we were never defined as critical so grocery stores would not let me get more than one gallon of milk or more than one paper

towel. I had to beg and plead with managers to give me gloves and sanitizer. There was even one point where I sent three of my staff in to get gloves because they only allowed 1 per customer. The alternative was inflated price tags and maybe weeks delivery.

My employees stepped up more than I could have ever imagined. They showed up, they had kids washing hands, they washed the toys, they stayed late and cleaned classrooms and did their very best to explain the pandemic and calm the fears of the little eyes staring back at them.

They deserve this money. Nurses, doctors, grocery store workers, all received bonuses, higher wages, but not us. We didn't get bonuses, all the money we received went to payroll or supplies for cleaning and PPE. When the cost of a vinyl glove goes from 2 cents to 11 cents and you go through 4,000 of them in a month you must prioritize any funds that are given, their safety was the utmost important thing. Paying astronomical prices for toilet paper, and disinfectant, the necessities to keep them safe, took a toll on our already broken industry.

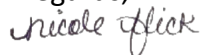
Public schools were closed, we spend most of our days figuring out how they teach 2nd grade math because we could only see teachers on zoom for about 15 minutes at a time. The rest of the time we had to help with google meet sessions and homework for the other 30 kids in our care. We became the public school teachers for no extra money! The public school teachers were safe in their homes. We were on the front lines in the classrooms with all their students helping them with their studies so their essential parents could go to work!

It is so imperative that childcare workers be seen as essential because without us, you do not have an economy. Without childcare, your ER doctor cannot go to work and save lives. Without childcare, teachers cannot teach. Without childcare, there is no shipping or delivery. Without childcare, people simply cannot work and that is the bottom line.

We have and always will be the backbone of this beautiful country. It about time people treat us fairly, give us the wages we deserve so the young generation of tomorrow can lead us into our future.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,



Nicole Flick, MBA