

August 10, 2021

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to share my personal story of working in a childcare center during the COVID pandemic. I have worked at Kinderberry Hill Child Development Center for 10 years. I love my job and the services I provide to the children entrusted to my care. This is my chosen career path, and I will continue down this road for the duration of my working years.

The families I care for become an extension of my own family. I am invested in the futures of the children in my classroom. The parents and family members know this to be true. I work hard to create an environment where we are a cohesive team providing the best possible care for these children. I know I am an integral part of their world. Therefore, I keep showing up and I arrive at work ready to do my job.

However, this past year and a half has been filled with challenges and obstacles too numerous to count. In the spring of 2020, our center had to make some difficult choices. I considered myself one of the lucky ones, at least I was able to keep my job and continue working. This wasn't the case for several of my colleagues.

Suddenly half of our students were pulled out of school. We shut down classrooms and said goodbyes to families and faculty that would now be staying home. We were faced with the unknown and were living in scary times. Our fears grew as we watched the numbers of positive COVID cases spread throughout the country, and in our own communities. Some of us had those fears realized by losing friends and family members to COVID.

Because we wanted to limit the number of people coming into our center each day, we eliminated our nightly cleaning staff. That now meant that we, the teachers, had to perform cleaning duties at the end of our 10-hour working shifts. We sanitized toys relentlessly, sprayed down countertops and wiped off surfaces, vacuumed, cleaned floors, took out garbage, and made our environments safe for the children in our care as part of our nightly routine.

Despite the additional safety measures, the temperature checks, the daily health screenings, and the added sanitizing practices, we ended up having teachers and students both test positive in our center. We had to shut down classrooms temporarily and follow strict quarantine protocols. Sometimes parents didn't appreciate the manner in which we had to do our jobs. Most of them realized this was for the safety of their children and were supportive, but some questioned us ruthlessly and didn't mask their frustrations with our newly enforced rules and regulations. We referred them to the CDC decision tree repeatedly and explained why their child/ren couldn't come to school. Having to keep their child/ren out of childcare for up to 14 days proves to be difficult for working families, understandably.

Fast forward to the summer of 2021. We are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. There is a vaccine, and most of us lined up to get it as quickly as we could. As educators, we appreciated being near the front of the line! We understand that it won't protect us with 100% efficacy, but we know we are better off having it. However, it isn't approved for children just yet. So, we continue to be faced with the danger of contracting COVID from the children we care for.

Some of us teachers have multigenerational homes. Others of us have children that are immunocompromised. Some of us have both. My 82-year-old father lives with my family. I worry every day about this virus taking him from me. My teenage son was recently diagnosed with an autoimmune disease. We have been in and out of the hospital for the last two months. Contracting COVID is his (and my) biggest fear. Every day I go to work, I put my family at risk.

I wish my options included working from home. Unfortunately, they don't. I don't sit in a cubicle behind a desk each day. I am an early childhood educator. I say that with great pride. I take care of tiny humans each day. My physical presence at work is a requirement of my job.

Like many others affected by this pandemic, my husband lost his job last year. He is currently only working part time. My husband stays home with our son multiple days a week because he isn't well enough to be home on his own. That means I have to continue working. I carry the insurance that pays for my son's medical bills. I have to show up when I can just so my son can continue to get the medical care he needs. But every day I do this at a cost. What if I get COVID? What if I pass it on to my family? The "what ifs" bring great anxiety to our daily lives. But I don't really have any viable options, other than to keep working. Doctor bills don't pay themselves, groceries don't magically appear, gas adds up, and the house I own isn't free.

Caring for people is an exhausting task, both mentally and physically, in the best of circumstances. And we are not living in the best of circumstances. We are living in a global pandemic. We continue to face risks daily. Yet here we are, still caring for little people in our classrooms so the rest of the world can continue to do their jobs each day.

Childcare workers have been instrumental in keeping our communities going throughout this pandemic. Social distancing is not viable in our line of work. We spend our days in close contact with unvaccinated children upwards of 10 hours each day. And we are vastly underpaid in comparison to most front-line workers. True, we are caretakers, but it sure would be nice if someone took care of us once in a while.

Respectfully,

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