

To the committee:

Hello, my name is Janice DeGonda. I wanted to be here to testify in front of you regarding the minimum sentence mandate for malicious treatment of a child under 4 years old. However, I am currently attending the plea bargain for one of the women who abused my daughter at Small World Learning Center. At the time of the abuse, my daughter was 5 months old, but gestationally 3 months as she was two months premature. We had several conversations with these women and the daycare regarding how she kept coming home with bruises, scratches and abrasions to which we were given likely excuses that seems plausible at the time. We had a phone conversation with the daycare in June about our concerns and suddenly, the marks stopped. Until July. She had bruises throughout her body that were covered by her clothes that we did not see until after we had picked her up and were doing a diaper change. They were on her legs, arms, stomach, groin and butt. This is when we decided we needed to get her checked out at the hospital. That is when the police got involved and we found out that our daughter, along with two other babies were seen on camera being abused by not only one woman, but two. Then to find out after the investigation started that there are over a dozen families involved with this case.

During this trial, we were informed that these women might not see jail time and if they do, it won't be for long. These women were arrested and only spent one night in jail before making bail. The prosecutor is asking for 90 days in jail if they plead guilty. These women have multiple charges, including a Felony for Malicious Treatment of a child under 4 years old. But due to this being their first offense, jail time is unlikely. This is highly unacceptable. Regardless of it being a first offense or not, these women were caught on camera abusing immobile, helpless babies who cannot stand up for themselves and cannot ask for help. They cannot tell us that something is wrong. This mandate needs to be changed. Anyone abusing a child under the age of 4 should automatically have a minimum of a one year long sentence. We need to hold abusers accountable. They need to face the consequences of their actions. Their victims are children, and in this case, babies. They should be protected and we, as parents, should not be worried about our children being abused. And unfortunately, if they are, we need to know that justice will be served and they will have to do jail time. We need to protect children as they are our future. Please, please pass this mandate and protect families everywhere.