



Senate Bill 20 Support

Mr. Chairman and Members,

Today I am wearing two hats: I am both the Chair of the Government Affairs Council for the Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce & EDC as well as the CEO of Joint Initiatives that is both the LCO for universal pre-school and houses the early childhood council for El Paso County.

Both groups are pleased to support this bill.

I want to especially speak to the task force being created in this bill.

In El Paso County, we have almost 47,000 children under the age of five but only 18,400 licensed childcare spots.

We have a childcare crisis.

The fundamental reasons for our crisis—and the crisis we see in communities across this country—I would place in three categories.

1. The childcare funding system is broken, which underpins the other two categories.
2. We have workforce shortages, largely because the pay is too low.
3. Finally, the bilateral regulatory framework with state and local regulations is a significant barrier to creating the roughly 16,000 new spots we need in our county.

To put a finer point on it, we have about 1/3 of under fives in licensed care, about 1/3 who would likely stay with a mom or dad either way, and approximately 1/3, or thousands of children, in a variety of unregulated situations. Some of these are probably great situations, but statistically, we know that thousands of children are not in very healthy, safe, enriching environments. By striving to reduce barriers to creating more childcare spots, we create more opportunities for parents to have their children in safe licensed environments.

I have an abundance of anecdotes of centers having to spend tens of thousands of dollars on renovations that will not enhance the health and safety of a center. One of my favorite comes from Early Connections in The Springs that is spending millions to renovate a building to provide 50 more spots. The local code, for example, requires that they install water fountains, and the state regulations prohibit the center from using these fountains. This also demonstrates the need for the provisional license piece of this bill.

We have sidewalks that lead to nowhere, \$50,000 required for additional outdoor shade, tens of thousands of dollars needed to move outlets, which could likely be addressed with more efficient solutions. Two feet are required between all sides of naptime mats that children likely use sometime after being outside playing in dirt and hugging each other. This mat requirement changes the size of the space centers need.

Renovation costs for almost any building typically run in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The task force created in this bill can take a hard look at which regulations are truly necessary for the health and safety of our children, which can mean more safe spots for those thousands of children who are currently in unsafe ones.

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