

I am concerned about HB 1307

I teach child development classes at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. I teach that quality matters, and that children are safer when the centers are licensed. I am sending my students out into the world to take care of children, in the best way that they can.

In my profession, as the observer for the internships, I have seen enough violations for the centers that were licensed, and it worries me that more safety and other violations could occur if the center had no oversight by the Office of Child Care, Maryland State Department of Education.

I had to report to the Office of Child Care a licensed center for overfilling a 16 passenger van with 24 people (4 adults, 20 children and no car seats) because their other van had expired plates. I knew who to call, and I had no trouble finding the right number to call. The appropriate agencies were on their doorstep the next morning, and the center director lost her job.

If the center was not licensed, and I was able to visit to watch a student, and if I even let a student go to an unlicensed center, then I would not know whom to contact quickly.

An unlicensed center may not even want me to come and observe what was happening at the center. The aforementioned center did not allow me to come into the center, and that was before COVID. I don't know what they were hiding. Licensing is a check to make sure that the center is doing what they are supposed to be doing, and requires a certain level of safety for the children.

I've seen other centers that scared me as well, who had school age children, who quickly turned off the blue babysitter when they noticed I was observing. The food fed to the children was not what was on the menu, and it was not something that I would consider nutritious. The calendar on the wall was from several months earlier, and the art materials were still in sealed plastic bags with dust on the bags. I've seen games on the shelves with dust deep enough to know that they had not been used in a long time. I have seen entirely too many school age children with one adult, and out of ratio. I could talk to the office of child care about what I saw. I would not know whom to talk to if there was no central agency to contact, or if the agency of record was in another state.

Licensing is good idea to keep the agencies on the up and up. Pay may be better for the employees if they are allowed to participate in Maryland Excels or the Credential program. Quality matters, since licensing checks to make sure that the teachers are qualified. It is not enough to just keep the children safe. They need to have appropriate programming so that they can be learning.

I would appreciate it if you continued to require the centers for the school age children to be licensed. The agencies listed tend to be thought of as helpful for the children, and I would like to keep their reputation as a quality place to be. Now is not the time to lower the restrictions.