Iowa Department of Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER COMPLAINT

Name of Center: Little Comets Childcare **Enrollment:** 52077 **License ID:** 52077

Street: 201 N Wilhelm ST **City:** Conrad **IA** **Zip Code:** 50621 **County:** Grundy

Mailing Address: 201 N Wilhelm ST

Mailing City: Conrad **IA** **Zip Code:** 50621

Director's Name: Erin Cross **Center Phone Number:** 641-366-3041

On-Site Supervisors: **E-Mail Address:** lilcometschildcare@gmail.com

Date of Complaint: 08-12-2025 **Date of Visit:** 08-18-2025

[ ] Scheduled **[X]** Unannounced **[ ]** NA

[X] Non-Compliance with Regulations Found **[ ]** Compliance with Regulations Found

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE

[X] NO CHANGES to licensing status recommended

[ ] PROVISIONAL license from **to**

[ ] SUSPENSION of License

[ ] REVOCATION of License

Complaint Details:

Did this complaint result in a serious injury? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Did this complaint result in a death to a child? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Summary of Complaint:

A complaint was received that there are unsanitary conditions occurring in the kitchen of the center regarding cleaning and hygiene, food preparation, and and service. A second complaint was received on 08-25-25 that an employee of the center had pulled the hair of a child in response to the child not listening. Additional concerns were also identified that there is no clear person in charge when Erin is not at the center, staff are often rough with and yell at the children, and children are left unsupervised.

Licensing Rules Relevant to the Complaint:

109.10(14)a The center and supervisor shall ensure that staff knows names and number of children assigned. Staff shall provide careful supervision.

109.12(2)a-d The center shall not use as a form of discipline:Center does not use corporal punishment including spanking, shaking, or slapping.Punishment which is humiliating or frightening or causes pain or discomfort is not allowed. Children shall never be locked in a room or closet. When restraints are part of a treatment plan for a child with a disability authorized by a parent and a psychologist or psychiatrist, staff shall receive training on the safe and appropriate use of the restraint.Punishment or threat of punishment associated with illness, toilet training, or food or rest is not to be used.No child is subject to verbal abuse, threats, derogatory remarks about child or child's family.

109.13(5) Centers shall ensure that food preparation and storage procedures are consistent with the recommendations of the CACFPs.

Inspection Findings:

An unannounced visit was made to the Little Comets Childcare center on 08-18-25 where I initially met with Nicki Coyle who was the designated person in charge as Erin was away from the center at a meeting. Niki was informed of the complaint and confirmed that she has been working as an on-site supervisor for about the past month as there are times when Erin will not be at the center due to driving a bus for the school at the start and end of the day. During the visit Erin did return to the center and I was able to meet with her. Both stated that there are two people who do the cooking for the center. The primary cook, (LP) who cooks on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and (DH) who cooks on Monday and Tuesday. Both acknowledged that there have been concerns about hygiene practices in the kitchen when LP is cooking and that these were recently addressed in a staff meeting, and with that

employee. Erin identified that the concerns were with regard to LP not keeping her hair up, not washing her hands or gloving when handling food, licking serving utensils, and cleaning. Erin stated that she has not had any concerns identified by any of the parents regarding staff being rough with the children, or yelling at the children. Erin stated that she had not observed any situations with staff handling the children in rough manner or speaking to the children in manner that she felt would violate center polices or Licensing Standards but did note that she has spoken with staff about with the most recent being part of the same staff meeting in which the concerns with the center cook were addressed. Erin stated that in response to those concerns she had re-written the center Discipline policies, and that the cook would complete the CACFP Serve Safe training.

During the visit I was able to observe the kitchen, and speak with the cook and lead teachers present for each classroom. It is noted that the visit occurred on a Monday and the cook I spoke with was (DH). In observing the kitchen the physical facilities were observed to be generally clean with no food debris on the floor or spills in the refrigeration/freezer units, however there were concerns with elements that are not as routinely cleaned such as HVAC vents and the ceiling fan which had visible coatings of dust that could be easily dispersed when used for air flow. The center did have bait stations/traps for insects and rodents which were identified as part of services provided by a pest management contractor the center works with. While those bait stations were present there was no indication of either insect or rodent infestation with regard to any visible signs of feces, or insects either live or dead when looking at areas that included the open floor areas, in cabinets, and under/behind refrigerators and stoves. I was able to observe DH as she was preparing lunch and she did wash her hands and wore food service gloves prior to handling food, and wore her hair in a tight bun.

During the visit one child was observed to enter into the kitchen to return a cold pack but the staff did direct the child back outside of the kitchen. It was noted that the child was either sent or allowed to leave the room without the classroom teacher providing supervision by either stepping to the door to observe that child and the children in the classroom, or by arranging for a co-worker to supervise that child. I was able to observe the lunch service while at the center and staff in the classrooms did follow good food handling and service practices when portioning meals in the classroom.

