Day Care Center Licensing Bill
Gutted By Louisiana Legislators

How They Voted

HOUSE

Here's how the House voted 51-48 on an amendment by Rep. Linda Jenkins to let day care centers decide whether they want to be licensed if they don't receive state or federal funds. The amendment was considered a "gutting" change to the mandatory licensing bill.

FOR

Benot, Lalonde, Thompson.

AGAINST

Achille, Bella, Bluett, Dienes, Gomes, Hatt, St. tier, Theriot, Thibodeaux.

"The children are the ones being cheated at the expense of what the adults believe they should be allowed to do and not do," she said. "We've lost sight of the children.""Gomes said he believes "we've ended up with as bad or worse situation since we had going to the amendment changed the intent of the bill. It didn't accomplish anything."

But Thompson and Lalonde said they voted with the amendment. Blasco, Gomes and Thibodeaux opposed the amendment.

"The bill provides for the proper amount of regulation without over-regulating the industry," Lalonde said. "It gives parents the ultimate responsibility to see how a child-care center operates."

Amendment Added

During debate, Thompson got the floor to open the door to exempt school centers, even though it has never been proposed. Jenkins' amendment that would in effect do the same.

The bill has nine times and isn't going to go away," Thompson warned the legislators. If they want church day-care centers and don't want regulations, they can think of it as their church and the state should be allowed to not be licensed.

"Not having anything about the bill being revised was almost realized and what if this bill is passed the vote and then, Thompson asked to file an amendment. His attempt failed 66-47.

Lalonde

In arguing for licensing, Benot pointed to an incident in Lafayette in which the Health and Human Services office was called to a day-care center for a child abuse complaint. "We have no idea what went on," Benot said. This incident was powerful in Blasco's mind and the wine was ignored. Later, an11-year-old child banged himself with a venison blunt.

Blasco said he was disappointed the House members didn't believe in "political pressure put on them by a small number of people who worked very hard to defeat this bill."

For the past two weeks, uniformed students and Bible-toting ministers have worked the halls of the legislature lobbying against licensing day-care centers.

Charges Intimidation

"They have intimidated these people," Blasco said. "They have controlled this action.

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"A district attorney can shut down a house if it looks like a public nuisance but he can't shut down a day-care center for child abuse," she said.

The House is destined to hear the day care issue at least once more. A bill similar to Blasco's has passed the Senate and is awaiting a hearing in the House Health and Welfare Committee, which approved Blasco's bill. Proposals are hoping that they can get enough support by then to pass the measure. Also, Blasco has a similar bill that is also having a hearing.

"If any parent out there believes in it, Blasco said, "they had better contact their representatives. Some representatives in our area told me they didn't have a chance because opponents were that hard to believe. I got a large amount of mail and numerous phone calls. Either they didn't get their mail or they closed it to ignore it." Benot said some of the opposition was from newly opened centers that are overcrowded.

"They don't enforce laws against overcrowding," she said. "Some centers opposed licensing because it would limit the number of children they can house. It's a matter of economics."