

Editorial

Day care neglected

Our view: Idaho lawmakers drop ball on child-care oversight, again

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A last-ditch effort to blast a day-care-regulation bill out of an Idaho Senate committee fell short Tuesday, so the issue is dead for the fourth consecutive year. Buttressed by support from working parents around the state, sponsors were seeking minimal standards for day care centers with four or more children, including criminal background checks for workers and annual health and fire inspections. Currently, only those centers with more than seven children are regulated by the state.

Senate Health and Welfare Committee Chairwoman Patti Anne Lodge, R-Huston, said the bill needed more work. For one thing, she said, the fiscal note was inaccurate.

"This bill needs to stay where it is in committee for this year, and give the sponsors the opportunity to work on it so that it is what it says it is."

It's always something. In the three previous years, the bill was also nitpicked to death.

Some lawmakers worried that it would prevent rural families from dropping kids off at the houses of relatives and friends. Some wanted evidence that smaller day cares had problems before deciding whether they needed regulation. Some worried that there wouldn't be enough money for inspections. And some thought that working mothers should just stay home.

The bill has been continually nipped and tugged, but it's never satisfactory.

In justifying his vote on Tuesday to block the bill, Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert, said: "We simply do not have enough time to hear every bill and to vote on every single bill."

But four years is long enough to get to the head of the line, and the Legislature is working on less vital matters.

For instance, the House just passed a bill that would criminalize the act of violently coercing a person into getting an abortion. Sure, it's already illegal to use such force, but the Legislature, at the behest of bill sponsor Rep. Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene, took time out of its busy schedule to make sure that such coercion is really, really frowned upon when it comes to abortion.

Missing from the bill is a prohibition on using threats or violence against persons who choose to have abortions. Or who are caught with contraceptives. Those decisions could be flashpoints for violence, too.

In any event, it just shows how out of touch lawmakers are when they waste time on a redundant punishment for a perceived problem, when the actual issue of protecting children with basic regulatory standards is kicked down the road year after year.

Idaho has been judged the worst in the nation for day-care oversight. This year's inaction will guarantee that it hangs onto to that dubious distinction for another year.