Leamersville Preschool
Official Testimony

Good afternoon. My name is Pastor Mark Lingenfelter. I've been the lead pastor of Grace Fellowship Church for over 25 years and I'm here today on behalf of our church, our Preschool and the families that benefit from our ministry to pre-school age children.

The story of our preschool begins with my grandparents. My grandfather was a principle in Claysburg, and my grandmother was a kindergarten teacher in Roaring Spring. My mom then graduated from Juniata College with an Elementary Education degree but instead of teaching in the public school like her parents, she felt called to start a preschool in the local church. Her decision to forego the financial security of a public-school teaching career was rooted in her desire to share the gospel with children and make a positive impact in the lives of their families. When I reflect on the timing of the founding of Leamersville preschool in the early 1980's, a couple years AFTER my own preschool experience at another local preschool, it is also possible that part of her motivation was in response to the daily bad behavior reports she received from my preschool teacher.

When my mom passed away from cancer in 2003, my wife and my sister, both having Elementary Education degrees from St. Francis and my sister holding an additional degree in special education, chose to continue this legacy of educational ministry. So, for over 40 years, Leamersville Preschool has been a trusted and sought out educational ministry in our community. Our class size has been full almost every year, with a waiting list and without the need for advertisement.

Then in November of 2025 we experienced an unexpected visit from PA DHS responding to an anonymous complaint that we were running an "illegal daycare". The two ladies who were there to investigate were professional and kind. They asked relevant questions about programming, days and hours met, ages of children, number of staff, etc. After their investigation they confirmed to us that everything was legal and surpassed the standards required for a preschool. When one of the investigators submitted her report to her supervisor, she was informed that the "rules had changed" and that our preschool was no longer in compliance with state regulations. The investigator called our preschool director to inform her that we would be receiving a letter from DHS that were not in compliance. We finally received that letter in February, and it was a "cease and desist letter." There were no instructions on how to come into compliance or any grace period offered to do so. There was an option offered to request an appeal, which we submitted and were granted. We worked with Judy Ward and her team to make sure we were allowed to operate until after the hearing and we began to research how we could come into compliance.

We discovered that there are two options for compliance – one under DHS and one under Dept. of Ed., but neither option had easy to navigate or understand instructions on their website. We were making every effort to cooperate with the state and figure out the best way to come under state compliance and then in March the DHS investigator showed up to make sure we were not operating. Her office had no record of the appeal that had been granted. We connected her to Judy Ward's office to clear up the confusion and the investigator agreed we were allowed to operate while waiting for our appeal scheduled for June 10. I am fully convinced that without the help of Judy Ward and her team our preschool would have been shut down.

Every year, for over 40 years, almost 30 children and their families entrust Leamersville Preschool to provide excellence in age-appropriate academics, preparing the children for kindergarten, in a Bible based structure. We do not seek to sidestep the state for educational standards or safety. In fact, our desire would be to exceed them. We would, however, encourage the state to take into consideration the difficulty of changing laws or regulations without communication, not only to local preschools, but within the governmental departments that were not aware of changes being made. We would encourage the state to consider a reasonable approach to ensuring those who teach and care for children have more direct and clear communication about changes and a reasonable timeframe in which to comply with those changes. We would also encourage the state to revisit the classifications between a limited day preschool like ours and a full-day day care so as not to create an undue burden on limited day preschools.

Leamersville preschool has been the single greatest outreach ministry for the gospel in our community among every other ministry our church offers. It's not even close. If Leamersville Preschool ceased to exist our community would suffer. So, on behalf of my church, our preschool and the families we serve, thank you for taking the time to listen to our story and give careful consideration to the reality that the ways state laws are implemented has just as much impact on families as the laws themselves.