

To whom it may concern:

My name is Aleana Vazquez. My husband, Yoel Vazquez Sanchez, and I have four children. There is Liliana who is eight, Graciela, who is turning four at the end of the month, and my twins, Yaslene and Yoel who are twenty-two months.

Our family started participating in the child care assistance program when Liliana was just 3 years old. I have been so grateful of this opportunity because it has allowed me to move forward. Our family grew, as most do, and the costs of out-of-pocket child care was not an option. My husband works full time as a bailor operator and he just received a promotion to start operating cranes. I work full time as an Office administrator and I am up for a promotion, but I won't be able to see that promotion because I can no longer work in my current position. Our child care ended July 21st, 2016.

I have worked for two employers my entire working career in hospitality. My current employer, who I have worked for since 2011, is deeply disappointed that they will lose me and the great work I bring to the company. We have worked very hard to do well for our family and the child care assistance program helped us do that. We were able to work full time and still be there for our children after school, for dinner, sports, and dancing. We have always complied with the requirements for the program.

In 2012, we were still living in Ramsey county but moved to Dakota county. We had no problem with our child care transferring. In November 2015, we moved back into Ramsey county, very near West. St. Paul to be exact. I was not aware that our child care assistance would end and be put back on a waiting list. Which is now 2-3 years long. If I had known this, we would have looked around longer to find a place in Dakota county. Since we did not have any issues with moving a few years prior, I imagined it would be the same in moving back.

My husband and I have ultimately decided that it's best I stay home. He will work two jobs.

I am deeply saddened and frustrated that with all of our hard work, keeping our family together in one piece, being there for our children, the program is ending. I am worried for what the next year or two will bring for them and for us.

We don't receive any other government benefits. My children are covered by state health insurance but, I feel that would soon be changing with our promotions coming up.

I am insured through my employer and my husband through his employer. The last thing I want to do is reach out to more programs to help us through. But with our assistance coming to an end, I am worried I will need to reach out to apply for health and food assistance. That would be critically setting our journey back. We do not have family that can help us care for our children which is why we rely heavily on the child care assistance to help us move forward.

We will now start all over, backwards, and I feel it is just not right. We understand rules and have always followed them. We are honest, hard-working parents but, it doesn't seem to matter in this case and it is so frustrating.

I thought the objective of these programs is to help families in need. WE ARE a family in need. We work.

We work hard.

There are many people who abuse these programs and we are not them. But because of a move to a different county, without us being aware that it would negatively impact us, is wrong.

I feel and wish there should be alternative requirements for families in need when it comes to families having to move. Alternative requirements for families in need who are willing to do the work to be a part of a program that will help them tremendously in the long run.

I do understand that the system has its rules and requirements for a purpose, but please understand how this has negatively affected are situation and is not allowing us growth. That is the ultimate objective.

Thank you for your time and allowing us to voice our story.

Sincerely,

Aleana Vazquez and family

November 14, 2016

Dear members of the Legislative Task Force on Access to Affordable Child Care,

I am writing on behalf of a family that attends one of our Especially for Children centers in Edina. The mother, who I will refer to as Andrea, would like this task force to understand what she sees as some of the failures in the CCAP system, and how those failures have negatively affected her family.

Andrea is a working mother with two children. Her older child attended EFC prior to starting elementary school, and her younger child started at EFC as an infant, and is now in the pre-k classroom.

Andrea has held the same, steady job for eight years. Over those eight years, she has maintained a consistent schedule. Despite this continuity, she is still required to submit CCAP paperwork every six months. The burden of paperwork is significant – she is asked to submit and verify a wide range of documents, including resubmitting items such as her employment status and schedule, even though those factors have not changed.

During the process of submission, sometimes small details or forms have been missed. When Andrea has tried to correct those errors, the process has been extremely long and cumbersome. Paperwork goes back and forth in the mail, which means that there is a significant time lag. To be proactive and avoid delay, Andrea tried to go to the department in person. Unfortunately, what she found was that if her caseworker was not on site (which was frequently the case given the extremely large caseload each worker had) no one else in the office could help her. She visited the office five times in five weeks to try to correct the missing paperwork – a significant time commitment on top of her regular work and family schedule. At each visit, her case worker was not available, so others in the office took down a note, but told her they were not able to help her fix the error. There is no team caseworker approach.

As Andrea worked to correct her paperwork, her CCAP lapsed. During this lapse and weeks of calls/visits to try to correct it, she is charged a daily fee for her child's care. These fees are typically reimbursed once a family is reauthorized, but that method requires that families have the money up front to cover the period of the lapse. Despite her steady job, Andrea is unable to afford that fee. So instead she calls upon family and friends to care for her child, until she can get her paperwork resolved and return to the center. Andrea recognizes that in this, she is somewhat lucky – she knows that many people don't have family and friends they can rely on.

The current system is failing Andrea and her family. Paperwork is too cumbersome and frequent, and the process for addressing any problems is slow and unresponsive to the needs of families. Andrea is experiencing significant stress and frustration – as a working mom with a steady job, she feels that she is doing things right, but it doesn't seem to be enough to overcome the problems in the system. And for her child, the result is a disruption in his care and education.

Prepared by Alli Zomer, Director of Operations, Especially for Children, based on parent remarks.