

Controversial Day Care Legislation Pending

By Teresa Simmons
Managing Editor

Almost 60 percent of the mothers in North Carolina have preschool aged children and work outside the home. Therefore, the percentage of children in N.C. day care centers is one of the highest in the nation.

It's also why many are concerned with the current day care legislation now being discussed in the N.C. Senate and House of Representatives. The bills will affect over 180,000 children now in the care of either 2,375 registered child day care centers, one of about 30,000 individuals registered as child carers or thousands other "underground day care" operations.

The N.C. Senate Committee on Children and Youth has already approved a few of the bills regarding such things as mandatory inspection within seven days of a center where cases of abuse or neglect are reported.

Some time next month the entire Senate is expected to vote on all of the controversial day care legislation.

For one, the opponents to the day care legislation feel that the new regulations will raise the cost of day care in North Carolina. The bill calls for reduction of child-to-staff ratio. (The best ratio for toddlers is four per staff member - example Iowa. But the current N.C. Day Care Law allows up to eight toddlers per staff member in day care centers.)

Opponents feel that staff-child ratio does not ensure quality care anyway. "Let's strengthen it (day care) in other ways," suggests Carolyn S. Turner, chairman of the Licensing Commission. "What we really want is a professional staff taking care of children," Mrs. Turner said. "The key thing in child care is the care-giver. That's why I'll go with upgrading that care-giver first."

She stated that more training would increase costs as well but said that it would be less than the increase in costs from lower ratios.

There are, however, portions of the day care legislation that address the development of minimal educational requirements for all staff and on-going staff development through courses, workshops, seminars, etc.

Those who are in favor of the day care legislation - Max Justice, president of the Council For Children, for one - feels that the accusations about day care cost rising is not true.

"If there is any increase in the cost of day care because of the



The children pictured above at Wonderland Child Day Care Center on Beatties Ford Road are prime examples of little ones who depend on day care. The question is will the North Carolina Day Care Legis-

lation, now pending, help or hinder their chances for better care at reasonable prices? (Photo By Teresa Simmons)

lature it would be minimal," Justice announced. "State auditors put it at the \$2 range.

"There is a lot of misinformation that the opponents are using. They are using scare tactics and tossing around unsupported and unrealistic figures. For instance, they say that weekly costs of day care will rise by \$14 or \$16 per week. That's just baloney and those assumptions are not supported by any study," Justice continued.

John Lail, director of Day Care Licensing Office in the State Department of Administration, stated recently in the News and Observer in Raleigh that North Carolina is unable to enforce the current standards and to add more would be folly.

"Let's enforce whatever we have. If we say one-to-five staff-child ratio, we need to be able to take the license away if they don't (meet the standard). Unless there is a corresponding change in our enforceability," Lail continued, "I'm not in favor of changing the standards."

Today 16 to 19 licensing consultants work under Lail. "But to do the job adequately," Lail says, "we need at least 40 consultants."

The caseload, he continued, should be no more than 60 centers for each consultant. N.C. consultants have

one of the largest caseloads in the nation, according to Lail, numbering 150 to 175 per person.

According to Justice, there is a bill requesting an increase in the number of inspectors.

Regardless of whether the cost of day care rises a little or substantially, North Carolina still allows more babies age 0 to one per care-giver than any other state in the nation. Encouraging is the fact that 77 percent of N.C. day care centers already comply with the proposed new minimal standards.

"And even if the ratio portion of the bill is passed North Carolina will still have a higher national average ratio of student per teacher and higher than recommended by the federal government," stated Justice.

For 0 to one year age group the federal government recommends three children per teacher; average of all states is five per teacher; the current N.C. standard is nine per teacher; and the proposed legislation is six children, ages 0 to one year, per teacher.

Two day care directors in Charlotte have few or now qualms about the legislation. Their employees are already attending educational workshops, courses and seminars, their centers already give written copies

of the center's discipline policies to the parents (as specified in the legislation).

Mrs. Rabb of the Little Learners Day Care-Kindergarten and Mrs. Townsend of the Shiloh Institutional Child Development Center both feel that the legislation will raise cost of day care "...a little."

"Some day care operators I've talked to have mixed emotions about the bill," stated Mrs. Rabb. "I would like for the bills to pass."

Mrs. Townsend is for portions of the bill, but, to some extent, opposes other portions. Her main concern is that children need to receive the love, attention and proper instruction in the day care center.

The remaining portions of the bill which must be hashed over in the N.C. Senate Subcommittee range from providing the children with stimulating activities to providing minimum health and safety standards for day care plans caring for two to six children on a regular basis.

If you would like to express your views on the day care legislation to your N.C. Representative, now is the time. For more information, call the Council For Children, 372-7961.



The County Courthouse was the scene of the marriage ceremony uniting Oliver and Betty Gaither. The couple wed on March 22. A reception was hosted by Mabel Hubbard, the bride's godmother. Oliver Gaither, a graduate of West Mecklenburg High School, is a member of the U.S. Army. His bride attended North Mecklenburg High School and Central Piedmont Community College. She was employed by Charlene's Discount Beauty and Barber Supply. The couple plans to reside in California.

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