

EXHIBIT 16
DATE 1-21-05
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January 20, 2005

Senator Greg Lind
Joint Appropriations Subcommittee
On Health and Human Services

Dear Senator Lind;

I am writing this letter in an effort to convey the importance of reliable childcare as it pertains to the life of my family. I also hope to bring your attention to areas that childcare truly adds value as well as an understanding of the need for adequate government funding for childcare.

My daughter Sydney will be 4 years old at the end of March and has been enrolled in the childcare program at Angel Childcare & Preschool (Angel) since she was 4 months old. There are key employees at Angel who have been there longer than my daughter has been in the program. These employees are the anchor of the program, and offer structure and stability that instills confidence as well as breeds trust in the children in addition to their parents.

There have been other wonderful caregivers and teachers who have moved on to other jobs because of the absence of health insurance offered by Angel. I know that Angel is not alone in omitting this offering. Childcare in most cases is not a for-profit business, unless of course you count the blessings of love given by the children cared for. It would be of great benefit to many childcare centers to be able to offer state sponsored health insurance for their employees, especially so for those centers who offer care for low-income families.

My husband and I are both fortunate to have professional positions in the Missoula community. It is critical that we have reliable childcare so we can take care of our professional responsibilities as well as excel in our positions so that our future with our companies is secure in a competitive marketplace. I can't place a monetary value on the trust that we have in our daughter's caregivers. I can't find adequate words to tell you how much it means to us that we don't worry about our daughter when she is in the care of the capable employees at Angel. If you or your peers have children of your own, I would imagine you could understand the value of this trust.

Angel offers our daughter a meal program that is approved by the State of Montana. This means that she is provided with well-balanced meals while in their care. In my family's circumstances we are able to, and do, provide well-balanced meals at home. I don't

believe that is the case in all families, and the well-balanced meals provided by the childcare providers may be the only healthy sustenance.

I have also had the unfortunate experience of enrolling my daughter in a licensed center from a seemingly reliable list that I felt did not offer care that was adequate or even safe. This was one of the most stressful times of my life and a time when I seriously considered giving up my career. A career that enables us to have health insurance through my employer, to save for a college education for our daughter, and to live in a home that provides safety and comfort in Missoula.

I mentioned earlier in my letter that my family is fortunate in that we have two reliable incomes. There are many families who don't. There are single parents who are struggling to work or to get a college education so that they can offer a better life for their children. I would venture to guess that reliable childcare is even more precious to parents in these circumstances.

I urge you to please value the comments you receive from the public, from the caregivers themselves, as well as their representatives as you make decisions for your constituency and the State of Montana.

Please feel free to call me should you have any questions, comments or if you feel I might add value.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Natalie Cooper", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Natalie Cooper