

Minnesota House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee
HF1915 & HF1916 Concerns
March 26, 2025

Dear Chairs Liebling and Scott, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Minnesota Child Care Association (MCCA), a statewide membership association representing licensed child care centers, I would like to register our concerns with HF1915 and HF1916.

HF1915

The safety of children in child care programs is providers' first and most important responsibility. Young children are a vulnerable population and rely almost entirely on adults to keep them safe. In addition to the safety of facilities and equipment/materials provided to young children, the education, experience, and support of the adults interacting with them is of the utmost importance.

HF1915 is sweeping in scope, applying extensive new equipment and maintenance requirements to all licensed child care centers serving infants or toddlers in Minnesota – in effect a new and very expensive licensing regulation that offers only passive and after-the-fact verification, not prevention, of child abuse. Our concerns include the following:

Privacy & Security

We have many concerns about the privacy protections for and security of the vast amounts of video footage that would be obtained under this bill. Most obviously, there is a reasonable expectation of privacy in diapering and toileting areas or classrooms. Child care surveillance footage nearly always contains images of multiple children and adults in a classroom, and beyond general privacy protections for minors there are also children in child care requiring additional levels of caution, such as those who are part of the child welfare system, involved in custody disputes, with protected health/disability issues, etc.

Of particular concern is Subd. 4d which refers to employees obtaining copies of footage to defend against disciplinary actions. Subd. 4c clearly states the situations in which parents can view, *but not obtain a copy of*, such footage. At the very least we would like equal protections here for both parents and staff: there would be situations where access to, but not copies of, the footage would be possible, because once a copy leaves the provider there is a huge risk of unauthorized release. The release of footage could be mandated by court order or other law enforcement or regulatory mechanism if necessary, providing more protection.

This Bill Leaves Out a Huge Portion of the Children it Intends to Protect

Within HF1915 we appreciate narrowing the focus on non-verbal infant and toddler populations, but only in child care centers. Why is family child care left out of this bill? In a family child care program there is often a single adult alone with children, whereas in a center there are many adults present. It seems that it would be equally if not more important to have video surveillance in family child care due to this fact alone. If this is an attempt to address abuse in child care programs serving infants and toddlers, it does not make sense to exempt a large portion of providers serving those very children.

Cost

The crisis in affordability and accessibility of quality child care is well known. If HF1915 became law providers would have little choice but to pass these significant costs along to parents. With approximately 1,800 licensed child care centers in Minnesota, \$250,000 would offer \$139/center. Providers estimate their actual costs to be in the multiple thousands of dollars in equipment and storage alone, not to mention the staff time required to review

many hours of video for potential incidents when such a review is requested. This is not as simple as purchasing a few cheap cameras and having providers install themselves – insurance companies explicitly recommend that child care providers *not* do this and rely instead on qualified professionals for installation and set up of security protections because of the sensitivity and risks involved in obtaining such footage.

Prevention

Sadly we have seen that the presence of video cameras does not deter or prevent abuse from occurring. While we understand the utility of using video footage to review incidents and take appropriate action, the fact that such video exists demonstrates that cameras themselves are not a deterrent for abusive behavior.

If providers are going to receive additional resources in the form of public support or parent fees, most would want them to support increased compensation and benefits necessary to attract and retain the amount and caliber of staff desired – one of the ways we firmly believe we could make real strides in the prevention of child abuse. Adults who are better able to meet their own needs are better able to meet those of children.

Chair West has been a dedicated listener and incorporated a great deal of feedback over the course of developing HF1915 up to this point, a partnership we appreciate. There are many items in the HF1915 before you that are improved over previous versions due to this partnership (such as appropriated funds, a change in video retention duration, and reasonable protections for providers when footage is viewed by licensing staff), and the bill is stronger for it.

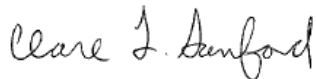
Overall however, we fear that HF1915 would come with significant costs and concerns that divert resources away from more meaningful investments in child safety and well-being, such as improved compensation, education, training, and supervision for those doing the difficult work of caring for and educating our young children.

HF1916

This bill would involve a far smaller universe of providers, cameras are not required in classrooms and play areas, and footage is intended for staff monitoring/investigating CCAP/Early Learning Scholarship program integrity (not families and staff), so our privacy and cost concerns remain but are less extensive than in HF1915. Our main concern is the chilling affect this could have on providers willing to accept families using public supports, limiting enrollment of low-income families in order to stay below the threshold that would trigger the additional expense of video monitoring. We want to support more access to child care for all families, not less.

We hope to continue working together with this committee to find solutions that help protect children and strengthen the overall child care field and the integrity of public dollars in it – our shared priorities.

Sincerely,



Clare Sanford
MCCA Government Relations Chair