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NICMA/Unite joint press release

Registered Childminders in NI left 'Out in the Cold' by the Department Of Education.

Covid Safety Precautions Could spell the End of the Childminding Industry without Financial Help says Unite Registered Childminders NI and NICMA.
Both NICMA and Unite Registered Childminders call on Department Of Education to help the Forgotten Key Workers.

NICMA and Unite Registered Childminders NI have joined forces to fight for the equality of childminders and demand they are lifted out of financial hardship.

NICMA CEO Patricia Lewsley Mooney CBE comments:

"One week has passed since a proposal was sent to Minister Weir asking him to increase payments for childminders and yet again we are left out in the cold. Despite including 3 very real life case studies regarding the extra overheads and expenses childminders are facing, we are no further with an answer.

"Like every other business in Northern Ireland right now, childminders have increased expenses due to Coronavirus. Our schools have been given the help they needed in order to make it safe for children to return, why is the childminding setting any different? The same precautions need to be taken and without a top up of payment to help do this, many childminders simply can't open or sustain their business.

"In order to keep their business a safe place, Childminders are facing higher electricity bills, heating bills, paying for extra cleaning resources such as hand sanitizer, hands free bins, separate boxes for children's belongings not to mention cleaning and washing their furniture and clothes."

Many childminders are already in a dire financial situation and these additional costs, which are outside of their control, are tipping them over the edge. The government has implemented these precautions but they don't want to help foot the bill.

The proposal asked for £500 per month, per childminder for July and August equating to £2.6M of a £10.5M pot however, what was offered is less than £750,000, meaning each childminder only received a pitiful £150 per month. That is simply not enough to sustain their business or to cover these extra costs.

Susan Fitzgerald, Regional Coordinating Officer for Unite paid tribute to the effort of her union's registered childminder members who had fought to put the issue of their sector on the political agenda.

“Registered Childminders, through their union, have raised their concerns at the highest levels. Operators in this predominantly female and previously overlooked sector have not left a stone unturned in fighting their case.

“The Unite Registered childminders’ branch was established during the pandemic and despite only ever meeting remotely, has engaged MLAs from across the spectrum and met with the leaders of most parties, including First and deputy First Ministers as well as both Finance and Education Ministers.

“The Covid pandemic has dramatically impacted the working conditions and pay of registered childminders – who continue to provide an invaluable service at this time. One week after presenting Education Minister Peter Weir with a detailed, evidence-led business case for funding, including costings and case studies exhibiting the increased costs facing operators, they are ramping up the pressure by encouraging operators in the sector to lobby their politicians for movement.

“The ball is now squarely in the court of the politicians – they must now deliver for the registered childminder sector. Registered Childminders won’t stop their campaign for fair treatment of their sector” Ms Fitzgerald said.

Both organisations conclude;

“Once again, the childminding sector has been discriminated against even after stepping up to the challenge during lockdown while most of the childcare sector was shut down. The payments are an insult to these registered childminders who put their lives and their family’s lives at risk while caring for key workers children during the pandemic.

“Compare this with the fact that the day-care sector were able to furlough their staff and had an ‘Approved Home Childcare Scheme’ set up with enhanced payments. They also received help with their overheads, even when they were closed, through the ‘Small Business Support Grant Scheme’.”

Unite Registered Childminders NI and NICMA are calling on Minister Weir and his Department to give the proposal their immediate attention and to top up the payment to an amount which is both fair and reflects what the sector has done during this pandemic. Doing so will go a long way to recognizing the vital contribution that our professional childminders make to the lives of young children, while also helping the economy.

Registered Childminding provides high quality childcare and learning within home-based settings for children aged 0 - 14 years. It is the most popular - and affordable -

form of full-time childcare in Northern Ireland accounting for 61% of full-time daycare places and 39% of all childcare places.