

High cost for daycare being passed down to WNY parents ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Around Erie County, one major problem providers are facing is the high cost of care, passed on to parents. The concern is, regulation is prohibiting progress.

State regulations, in place to keep your kids healthy and safe at daycare, are the same regulations some providers say are hurting their business and limiting the availability for working parents.

"We want to be a support to families," Tiffany Malone said. She's the owner of ABC Learn and Play in Buffalo. "We want to make sure parents are able to work and know their children are safe; work and not have to worry..."

One concern, she says, is the student-teacher ratios in the classroom.

"If we were able to increase our capacities in the classroom, we would be able to make a little extra money to sustain -- to not take from one pot to the other-- and not rob Peter to pay Paul so to speak," Malone said.

In a letter, sent to the 7 Eyewitness News I-Team, Carol Vogel--owner of Brierwood Daycare--explains, the average cost of full-time child care is about \$64/day. 55-cents from every dollar goes to labor, she writes.

"It would help defray some of the costs of running the center if ratios remain the same...but maximum group size increased," Vogel wrote.

She'd like to see:

- 15 toddlers cared for by three teachers, up from 12
- 21 three-year-olds in a group--up from 18
- 24 four-year-olds in a group--up from 21.

This would result in a cost savings, "to keep tuition costs down for parents and would help in recruiting, retaining and offering better pay for quality staff," Vogel wrote.

"These teachers are going to school and getting four-year degrees and getting college debt and they come into this field and they're at minimum wage," Malone said. "It's not fair, but we can't afford to offer benefits, we can't afford to pay more than minimum wage."

In response to this story, the New York State Office of Child and Family Services issued a statement to the I-Team:

"New York State's regulations establish staff-to-child ratios with the health and safety of children as the primary focus. The regulations also optimally benefit children's social interactions with peers and with staff to best meet their need for quality, nurturing care and to promote positive development. The ratios are well within national standards for toddlers and preschool children and provide for consistent caregiving. Higher ratios of children to staff can put the health and safety of children in jeopardy, and can also cause a stressful work environment for teachers and caregivers and less one-on-one interaction with children."

Some providers will take these issues to OCFS next month, explaining they aren't able to maintain quality without increasing rates for parents.

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