

Wisconsin child care providers could be required to check in on parents

By [Ryan Ekvall](#) | Wisconsin Reporter November 8, 2013

MADISON, Wis. — When does a child care provider's responsibilities begin? Under a bill proposed by a bipartisan group of state lawmakers, it could begin before the child steps in the day care.

The legislation would [require child care providers to call parents](#) of children who are an hour late to daycare. If the parent cannot be reached, the day care provider must call any listed emergency contacts. In that case, expect a call from grandma too.

Advocates say the bill authored by **Reps. Dianne Hesselbein, D-Middleton** and **Scott Krug, R-Nekoosa**, could save lives, but to some daycare providers it "feels like overkill."



Raise your hand if you were at daycare within an hour of when your parents said you would be at daycare.

"I feel really sad for the family who lost their child because they forgot him in the car," said **Renaë Henning**, administrator of **Community Care Preschool and Childcare in Beaver Dam**. "But I'm not really sure how that's the responsibility of the child care provider."

Henning operates a 75-child, five-star daycare center — the highest rating available to child care providers from the state **Department of Children and Families**.

"We already make phone calls when children are late," she said. Her policy is to call parents when they are between 30 and 60 minutes late, something she said happens once a day. Larger child care providers, she said, might not be able to call within 60 minutes.

"I feel like it's an overreach of the government to dictate what they think should work for us. Why should you tell all 3,000 or more providers, big and small 'this is how you're going to do it?'"

DCF requires Henning and all licensed providers to implement their own policy for calling parents of absent children.

Family child care providers have been cited four times and group child care providers six times for breaking that policy in 2013.

When a provider is cited, it submits a corrective action plan to the agency. There are [nearly 6,000 licensed child care providers](#) in the state, and all providers receive "regular unannounced (compliance) visits," according to DCF.

Under the bill, the existing administrative code would tighten and become state law. The bill also requires parents and providers to establish drop-off times — something they do informally now.

Jack O'Meara, a lobbyist for the **Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association**, said it's unclear if making this law would increase a child care provider's liability. Could a provider be sued if they failed to make a phone call to a late parent in 60 minutes and a child died in the car?

"(The bill) sets a really prescriptive way of looking at things that does not comport with reality," O'Meara said.

There's another issue for Henning: "Technically, I shouldn't be responsible for you until you walk into my care," she said. It's similar to asking a pilot to be responsible for getting a passenger to the airport.

Janette Fennell, president of [KidsandCars.org](#), said babies will be saved if the bill becomes law. KidsandCars.org is a national public safety awareness organization that focuses on child safety around cars.

"It is a parent responsibility," Fennell said. "But it is a shared responsibility."

Fennell said at least 100 children that should have been in child care facilities have died in the past dozen years due to heatstroke after being forgotten in cars.

And anybody, she said — dentists, counselors, doctors — is capable of forgetting their child in the back seat. If you can forget your cell phone, you can forget your baby, she said.

"Those are children who have died because a parent thought they dropped their kid off at day care. If one phone call can save their lives, let's do it," she said.

"I do think there needs to be a law because then everyone is working under the same set of criteria," Fennell said.

"Without a law you don't have any way to check on it. You don't have any way to enforce it. It sometimes brings to light other deficiencies a child care center might have."

An unsigned email from the DCF communications office said that if the bill became law, the agency would continue to monitor and enforce compliance the same way it does under current agency rules. It's unclear how many children are an hour late to day care daily.

Contact Ryan Ekvall at rekvall@watchdog.org or on Twitter @Nockian
<http://watchdog.org/114958/wisconsin-childcare-parents/>