
Daycare bill fails to make it past Senate floor despite last minute push

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A bill that would have regulated non-licensed daycare facilities failed to get past the Senate floor despite the resolve of supporters Friday morning.

The bill would have brought daycare centers that received government subsidize around Alabama under the regulating power of the Department of Human Resources. Under existing law, there is no regulatory authority over these unlicensed daycare centers.

The bill initially faced opposition from those who said the bill would infringe upon religious liberty because some of these daycare centers are located in churches and non-profit religious schools.

Because of this, the bill was amended to clarify that licensing of religious-operated centers not infringe upon the freedom of religious of the churches.

The religious-based organization Alabama Citizens Action Group gave the newly amended bill its approval saying the bill both protected children and religious liberty.

Conservative group Eagle Forum of Alabama voiced their opposition to the bill Thursday in a statement on their website.

“An unintended consequence of HB277 will be that that many children in rural areas of the state will no longer have any positive child care options,” the statement said.

Despite the opposition, Representative Pebblin Warren (D-Tuskegee) held a press conference Friday morning to rally support for the bill as it made its way to the Senate.

“The House bill 277 is about protecting our children plain and simple,” Warren said “It’s not about religious preferences. It’s all about the health and safety of children,”

On the Senate floor, the bill was met with one dissenter. Senator Shay Shelnett (R-Trussville) said he still had problems with the bill. Senator Cam Ward (R-Alabaster) made a successful motion to negotiate the bill off the floor. The bill never came back.

The main opponent of the bill Senator Larry Stutts (R-Sheffield) was not present today.

An unlicensed Montgomery daycare center named “Sunnyside Child Care” became a focal point for this bill. The daycare had become infamous for a staph infection which sent 86 children to the hospital for various symptoms including dehydration, vomiting and diarrhea in 2015.

The two daycare centers in Montgomery have since been closed and face pending litigation from parents.