

Date: 2/01/05

EXHIBIT 4  
DATE 2-2-05  
HB 47

From: The Great Falls Day Care Association  
Penny Larson President  
2003 1<sup>st</sup> Ave North  
Gt Falls MT 59401

Re: HB47

The Great Falls Day Care Association would like to offer the following comments and information for discussion of HB47.

Our school district implemented full-day Kindergarten in the fall of 2003. This is our second year of full-day Kindergarten in our community. This program has had a significant impact on many members of our community. Our organization is comprised of a membership of Early Childhood Professionals including registered and licensed Child Care Home Providers, Group Home Providers and Center Child Care Professionals. We work with children and families on a daily basis providing quality care and education. As providers we have worked with the Quality Assurance Division and with DPHHS to assure that continued education and training for Child Care Professionals is a priority.

Our membership does not agree that a full-day Kindergarten program is in the best interest of the children, families and child care professionals. The reports that we hear in the media have all been extremely positive about the program in general and have not covered many of the concerns or negative aspects of some members of our community. Many children participating in the full-day program experience very long days. Many times they are dropped off at school to participate in the Breakfast program at their school, (around 7:30 to 8:00am) then continue with class until school is out. At that time many of them go to the after school "Hands" program available to them. Many parents pick these children up by 5:30pm. These 5 year old children have then spent 10 hours at the school they attend. This constitutes a very long day for a 5 year old child. All of these different scenarios should be considered when deciding to implement this program.

In addition we would like you to consider the impact that this change has had on our Child Care Community in Great Falls. Our city has 829 full-day Kindergarten students currently. Each of these children under our previous program of half day Kindergarten would have been spending half a day in one of the licensed Child Care facilities in our community. The hours in care generally would have exceeded 5 hours per day at an average rate of \$18.00 per day. This has resulted in a loss of approximately \$328,284.00 per month to Child Care providers in our city. When looking at that figure for 10 months it exceeds \$3,000,000.00. This was revenue that was earned by small business owners and then in turn spent in our community. As small business owners, taxes were also claimed and paid on this income. In addition to this loss of income, many of these children were enrolled in the Child & Adult Care Food Program and providers are eligible to be reimbursed for the meals served. Considering these children were in care for at least lunch and snack each day, the lost revenue for reimbursement of these meals exceeds \$450,000.00 in 10 months. This is also revenue lost to our community.

When this program was implemented we had little knowledge of what the impact would be, now we are dealing with the devastating effect it had on our profession. When thinking about what the impact of this program will be if implemented State wide it portrays a dismal future. We have experienced closures of many quality Child Care Programs in our community and infant care is very difficult to find. Child Care facilities are limited to how many children in each age group they are able to care for. Eliminating all of the children that are five years of age from their enrollment has a devastating affect on their ability to continue to provide care. If these facilities close due to financial duress they will not be available to provide care to all of the children under the age of 5 years. We have also experienced difficulties in Holiday and vacation care for these children. They no longer hold slots at one of the Child Care facilities and when school-out days occur the parents are scrambling to find care. With capacity restrictions these facilities may have a full schedule and are therefor are unable to accommodate these families needs.

Comments from some Kindergarten teachers have included the fact that they are seeing more "acting out" and having more disciplinary problems with students. We are currently in the midst of our district closing a middle school.

With the full-day Kindergarten program and influx of sixth graders that will now be remaining in elementary schools, instead of moving on to middle school, it is likely to lead to overcrowding.

Our State has worked hard to implement training, education and mentoring programs to assure that our Child Care Programs are the best that they can be. It is difficult to maintain longevity in a business that is under stress because it cannot maintain financial viability. Child Care is a vital need in all of our communities so that families can work and be successful. Please give careful consideration to all the ramifications of implementing full-day Kindergarten in our state.

Respectfully,

The Great Falls Day Care Association Board of Directors

Penny Larson  
President  
406-761-2326  
2003 1<sup>ST</sup> Ave. North  
Gt Falls MT 59401

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