



April 2024

Dear Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committee,

Appleseed Childhood Education is a non-profit organization that works to provide high-quality early learning in Jasper County. The Appleseed Childhood Education Board of Directors fully supports recent efforts to differentiate legislation from regulation and determine what should be, simply, best management practices in the licensed child care industry. The Board also supports legislation that would expand funding for early childhood operations as there is a wide funding gap to sustain this essential service throughout Indiana.

It is our understanding that past efforts have not been revisited for many years and we know the industry needs more flexibility to grow and find creative ways to prosper, especially in low population rural areas like ours. The child care industry is rarely profitable and some of the hindrance comes from outdated legislation and codes that are costing the facilities ridiculous money that is rarely available. A real-world example can be seen at our Appletree Rensselaer facility, at which we undertook renovations of a modern office building in 2022 and converted it to a licensed child care center. This is a good example of how the industry and communities have changed over the years and we now see risk in what used to be a safety practice.

Appleseed was required to put exterior exit doors in every classroom, costing us about \$40,000 of our very tight construction budget. Our facility is not big enough to need all of these doors, but we had to follow the Code. That is \$40,000 that we now have to fundraise from our community to cover instead of spending it on our mission; to provide affordable child care in our rural community. We also have safety concerns regarding unwanted access from outside through these doors.

We also support a more level Administrative Code for the three different licensed child care entities; owned entities (profit or non-profit), ministry-owned, and in-home. As we heard in a recent regional meeting, "A two-year-old is a two-year-old whether they are in a million-dollar licensed facility or someone's modest licensed home." We had many different types of facilities represented in the room and nobody understood why there were such drastic differences in the requirements for licensing. The consensus was that back in the day, we had to start somewhere. Now, it's time to go somewhere else to show the progress the child care industry has made and let more facilities provide this essential service.

Any goal of editing the legislation or codes should be to encourage the development of more child care seats and not impede the ability for these operations to succeed in our most rural areas of Indiana. Our employers are counting on a workforce and our licensed child care efforts are needed to keep these employees in our rural areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

The board of directors of Appleseed Childhood Education, Rensselaer, Jasper County