

Lobbyist Disagrees with Day Care Story

The following letter was received in response to an article in the Summer, 1979, issue of this magazine, "Day Care Bill Killed". In that article Mr. Harrell's first name was incorrectly given as Bennie. Mr. Harrell's first name is Bernard. During the 1979 Session of the Legislature Mr. Harrell was a lobbyist for private for-profit day care operators.

Re: Article Appearing in *N.C. INSIGHT*
Summer 1979, Vol. 2, No. 3
Entitled "Day Care Bill Killed"

Dear Mr. Editor:

Your article appearing in the Summer 1979, Vol. 2, No. 3, of *N.C. INSIGHT*, entitled "Day Care Bill Killed" is inaccurate, both as to what it actually says and what it does not say. It is also inaccurate as to what it implies.

In the first place, on the present Child Day Care Licensing Commission there are only five members appointed to the commission who are required to be private for-profit operators. Your article lumps all of the operators of day care centers together. As a matter of fact, two of the members are from centers operated with tax monies (state or federal). This is not to disparage the two non-profit operator members. They have done a good job and have faithfully attended the commission meetings, siding at times with the private operators and sometimes opposing them as their conscience dictated.

So, for the record, only 5 of 15 members of the commission are private for-profit operators. Seven members of the present commission are governmental officials or their designates. The remaining members are three citizens at-large. It goes without saying that 5 operators out of 15 members does not a majority make. On the other hand, Senator Sebo's proposed bill would have reduced the representation of the private for-profit operators from 5 of 15, to 5 of 19. This was looked at as being fundamentally unfair, both by persons in the day care business and by the committee members themselves.

As a practical matter, the history of "citizen members" on boards and commissions can be classified as a dismal failure because of the poor participation by citizen members. Appointments are too often looked upon as additional patronage for the appointing authority. The Senate Committee (independent of my thinking) saw it this way. They were very reluctant to reduce the voice of those on the commission who had their own capital "at risk".

While I appreciate the reference to "clever lobbying", you managed to misspell my name and, furthermore, it simply isn't true. The truth of the matter is that the Senate Committee members simply did not want to increase the size of another governmental commission. Chairman Lawing was very strong in wanting to reduce the size of the commission and expressed himself openly. Senator Dallas Alford took the position that the time of the legislature should be spent legislating on matters which needed correcting. To quote him: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Senator Ollie Harris was of like mind. In summary, the committee and the sub-committee made up their own minds independent of any clever lobbying on my part.

Your article is true in saying that Senator Barnes did not sponsor nor endorse the committee substitute which I prepared. Senator Barnes did agree to take the committee substitute I had prepared and discuss it with the sub-committee members. The committee substitute, which I prepared, did provide for citizen member participation, but those citizen members were limited to those people who were the parents of day care children. I felt, in this manner, that good participation by citizen members could be achieved. Unfortunately, the committee substitute was, likewise, killed.

Perhaps it is time for those in state government to stop pursuing the pipe dream that merely adding "citizen members" to boards and commissions will solve some problem. This is a bit of costly populism which has nothing to commend it except a bad record in instances where it has been tried. Maybe it's time for North Carolina, its General Assembly and its Executive Branch to try something different and go back to the old adage that the best government is the least government. I think we might be surprised at the excellent result we might get.

With best regards.

BAH:jsm
cc: Senator Craig Lawing
Senator Dallas Alford
Senator Ollie Harris
Senator Henson Barnes
Mrs. Rachel Frazier
Mrs. Agnes Love

Very truly yours,

Bernard A. Harrell
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