

SENATOR BERNARD-STEVENS: Thank you, Senator Chambers. I have lights on from the previous amendment so let me just take a minute and go through and find those that wish to speak on this particular amendment to the amendment. Senator Wesely, do you wish to speak on this portion? Senator Hall, on the amendment to the amendment. Senator Wehrbein, on this. Senator Maurstad, on this amendment to the amendment? And, Senator Witek, on this amendment to the amendment? Do you wish to speak to this amendment to the amendment when your time comes? Okay, that's fine. Senator Wesely, you are recognized.

SENATOR WESEL: Thank you, Mr. President, members, I understand what Senator Chambers and Senator Hall are raising in terms of concern because I share that concern. You begin with a premise that child care workers are under reimbursed to begin with. As you saw from that survey I passed out, they're the lowest paid workers in our society today and they may be the most important when they work with our children in the sense they're surrogate parents at the very youngest, most vulnerable age. It's an incredible responsibility and here we are reimbursing them. So when you have a 75 percentile of an already incredibly low reimbursement, I mean you are really making it hard for individuals who are child care providers and you're making it hard on families to find people who will provide child care. We, at a point when we got involved with the child care issue and passed a bill in '91, we're at a range of 50 to 60 percentile on the reimbursement and we could not get child care providers to care for these children. It was a disaster. We were finding a very difficult time for these individuals in these various programs and the whole thing was falling apart basically in my view. So we came in and we all agreed that that can't happen again so we put in the bill and we thought we were going to have an attempt to get this 75 percentile and every two years adjust it, putting in the survey. But what happened was the department interpreted and I think correctly so, that we didn't require it so it wasn't done. So in '93 the 75 percentile wasn't changed and no adjustment was made and we dropped to 67 and then again in '95 the survey has just been done and there's no adjustment in the budget and now we're going to drop to 63 and '97 is when this kicks in and every two years beyond and everything would point to a fact that we'll be below 60 percent and now we're back in that range where we simply are too poorly reimbursing child care providers and similarly we won't get them to provide care. We're already...even at the reimbursement level we're at now, which I say is about