

The Athens Messenger

Changes could push out some child care providers

2.1.08

By Casey Elliot

Proposed changes in the Ohio legislature to the way in-home child care is regulated in the state have some people pleased that child safety is being addressed.

But others are concerned the changes would make it harder for people needing child day care to find providers.

The concern for child safety cropped up after the publishing of a ranking of state standards and supervision of small family child care homes.

The National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies published the report in 2007. The association focused on this type of child care because it "is the second most frequently chosen option by parents using organized child care arrangements," according to the report.

A small family child care home is defined as a child care setting in which up to six children, including those of the caregiver who are under age 6, are cared for in the home of the provider for compensation.

States were reviewed on their thresholds for licensing because the number of children allowed in family child care homes "is important for health, safety and caregiver interaction," the report stated.

The report found that the highest scoring states were Oklahoma, Washington and Massachusetts.

The states that scored zero because they either permit more than six children to be present without regulation or do not regulate small family child care homes were Ohio, Idaho, Louisiana, New Jersey, South Dakota and Virginia.

Nine other states - Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Montana, Pennsylvania and West Virginia - scored zero because they do not require family child care homes to be inspected or visited prior to obtaining a child care license.

Two bills were introduced in the Ohio Statehouse at the end of last year, focusing on establishing basic health and safety standards for providers who care for three or more children in their homes. They are Senate Bill 232, introduced by Ohio 16th District Sen. Steve Stivers, and House Bill 342, introduced by Ohio 2nd District Rep. Jon Peterson.

Current Ohio law only regulates publicly funded, in-home child care and there are no standards to govern private in-home providers. The new bills propose that individuals who are paid to care for three or more unrelated children in their homes on a regular basis be required to obtain a license from the state.

To receive a license, the provider would be required to pass a background check and submit to health, safety and home inspections prior to being licensed, and then periodically after that. The new standards would not apply to family members caring for related children, child care providers who are not paid for their services, those under age 18, providers who work in the child's home, nor to anyone who provides care for fewer than 10 hours per week or less than four weeks per year.

Maureen Boggs, the early care and education division director at the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development in Athens, said legislation such as what has been proposed in Ohio is needed nationwide.

"This is about basic standards and oversight," she said. "When parents are looking for care, they are looking for something that meets their needs first. They also believe that somebody is overseeing and monitoring these places. What these reports do, I think, is give parents the opportunity to see the real picture - here is what the basic standards are, and it compares to your program so you know where it stands."

Some of the basics for licensing these homes for child care include background checks, adequate traffic access to homes and having a basic understanding of child care.

"I have worked with two fathers over the last four years who have helped write standards that have come into this new legislation," Boggs said, noting that basic understanding of infant care is needed. For example, she said one baby died because it was laid improperly in an adult-sized bed on its stomach, causing it to suffocate.

"Even with our own children, things can happen and do," she added. "No matter what we do, nothing will be fail-safe. But we certainly ought to be able to do better."

The proposed legislation pleases Buchtel resident Peggy Peacock, who operates a licensed day care operation out of her home. She said she thinks it is good that this would put all homes that provide day care on the same level.

"I have certain rules to follow that non-certified day care providers don't," she said. "Such as guidelines for nutritious meals and safety. All providers should have to follow those guidelines."

Peacock, who has been certified for 15 or 16 years, said she could see this might be an inconvenience for other day care centers who have not had to go through licensing procedures before.

This potential legislation worries Athens County Department of Job and Family Services Director Jack Frech. He said there is a shortage of child care options in Appalachia Ohio as it is, and more regulations could cut out options for child care.

"Most families out there are making other arrangements on how to do child care, and doing it themselves," he said. "A lot of folks need child care and they are not getting it - there's not enough child care as it is. I understand we need safety, but I am not sure having licensing standards and certifications will make it any safer. Ultimately, it would be less safe because you would have fewer kids in any kind of licensed or monitored care."

[Click here for PDF.](#)