

My name is Jessica Daugherty and currently I work for a licensed childcare provider in Lititz. Our center provides care for over 190 children each week. We hold accreditation through the Association of Christian schools and are a PA Keystone Stars 3 center. We also have a K-12 school attached and as a school we hold a high standard to providing quality, loving and positive care and education for every child that walks through our doors.

Personally, I've worked with children in the nonprofit sector and education settings for over 23 years as a leader in the industry. I also traveled for a well known Christian publication company, taught hundreds of workshops, training and seminars throughout the north east region that primarily focused on working with children in non profit and education systems. I've published articles throughout my career that focus on behaviors of children, how to connect children and the family and how to help adults relate to children. My thoughts and words are not only from a child care director but a leader in children's education. I'm also a parent who has seen first hand the effects of forcing our children to wear a mask.

In the state of PA there are 6,900 licensed child care centers. At one point a few years ago these centers provided care for over 500,000 children. This industry is vital for parents and caretakers as they provide for their families.

With this amount of licensed centers it gives the state of PA a great opportunity to serve thousands of families across our state. This also gives OCDEL (Office of Child Development and Early Learning) the opportunity to put regulations and restraints onto these centers.

I choose to believe that the goal of OCDEL is to provide regulations that benefit the overall wellbeing of children that attend each of these licensed facilities. My hope is that their desire is to keep children safe and center in line with regulations that provide quality care for children. Yet at times there are regulations that speak of control rather than a safety issue.

I received Announcement C-21-07 from OCDEL on August 31st that supported the Acting Secretary DOH, Alison Beam's Directive for Face Coverings. This announcement gave a very vague update as to how the new requirements would need to be implemented in regards to licensing regulations. After reaching out to my licensing certification representative I was left with many unanswered questions.

I then reached out to local senators and officials to see what our responsibility would be as a licensed center to follow these new regulations but not be held accountable for those who made a personal choice for their children not to follow this directive. No one had any answers as to what needed to be followed and what the repercussions would be if they were not.

When we reopened in June 2020 we were not required to have children wear a mask only recommended and would not receive a citation if a child was not wearing a mask. You can imagine my shock when I received the most recent Announcement C-21-07 on Sept 15 that stated the extreme measures that was placed on childcare centers. This update stated that OCDEL would give citations to childcare centers for children not wearing masks without a

doctors exemption from their child's physician. I was completely appalled at the length OCDEL and this administration would go to control the level of which masks are worn.

Not only did the choice on wearing masks get taken away from a parent but the obligation of REQUIRING to wear a mask was placed on the childcare provider. The newest announcement states "compliance with this order is not optional"

Failure to comply with the order subjects a child care provider to:

- Initial citation for non-compliance
- A 10 calendar day window to come into compliance with the order or else your license will be downgraded to a Provisional Certificate of Compliance. In which the announcement states "will result in the inability to apply for, or receive a Child Care Stabilization Grant".
- Continued non-compliance may result in continued enforcement action up to and including issuance of an Emergency Removal Order.

So if the parents/caretakers that bring their children to our center cannot get a medical exemption and refuse to comply, I can be removed from the center for non-compliance? How is this even reasonable?

In addition, OCDEL strategically created this mandate knowing the Stabilization Grant was sent to begin the application process mid/end of September. This is not just a mandate for childcare providers to follow, this is withholding tax payer dollars from licensed centers for NOT abiding by their control tactics. These centers have come into compliance with every other regulation required in order to maintain their license but now are being told if a center does not comply with this demand they will not be eligible for the 6 month stabilization grant pay out.

This is no longer about masks. It's simple. It's about control. Who has it? Not the parent. It truly makes little sense why a parent can write a medical exemption for a vaccine due to personal or religious reasons but a parent cannot write an exemption for a child not to wear a mask. So who really controls the rights of thousands of children who attend Early Childhood Education centers, daycare center, home providers or the local YMCA? I think it's pretty clear that the rights no longer belong to the parent or caretaker.

These rights were stripped away from the parent having any other option but to do what this governmental administration has forced upon childcare centers to require. Our desire as a licensed center is to partner with the parents. To walk alongside them to help, nurture, care, guide and love their children on a daily basis when they cannot.

This mandate for centers does nothing more than cripple that relationship to become a requirement that some families never intended it to be. We have partnered with parents for over 45 years at our school as to what THEY think is best for THEIR children.

Have you ever tried to get a 2 year old to wear a mask all day? How about more than 10 minutes without touching it or having bodily fluid soak the nose or mouth portion of the mask. These parts of the face mask ends up becoming a suction cup to the child's mouth and nose during the day. A tearful child is not an unusual site in childcare. When a child cries they can begin to hyperventilate because of the tears and emotions that follow. This leads to children having a hard time breathing or catching a full breath with a mask covering their nose and mouth which prevents them from breathing properly.

And a face shield? That is truly a joke and safety issue with young children as they see it as a helmet or visor that they continually touch throughout the day. I've encountered children flipping the face shield from one side to the other creating safety issues as they have a hard time seeing and keeping the shield in place. We have had children have accidents just from their inability to see fully and safely through a face shield.

The masks don't stay in place on children. They become a toy that is played constantly making it more contaminated with germs than if they would have nothing on at all.

We noticed instantly the increase in negative behaviors when we went back to making teachers and children wear masks last week. Children are no longer able to see a teacher's facial expressions when interacting with them. Young children rely on reading a full face expression from the ones who are teaching and loving them. Young children do not know how to "read eyes" and often disengage from an activity because they become frustrated with the barrier around their mouths.

Children who have speech issues are more likely to regress in any progress they made over the last several months with no masks. We have several children who do not speak english and rely on facial expressions and engagement to reinforce the English language.

Face shields have been a difficult alternative as younger children pull them off. They become easily scratched and many of our teachers now have eye sight issues due to wearing them daily over the last 18 months.

Our goal as a licensed center is to provide quality loving care for all children who are in our care on a daily basis. I can tell you that our parents value the level of care their children receive. I can also tell you that parents are not happy that they have to choose between wearing a mask or not receiving a quality education and care.

One mom said that the masks "prohibit her son from being able to fully communicate with teachers", another parents stated that the masks and social distancing "restricts what the kids can do. It forces them to feel like it's unsafe to play with their friends."

If this updated announcement was about children's health it would give the right and opportunity back to parents to make the best choice for their children. It would allow a parent to write a note to opt out of wearing a mask just as a personal or religious exemption is acceptable for not

taking a vaccine. But just like most things in this administration this is clearly not about options for parents/caretakers it's about control.

I ask that the force of control be taken away from the childcare provider and be given back to the parents. Allowing parents and childcare providers to make the best decision for their child and centers.

If we don't.... Where does this stop?

When is it enough for the governmental administration to stop stepping into the families of Pennsylvania and do the work for the people not to control the people.

I would ask that you relook at how your rules, regulations and levels of citations and how withholding funding affects local agencies that are only desiring to provide quality care. If we do not make some changes now the rope of freedom will grow shorter and the children we are providing care for will only know control without choices.

Thank you.