In speaking to the lead teaches for each classroom all provided consistent and credible information that they have either personally observed, or spoken with other staff who have observed the center cook (LP) do things such drink directly from the milk carton and put it back in the refrigerator, lick serving spoons and her hands then continue to use them to serve food without washing them, and finding hair in the food that is served. All staff noted that LP does have long hair that is typically worn in a ponytail. All staff confirmed that when Erin is not in the center Nicki Coyle is the person designated as being in charge. All staff stated that they have not observed or heard of any staff having hit, slapped, or yell at a child in a threatening or derogatory manner. Various staff did state that they have heard staff yelling at the child as means to be heard over the general noise of the classroom but more as a way to get their attention rather than to chastise or berate. Some staff did report that they have observed teachers take children by the hand or arm in a manner that they felt was harsh but not in a manner that either did or would be suspected of causing injury.

It is noted that contact was made with Cheryl Tolley from the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to inquire about food service practices including requirements for use of hair nets. Cheryl clarified that CACFP regulations refer to local health and safety standards. Cheryl provided the following information on local Inspections and Appeals code: 32.3(2) All employees who assemble, dress, cook, manufacture, compound, or serve food are required to effectively restrain hair, wigs, and beards. Caps, hair spray, bandanas, head scarves and hairnet are acceptable restraints provided they cover and restrain the hair. chapter 32, p.2.

A second visit was made to the center on 08-27-25 in response to the additional complaint that had been received regarding an employee pulling a child's hair as part of a discipline. Erin stated she was aware of the incident. Erin stated she was not informed of the incident until after the employee identified in the complaint had left for the day. Erin stated that she had spoken with the employee's co-worker, and the child's parent right away, and then spoke with the employee the next day. Erin stated that all agreed that the situation had been where the child was not paying attention to the teacher when she was talking to the child and so she put her hand on the child's head to turn the child to look at her. Erin stated that while there was no injury the teacher did use more force than was necessary. Erin stated that she did address the issue administratively which does include that the employee will not work in the same classroom as that child, and will attend a training with a focus on managing children's behavior.

Based on the information obtained this complaint is SUBSTANTIATED for violation of Licensing Standard 109.10(14)a The center and supervisor shall ensure that staff knows names and number of children assigned. Staff shall provide careful supervision. -- During the visit a child was observed to leave or be sent out of a classroom to return a cold pack to the kitchen. The teacher did not step to the doorway, nor make any arrangement for another employee to supervise the child. Careful supervision is interpreted to be implemented as within sight and sound of staff at all times and for staff to verify

exchanges of responsibility. While there was no negative impact and the overall time was limited to the brief period it took to cross the center from the classroom to the kitchen it does create the potential for children to engage in behavior that could result in harm such as using the opportunity to elope from the center.

Based on the information obtained this complaint is SUBSTANTIATED for violation of Licensing Standard 109.12(2)a-d
The center shall not use as a form of discipline: *Center does not use corporal punishment including spanking, shaking, or slapping.
*Punishment which is humiliating or frightening or causes pain or discomfort is not allowed. *Children shall never be locked in a room or closet. When restraints are part of a treatment plan for a child with a disability authorized by a parent and a psychologist or psychiatrist, staff shall receive training on the safe and appropriate use of the restraint. *Punishment or threat of punishment associated with illness, toilet training, or food or rest is not to be used. *No child is subject to verbal abuse, threats, derogatory remarks about child or child's family. -- It was confirmed that an incident did occur in which an employee did place their hands on a child's head and turned the child's head in what was described as manner of using "more force than was necessary", when the child was not listening to the teacher.

Based on the information obtained this complaint is SUBSTANTIATED for violation of Licensing Standard 109.13(5) Centers shall ensure that food preparation and storage procedures are consistent with the recommendations of the CACFPs. -- All staff provided consistent and credible information that they have either directly observed or been told by others who observed hygiene practices which would be in violation of CACP recommendations by the center cook. Those practices include the cook drinking directly from milk cartons and returning them for use, licking serving spoons and her fingers and continuing to use them for food preparation and service without washing them, and finding hair in food items from poorly bound hair.

Special Notes and Action Required:

This complaint is SUBSTANTIATED and the following actions are required and/or recommended. A full license will remain in effect at this time.

RECOMMENDED:
1. The center will continue to review the center policies on Supervision, and Discipline with all staff, and maintain the individual employee plans of correction regarding training for CACFP Safe Serve, and Behavior Management.

Consultant's Signature:

Ray Salsbury

Date:

09-08-2025