

Hello and thank you for having me. My name is Amy Bowie and I am the owner of Miss Amy's Child Care in Abingdon. I am here as a Promise Advocate with the Virginia Promise Partnership.

- I have been married for 41 years to my husband Mike and reside in Abingdon. I opened Miss Amy's in 1992 and serve more than 65 families a year. We are a full day fully licensed, Virginia Quality level 4 child care center. Serving children in our community from age 22 months thru 5 years. We follow the Reggio style of early childhood learning, which is an emergent curriculum.
- As most of you know child care is an essential part of our community. WE ARE THE ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEE'S. I want to address the need for a commitment from you to help us continue to provide quality spaces for Virginia's youngest citizens. Currently I have no available spaces in my center, with a waiting list of more than 70. We are a high - quality center engaging students daily and building healthy relationships with them so they can learn. We are currently participating in the mixed delivery program which provides funding for us for children and families who meet the criteria. This has been a fantastic program for us in terms of supporting us financially. We do need more flexibility in this program in order to be able to qualify and enroll more children.
- I want to speak to you not as just an early childhood educator, but also as a small business owner. While all small business has struggled during the pandemic, child care has taken a nose dive. We were already a broken market, with a razor thin profit margin. Now it will be impossible, numbers don't lie, to continue to operate without subsidies and programs like mixed delivery. A year ago, my rates were \$125.00 per week for our base program of 8-4 Monday thru Friday. My new rates are \$143.00 to \$150.00 per week for the same program, well actually less, since I cannot hire enough staff to cover the full day so we are operating on a reduced schedule. At this rate we will not be able to continue, our rates will have to increase again, to meet the new minimum wage requirements. Can you imagine hiring staff that must

have a college degree (to meet many new standards under the DOE) and only offering them \$11.00 per hour? I hired 5 staff (most degreed) in August of 2021, all quit before October!!! Why? Too much stress, too difficult work, too many hours, no benefits, being treated like a babysitter. Low pay. I have only been able to replace 3 of those staff. I had to temporarily suspend my part time children until a minimum staff could be hired.

- There has always been a need in my community for quality child care, as well as quality staff. Now that need has increased substantially with so many centers going out of business. Honestly, I would have closed for good as well, had it not been for the funding we received from many sources throughout this pandemic. It just would not have been possible to pay the bills to stay open.
- We need to be serving more children in private community - based settings, by expanding some of the programs like mixed delivery. We need to be able to attract high quality staff to fill the positions we have available. If we can pay them what they are worth then we decrease the turnover rate in this profession, and hopefully attract good early childhood educators.
- I have worked in this field for over 43 years. I am nearing retirement, who will take over, who will stay the course and care for and educate our young children? These are real concerns, and will turn into real problems if you do not act now. I know very few young adults who are willing to work 65-70 hours each week to keep things running, as I have done for the past 2 years. Working in every capacity in the center. All of my staff continue to work overtime every week to keep the doors open for our families.
- We must move forward members of the general assembly and continue to prioritize early childhood education, together we must take bold steps to expand access to quality programs like mine that work for Virginia families. Without this commitment Virginia's workforce will continue to decline, however the availability of quality childcare puts Virginians back to work. Without childcare there will be no workforce.
- Thank you for your time and consideration.