

Robinson beats Orange High 35-32 at the state 3A wrestling championship | B1

The Herald-Sun

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50 CENTS

New DSS policy draws opposition

Child-care leaders feel subsidy shift would not be a quality solution

BY RAY GRONBERG

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DURHAM — Two major child-care advocacy groups have weighed in against the Durham County Department of Social Services' plan to subsidize care provided to low-income children by relatives, friends and neighbors.

The criticism came Monday

from Marsha Basloe and Sue Russell, executive director and president respectively of Durham's Partnership for Children and the Child Care Services Association.

In a letter to DSS Director



BASLOE



RUSSELL

subsidy dollars to support unregulated care for low-income

Gerri Robinson — also relayed to County Commissioners and key city officials — the pair said they “strongly oppose Durham County Social Services’ decision to shift

children.”

A separate five-page memo went into more detail about their objections. Among other things, they said the department’s initiative would undermine established state and local policies designed to boost children’s scholastic achievement and prevent crime.

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Abortion-benefits dispute heats up

BY RAY GRONBERG

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DURHAM — City and county officials in the western Triangle are keeping an eye on an abortion-rights dispute in Wake County.

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Pick 4: 0-7-8-4;

Cash 5: 12-14-27-29-37

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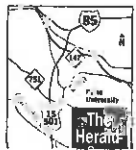
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CARE

FROM PAGE A1

Robinson briefed County Commissioners on the policy change last week. At the time, commissioners said they were already hearing opposition from major child-care advocates.

Russell was among the people commissioners said had contacted them to complain.

The Child Care Service Association is a referral group that directs parents from across the Triangle to care centers. The Partnership for Children administers the local branch of the state's Smart Start program.

The boards of the two groups include key elected officials, city and county administrators and representation from major interests like Duke University and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina.

In her briefing last week,

Robinson acknowledged that the policy change likely would encounter opposition.

But she said county officials have to do something to help children in very low-income families who can't afford to pay, even with help from subsidies, to put their kids in high-quality day care centers.

She said the problem deters some parents from seeking employment. "Quality is a must, but my customer base cannot go to work when they need to simply because they cannot afford the service," Robinson told commissioners.

Basloe and Russell complained that DSS unilaterally embarked on the change.

"It has not been a strategy developed through our collaborative work and communications among partner agencies," they said in the supporting memo they sent along with their letter to Robinson.

Moreover, research in North Carolina and elsewhere has shown subsidizing care offered by relatives, friends and neighbors is unlikely to work, they said.

"This means that children in these homes likely experienced environments that were inadequate for their health and safety and did not promote their cognitive and social-emotional development," their supporting memo said.

Low-income children placed in high-quality, licensed day cares, by contrast, are generally better prepared for school and appear less likely to turn to crime later in life, they said.

Basloe and Russell added that if the problem is that low-income families can't afford slots in highly-rated care center, there are other remedies.

There are plenty of vacancies in such centers, and officials could address the situ-

ation by making changes in how they refer families to care providers, they said, or lobby the state to boost reimbursement rates for care subsidies.

The supporting memo warned that Durham could lose Smart Start money if it fails to meet state benchmarks that include placements of children in licensed day cares. It also questioned whether DSS "has the capacity and resources" to oversee unlicensed caregivers.

"Settling for low or mediocre quality or even unregulated care is an unacceptable strategy to increase poor children's access to care," Basloe and Russell said. "While it is a legally acceptable option, less than 1 percent of subsidized placements in North Carolina are in unregulated family, friend and neighbor care."

FESTIVAL

Music is one of many such

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