

I would like to thank the committee members for taking my testimony. The Covid-19 pandemic affected everyone in my child care center, but it has forever changed me. My name is Jessica Rheaume, and this is what being 'essential' looked like for me.

At first, the stress was about the possibility of contracting COVID, and the increased personal health risks. I have an autoimmune disease and take immunosuppressant's to help with the symptoms. It was scary to be in the 'most venerable' category, surrounded by children of other 'front line workers'. I was washing my hands until they bled, and was bleaching my classroom surfaces multiple times a day. There was simply no way to social distance in our setting, and all I could do was set scheduled handwashing times for all my students.

Then, it became all about the stress of providing school age care during the school closure, plus distant learning. I was pulled from my preschool room to teach school age full time. Overnight, I went from being a preschool teacher to an elementary teacher, as their teachers got to stay in the safety of their own homes. I have multiple college degrees in child development and education, including my MN teaching license, but nothing could have prepared me for this.

I was in charge of 15 elementary students ages 5-11 (grades k-5), from six different school districts. Each district had their own requirements. Each different school within the district had separate demands. Each grade within a school building had different requirements to meet. Even students in the same grade, in the same school, had contrasting work. These requirements included, but were not limited to, multiple educational websites to get familiarized with, email addresses, log-ins, and passwords, different electronics to get used to, app downloads, internet connection, school supplies, and schedules, all while I was becoming adjusted to each different learning style, and they were trying to adapt to this new style of learning while living in fear of something they couldn't understand.

Some students were given two problems a day to solve, while others were handed multiple packets to work through in a week's time. One child was expected to complete an entire school days of work, as if he were still in school with all of his learning tools, and teachers. Another student had classwork much like his peers, but he was also required to complete special education course work, and practice speech therapy with me every day.

I ran a one room 'school house' situation to handle on my own. I wasn't provided help because we simply didn't have extra staff due to quarantines, and cut hours. Out of 15 students, 5 of them had IEP's and full time paras in school. Needless to say, it was very stressful. I had

every minute of every day planned, and made worksheets, sticker charts, daily/individualized schedules, and multiple seating chart arrangements to try and ease some of the anxiety and distress I was under. At one point, I was asked to write sub notes for another staff member, just in case I contracted Covid-19 and didn't make it. My notes were 20 pages long to describe a 7 1/2 hour day.

Just thinking about what it was like makes my chest feel tight and my heart pound into my throat. I don't just speak for myself, but also my colleagues in my field—receiving a bonus from the Front Line Workers Fund, would never truly repay us for what we've been through, but it would be a great recognition to our contribution to our community. Thank you for your time and for reading my testimony about how Covid-19 affected me.