February 24, 2018

Renee House

Verndale Area Christian Academy Child Care

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Dear Representative Franson and Committee,

Sorry I am unable to speak in person at your committee meeting this Wednesday. I wish to share with you the struggles that I have went through in the last 8 months with trying to start this program.

First of all I would like to give a short background of where I am coming from and why this was so frustrating to get through this process. I have been in the Early Childhood business for 31 years. I have done everything from Early Headstart to School age programming and have had my own licensed child care center. That being said, I know that things are changing and updates need to be done for the safety or our children but there has to be a balance of what is needed and what is overkill and just plain ridiculous.

So, I started in April of 2017, when my husband and I were asked to help start a Christian school at the Verndale Family Life Church. I felt the calling to move forward with this and we started visiting other programs. The more I search for our area the more I realized that the need to start child care was the place to start and then add the school later. The Church board was very excited, with space for free we just needed to get a license. All of the funding we have gotten has come from private donations through the church and community members. We have not written any grants, taken out any loans or asked for assistance from any government organization. In July, we started the application process. I knew that it would take about 6 months to finish this process, so I anticipated January 2018 as a start up date. I enlisted a nurse friend to help me with the handbook and the paperwork, as she had just helped license three other classrooms in the previous months. We used a lot of the same policies and procedures for our handbook. On October 10, 2017 I sent in my paperwork and we waited. I didn't here anything from the license office until I received a large 19 page packet, on November 22nd, of things that needed to be fixed in my handbook. I wanted to cry and throw it away. I was reminded of why I started this venture and proceeded to work on the corrections with my friend who had helped me before. It took us 12 hours of typing and retyping my policies and procedures. I then sent them back in on November 28th. We waited again. Between all of the waiting I wasn't sure what was next so we were working on hiring staff, collecting equipment, doing upgrades to the building for safety, collecting toys and other things that we would need to open. On December 28th, I sent an email to the lady who was working on my license and asked if everything was ok or if I needed to send more information and what was the next step. She sent an email back that she had passed my application on to another supervisor to work on. Now I was frustrated because that meant that someone else was going to have to get up to speed on my licensing process. I sent that person and email, January 2nd, 2018, asking what was next and when could I expect Inspections of our facility to be done. She responded right back saying that I had to set up the fire inspection and she sent me the paperwork to do that. She worked on the Health and Building inspections for me. However, we didn't have anyone to do the building inspection so we just needed a sheet to be signed by zoning commissioner. Fire inspection was done within 2 weeks and we were having trouble getting a hold of the Health inspector. My question on all of this is “could this have been done in October, November, or December”.

Health inspection was finally done in February. With inspections done I thought we were finally on the home stretch of being licensed. Not true, I received another 19 page document of corrections to be done. Not as much as before but still another 8 hours of retyping. I did however receive a conference call from licensing, to help me through this process. Thought that would be it but nope, again another few corrections had to be done to policies and handbook and sent back. I sent in staff files for her to work on also so that we could speed up this process. As of today, February, 24th, I am now finally going to get a site visit February 28th, and am hoping and praying for us to be open.

I know this seems like a lot of information, but on top of me being frustrated, I have lost 3 staff to other jobs, and 4 families because we couldn't get open sooner. I started this adventure not for me but for the families and children of this community. This has never been about me and it never will be. My heart is for the well being of our children and the red tape can cause a person to say “I would never go through this again or suggest this process to someone else to go through.”

**Some of my hurdles were:**

**Communication**- not having any one person who could follow my license and answer questions pertaining to my specific license. At the beginning, it was whoever answered the phone that I talked to and it was a different person each time. When I got the 19 page report back the first time that is when I knew who was my licensing lady.

**Check list of what's next**- it would be nice to know what I could have been working on between the time license paperwork was sent in and came back for revisions.

**Keeping the same person all the way through the process**- it was frustrating knowing that someone else was going to have to go through everything again. This might be the way it works, but that two would have been nice to have known.

**Having policies and procedures in several places**- I was required to put most of my policies and procedures in both my staff handbook and my parent handbook. There is no way a parent is going to read a 12 page handbook of information on behavior guidance, nap policies, risk reduction plans, bathroom procedures and etc. We are lucky to get them to read the parts of daily things that need to be done. This should be available to them if they ask and that can be stated in the parent handbook.

**Choices of vocabulary**- I was told to change all “should's” to “must” and change some of the vocabulary that I used for some of the procedures. I see how this could be a problem, but this was extreme and it took more time to do this and get it sent back. I would be nice to have a list of what could be appropriate language if they are going to be this picky.

**Risk Reduction Plan**- glad we have this however it should be used for things that could be dangerous to children. I was told I needed to add a plan for “if a child fell in the toilet”. Really, I would hope that my staff would help that child out without having it written in a plan. The plan was very time consuming and is great if it is for what really matters.

**Qualified Staff**- I started hiring in November and received 21 applications. Out of the 21 applications, I had two who were qualified by state licensing rule 3, to interview. One was me and the other was a college graduate from 7 years ago. The rest were home day care providers, people with no experiences, or elder persons just looking for something part time. I had to call the college to see if there were any students graduating soon to take positions. I received on contact.

I want to close with this. The last two months were better than the first 5 months of trying to get this center up and running. I was fortunate enough to contact a few people who were willing to help when I was ready to quit and I will see this through no matter how much is left to do. Thank you for the opportunity for me to express the frustrations that I have, and assume that others will have with this process. If I can be of any other help, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Renee House

VACA Director