



A Place to Grow  
436 Route 125  
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February 9, 2026

House Municipal and County Government Committee  
HB1195 Relative to municipal zoning requirements for child day care providers

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to support the modification of the requirements as suggested in HB 1195 as they relate to **family childcare in Section 1**. There are many safeguards around the use of residences already built within the childcare licensing rules, including fire safety and building codes. These are extremely reasonable changes and support the ability for NH residents to use their homes to care for their own children and a limited number of children from the public.

I understand the desire to streamline the efforts to increase childcare capacity within the state of NH. According to Childcare Aware, "Mapping the Gap", there is a deficit of more than 22,000 licensed child care spaces across the state of New Hampshire. This means that 2 in 5 children in working families in New Hampshire do not have access to licensed child care while their parents are at work. The quickest and most affordable means to increase childcare capacity in the state of NH is through decreasing zoning requirements for childcare.

If we take this same principle and apply it to commercial center-based childcare, it would rapidly increase capacity. But will this capacity increase result in the same layers of safety that were maintained when residential zoning requirements were changed? I would argue that it does not. Site Plan Review process by towns can be lengthy, expensive, and a highly cumbersome burden, but they are an essential safety checkpoint.

The process of sight plan review crushed the dreams of would-be owner, Destiny Carter, when she purchased a commercially zoned property in Plaistow, NH, for the purposes of a small childcare licensed for 20 children. During the review process, it became known that the septic capacity was grandfathered in for residential use but would not meet the requirements for commercial use. As most of the children in her care would be in diapers and such, this was a technicality, because the calculated burden on the septic would have been less than if it were in residential use. The center never opened, and the property was resold for residential use, despite its location in a commercial district. It is an example like this that would warrant some leniency in commercial zoning requirements.

But where do we draw the line as a reasonable expectation that a childcare center is acceptable in any commercial location? A 5000 sq ft building could support over 100 students. They would



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need parking for 15-20 teachers, parking for at least 20 parents at a time, a large septic system, a fire suppression system, and more. Who would be checking to make sure these requirements are met for fire and building codes, as this is generally done during the site plan review process? Would it be more reasonable to not use the size of the building, but the intended licensed capacity as the threshold for this new criterion?

A Place to Grow is licensed for 52 children and operates in a 3700 sq ft building on Route 125 in Brentwood, NH. While site plan review was far from a fun process, it was an assurance to me as an owner that I was meeting all of the needs for operating my business. It was the equivalent of paying for a house inspection, though it's far more expensive and time-consuming. Together, the town and I made reasonable plans to accommodate all needs. I learned my septic was too small, but we agreed to monitor with a flow meter. We learned that I needed a sprinkler system, and together we agreed that a residential sprinkler system was adequate to meet the needs of the building. This was a straightforward process for a center of my size. Could we have skipped this step with no issues, probably. Should my school be bigger and licensed for over 100 children, NH DOT would want to look at traffic to make sure that many families can turn onto Route 125 safely without a middle turn lane or traffic signal. Without the Site Plan Review process, there would be no trigger to review these conditions.

I would suggest that there is a middle ground if we wish to open commercial zoning by allowing licensed centers of less than 50 licensed students to bypass this process. Centers exceeding a capacity of 50 would need zoning approval. I would urge this committee to discuss what this reasonable threshold would be with the fire marshal's office, an architect, a building code enforcement person, NH DOT, and other interested parties.

In summary, please accept the changes as outlined in Section 1 of this bill.

I would urge that additional considerations for health and safety be made as they relate to Section 2 of this bill. These considerations may reduce sq footage requirements, or use the licensed capacity of the center to ensure adequate controls for health and safety, traffic flow, etc.

Regards,

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