



Dismantling Idaho's Childcare Licensing Standards: House Bill 243 Summary

House Bill 243 seeks to significantly roll back regulations governing childcare licensing. Idaho Voices for Children opposes the proposal because it effectively dismantles even the most basic of child safety standards, strips local authority to protect children, and threatens federal funding for the Idaho Child Care Program.

Providing standards for childcare licensing in law ensures the safety, well-being, and development of children in childcare settings. For years, Idaho has ranked last in the nation for childcare regulation and oversight. If House Bill 243 passes, Idaho will have the lowest childcare safety and oversight standards in the developed world.

Childcare licensing is not an area of law that should be experimented with, as changes in standards could have tragic consequences on the lives of kids. House Bill 243 will put babies in harm's way, as it does not take into consideration basic safety precautions; parent, provider, and community input; or proven industry best practices.

1. House Bill 243 eliminates childcare child-to-staff ratios.

- The proposal strikes out Idaho's entire child-to-staff ratio from statute and administrative rule, including minimum ratio standards for each age group of children receiving care. It adds language that requires each individual childcare provider to develop their own child-to-staff ratio standards with no best practice guidance.
- By eliminating current child-to-staff ratios, the bill allows providers to care for unlimited numbers of infants and toddlers and removes the ability to enforce the most basic of child safety standards.

2. House Bill 243 relaxes childcare supervision requirements.

- The proposal removes the requirement for infants and toddlers to be within sight *and* sound of caregivers at all times. It adds language to allow flexibility of supervision of children over the age of five with no best practice guidance.
- Current supervision standards are based on lifesaving precautions and scientifically backed research. Relaxing childcare supervision standards makes it far more likely that emergencies will go unnoticed until it is too late.

3. House Bill 243 strips local authority to protect Idaho children.

- The proposal removes language that allows cities and counties to set their own childcare licensing standards. Local communities will no longer be able to require

criminal background checks, safety inspections, or health requirements beyond what the state allows in its licensing standard law.

- Banning local authority for childcare licensing standards strips communities of their ability to meet the unique needs of families in their region.
- The one-size-fits-all approach in the proposal means that even communities that want to maintain basic childcare protections will be forced to comply with the new, dangerously low state standard.

4. House Bill 243 does not address the childcare shortage crisis; instead, it penalizes high-quality childcare providers and threatens the Idaho Child Care Program.

- Idaho's childcare system is fragile, and the state is facing one of the worst childcare shortages in the country. The proposal does nothing to incentivize the development of new, high-quality childcare businesses. With the potential loss of Idaho Child Care Program funding, it would disrupt payments that hundreds of providers rely on to keep their doors open and costs affordable for families.
- Providers who follow best practices for child safety will be at a competitive disadvantage against unsafe operators and bad actors who cut corners to save on costs. Ethical providers will have to lower their own standards or be driven out of business. Strong childcare licensing standards should remain in place to ensure high-quality providers remain open, while keeping bad actors at bay.
- Parents are already desperate to find childcare in communities with provider shortages. They should not have to choose between sending their child to an unreliable provider, with few safety guardrails in place, or going to work.