

PROPOSED CALIFORNIA LEGISLATION: INTEGRATED LICENSES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

BACKGROUND

In the 1970s, California led the nation in the creation of its licensing system for community care facilities, and pioneered recognition of the special needs of infants and toddlers with a license distinct from preschool age care. While the standard of care in California statute remains appropriate, the bifurcation of early care licensing in California into two separate licenses is unnecessary and problematic. Many states now mandate the standard required in California, but without dual-licensing. California is one of only two states in the country which employ a separate infant-toddler license. Other states employ a single license for early childhood centers, mandating developmentally appropriate standards based on the age of the children served. Even in California, Family Child Care providers are not subject to the dual-license requirement: only private fee, state and federally funded center-based programs. This dual-license requirement affects 12,624 provider licenses, serving 574,608 children across California.

PROBLEMS WITH THE DUAL LICENSE SYSTEM

Developmentally, the most important factor in a young child's social-emotional development is continuity of relationships. Unfortunately, siloed licenses that ignore transitional considerations force California providers to arbitrarily move children out of one classroom and into another based on birthdates, to the exclusion of other needs.

The intent of the current statute is good: maintaining appropriate caregiver qualifications and staffing ratios, but this can be accomplished more effectively through a single license which also values continuity of care during ages 24-36 months.

Currently, if there is no vacancy in the preschool age classroom when a child turns three, a family may be forced out of a center because their child is not allowed to be with younger children. Conversely, some centers are forced to hold slots vacant in order to facilitate the transition, denying service to other families and depriving them income in the process.

LICENSE REQUIREMENTS:

Community Care Licensing (CCL) provides and administers licenses for Infants (Birth-2yrs) and Preschoolers (2yrs-entering Kindergarten). The "Toddler Component" means the component of a preschool or infant care program license designed for children between the ages of 18 months and 30 months.

Programs may apply for a waiver to allow a child to stay in the Toddler classroom until 30 months. This is a time consuming process and ultimately is up to the discretion and time available to process the multiple requests of local licensing analysts. However, the waiver still doesn't resolve the potential for a child to potentially loose care from 30 to 36 months as most preschool classrooms serve children from 3 years old through entering Kindergarten.

PROPOSED BILL WOULD:

- Create a single license for Centers serving children age birth through age 5.
- Maintain existing quality standards – caregiver training, child/adult ratios based on age, etc.
- Promote continuity of caregiver relationships and continuity of a child's peer relationships.
- Reduce vacancies, enabling current system to serve more children
- Be fiscally neutral – programs would continue to pay licensing fees equal to current system.
- Reduce paperwork for child development facilities and for CA Community Care Licensing.

RELEVANT CA CODE SECTION & OTHER CITATIONS:

Health and Safety Code Section 1596.81
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