

Mama Beth's fight for her Daycare



Beth Gates(Mama Beth) has run an at home daycare for 35 years, kept over 400 children and had no complaints or violations and now South Carolina Department of Social Services has shut her down over paperwork issues. However, on the day they shut her down, her name and registration # were on their website and she was listed as being up to date on all her paperwork and listed as having no complaints. Nonetheless, they shut her down and told her to enroll in their daycare training/orientation courses(as if she had never had a daycare before), and reapply for her license. After participating in the training and completing all the paperwork, they denied her application and refused to give her a license.

It is our belief that DSS was on a hunt to close several at home daycares to "prove" to the media/public that they were in fact a functioning entity. In the weeks prior to them visiting Beth's house an infant died in an at home daycare with a long list of violations. DSS was highly criticized by the media for having allowed that particular daycare to stay open, despite its previous violations. DSS has had many problems within their agency in the past several years. Their director was forced to resign in June of 2014. December 2014 Senator Katrina Shealy introduced a bill to dismantle DSS and start over.

When DSS ordered Beth to shut down immediately it left all her families scrambling to find new daycares in the middle of the year. For me this meant taking sick days at work, to cart my three children around town looking for a new daycare. This experience, and the months away from her to follow, was traumatic for all involved. Everyone affected by this felt DSS handled the situation in the worst way possible.

The families who used Mama Beth's daycare urged her to sue DSS to get her license back, which she ultimately decided to do. A judge has ordered DSS to allow her to stay open throughout the course of the suit, so our children are happily back at her home. However, this has turned into a much bigger legal battle than anticipated and she has incurred over \$34,000 in legal fees. It is difficult to sue a state agency when they have endless tax dollars to use in their defense. We want her to be able to continue to fight for her career and for the children of Greenville who love her and need her.

Beth Gates is one of the kindest, most generous, sweetest people you will ever meet. She loves each of her "children" as if they were her own. Beth is a native of Greenville, SC. She was an orphan after her father died in WWII and raised by her grandparents. As a teenager she spent much of her time at a friends house who had 12 siblings. Beth loved being in a household with many children and dreamed of having many children of her own. Shortly after marrying her husband Clint she needed an emergency hysterectomy. Unable to bear biological children, her and Clint adopted their daughter Amy. Beth left her career as an accountant to stay home with her daughter and several years later started her at home daycare. She has been keeping children in her home ever since.

usually so much better. Yet, they are poorly monitored and regulated, resulting in bad ones that stay open and good ones that get shut down. I am not saying at-home daycares are better for everyone, nor am I saying they are all good. I am saying that they are a vital component of childcare across the state and parents should continue to have the option of using them, but also have the assurance that they are properly and fairly monitored.

In my 7 years as a working mother I have seen the good and the bad of child-care. I had my children in one at-home child-care situation in Greenville that had my "mother's instincts" on high alert. We left that situation after 2 months, and the following year an infant died in that home. The providers name was Pam Woods. The media reported she had many parent complaints and DSS violations yet was allowed to stay open. Shortly after the child death in Ms. Woods home, DSS showed up at our current at-home day-care provider and shut her down for violations that never put a child at risk, despite the fact that she had been open for 35 years with no violations. This sweet lady's name is Beth Gates, my children call her "Mama Beth".

Beth Gates is an amazing child-care provider. She is passionate about what she does and truly enjoys her work. This would be evident after one visit with her in her home.

I feel DSS has failed my children and many others with their sloppy, disorganized handling of at-home daycares. I cannot understand why DSS has given so many other daycares chance after chance when they have made huge mistakes that involve the safety and wellbeing of children, yet they are refusing to allow Beth Gates to keep her license over issues that never put a child at risk. I am passionate about this situation and recently started a Gofundme page to help pay for Beth's legal fees. I have included a print out of my Go Fund Me page for you to review her story.

I am not writing because I hope you will give a donation to the cause, but because I hope you will further investigate her story and the larger story of the systems, or lack there of, DSS has in place for managing these at home daycares.

Thank you very much for all you are doing for the children and families of South Carolina,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patty Kotula Stewart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Patty Kotula Stewart

Patricia Kotula Stewart
206 Buist Ave.
Greenville, SC 29609
withholding number
(843)209-3033

February 23, 2015

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley
Office of the Governor
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Governor Haley,

I am writing to say thank you for standing up for the children of South Carolina. I have a passion for education and child welfare, and have been following your improvement plans for education and for DSS. I also have a specific request for each of those areas.

I am a teacher and a mother. I have taught in some of the State's most disadvantaged schools(Colleton County and Clarendon District One), and most affluent(Greenville County). I have also used childcare providers for my own children in those areas.

As for education, from my perspective, the most important change you could make would be to create an equal pay mandate for teachers across the state, with education incentives for those working in the poor rural areas. My husband and I are both teachers. We taught in Summerton(Clarendon District One) for three years before moving to Greenville for my husband to pursue his masters degree through Clemson University. We both have a passion for working with poor, disadvantaged students and considered moving back to Summerton last year. A major deterrent was the fact that collectively we would take an \$7,600 yearly pay cut due to the discrepancies in how teachers are paid across the state. It is crazy to me that the teachers who are working in the most difficult situations make the least amount of money. Money isn't everything, but we have three children and already live on a tight budget, we could not figure out how to make such a large cut in pay work for our family.

Another problem, is quality child-care. There is not one single church or group day-care for babies in Summerton. Parents have the option of hiring an in-home nanny or taking their children to an at-home day-care. This is where my request for DSS improvements come into play.

At-home daycares are an important part of childcare across the state. From my perspective, at home daycares are to Corporate Daycares, what a downtown boutique is to shopping at the Mall. The service is more personal, the quality is often higher, the overall experience is