

**Madison Brame**

From: Brenda Bloom <bloomearlyed@yahoo.com>
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To: IRRC
Subject: final-form regulation #14-545 response

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Brenda Bloom

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5/2/2023

To: IRRC Commissioners The Honorable Michele Brooks The Honorable Art Haywood The Honorable Donna Bullock The Honorable Barry Jozwiak

Dear Commissioners and Oversight Committee Chairs:

Bloom Early Education Centers have been providing high quality child care and Pre-K Counts for the past 23 years. Our current center is a Keystone Star 4, but we are opening a new center in a low income neighborhood in June.

My concern is §3042.14(d), which permits child care providers to charge families receiving subsidized child care the difference between the provider's private pay rate and their state subsidy reimbursement. This regulation needs to continue.

Others have reported that this would hurt child care providers. I want to tell you, my story.

Like I said I have been providing high quality care for the past 23 years, over those years funding for child care has been very unstable. I have been able to keep my center in business and providing high quality by charging subsidy families the difference. At the current rates and with our Keystone Star 4 add on money ELRC rates are even with private pay rates. Its sad that our Keystone Stars add on money has to go towards ELRC subsidy rates- but that is a different fight.

Now I am opening a second center, in a low income neighborhood. It will take six months to a year to move to Star 4. Not because I am not ready or high quality but because the Keystone Stars regulations are time sensitive (we need to have 2 parent teacher conferences, that takes time in between each conference etc). So we will be running as a Star 4 center with high quality staff, with degrees in Early Education and all the other expenses that comes with having a Star 4 center but will not be getting the add on money for 6-12 months.

For an infant the difference between what I charge per week and what ELRC pays is over \$30 per week. That is a lot of money, when you start counting multiple children and over the course of year.

So many organizations try to promote child care to be run like a business, its not always the case but I do. That is why I am able to be in business for 23 years and be able to pay my staff higher than all the other child care centers in my area.

But I can't be told by the government how to run my business and how much I can charge my clients. This whole thing sounds like communism, telling businesses what they can and can not charge its consumers.

All these years, I would have not survived with out the add on for subsidy families, so the thought of taking it away now, in the middle of the biggest child crisis in history is frightening. Over the past two years I really feel like Pennsylvania has been purposely causing the child care crises, I can't imagine why- but it has been a horrible past two years.

But I can't think of a more intrusive, unAmerican way to hold child care down than to start telling us what we can charge our clients. We are a business at the end of the day, we should have rights just like any other business.

Who is going to pay for this loss of income, loss of rights of my business? I need a certain amount of money to run my child care business. If 30 of my students out of 50 are paying \$30 per week less than the other 20 students, how am I going to make ends meet. I have three options, my staff can pay the \$30 per week- with pay cut, or the private pay families can pay the \$30 week to make up for the loss, or I don't take subsidy families, I am opening a child care center with in walking distance of two low income housing developments. But instead of giving those children the high quality care they need, they would not be able to come to my center- I will have to save the openings for families who work in the area. That is not my first choice, but I will not give up the quality care I provide, I don't think it's fair to ask private pay families to pay for what the government refuses to pay for subsidy families and I will not pay my staff less.

Even if this change comes with more money for the subsidy children, it will not be worth me losing my rights as a businessperson. Plus we can give child care more money today- but as we saw for the past 15 years it doesn't mean that we will have the funding in the future.

Thank you for listening to my side of the story. I understand that this idea may have come up as a way to help low income families, but it definitely does not help them- it will lead to even less opportunities for them to access high quality child care. The way to help low income families, middle income families and child care employees is to pay what child care centers charge- not a low percentile- but what we actually charge. When a percentile has been set at 60, you have been telling low income families they don't deserve to go to the top 40 percentile centers. It sounds like PA is understanding that this is wrong- but going the wrong way to get to a solution. The solution is not to take away our rights as a business owners, but to pay what child care centers have deemed necessary for provide care.

Thank you

Brenda Bloom