

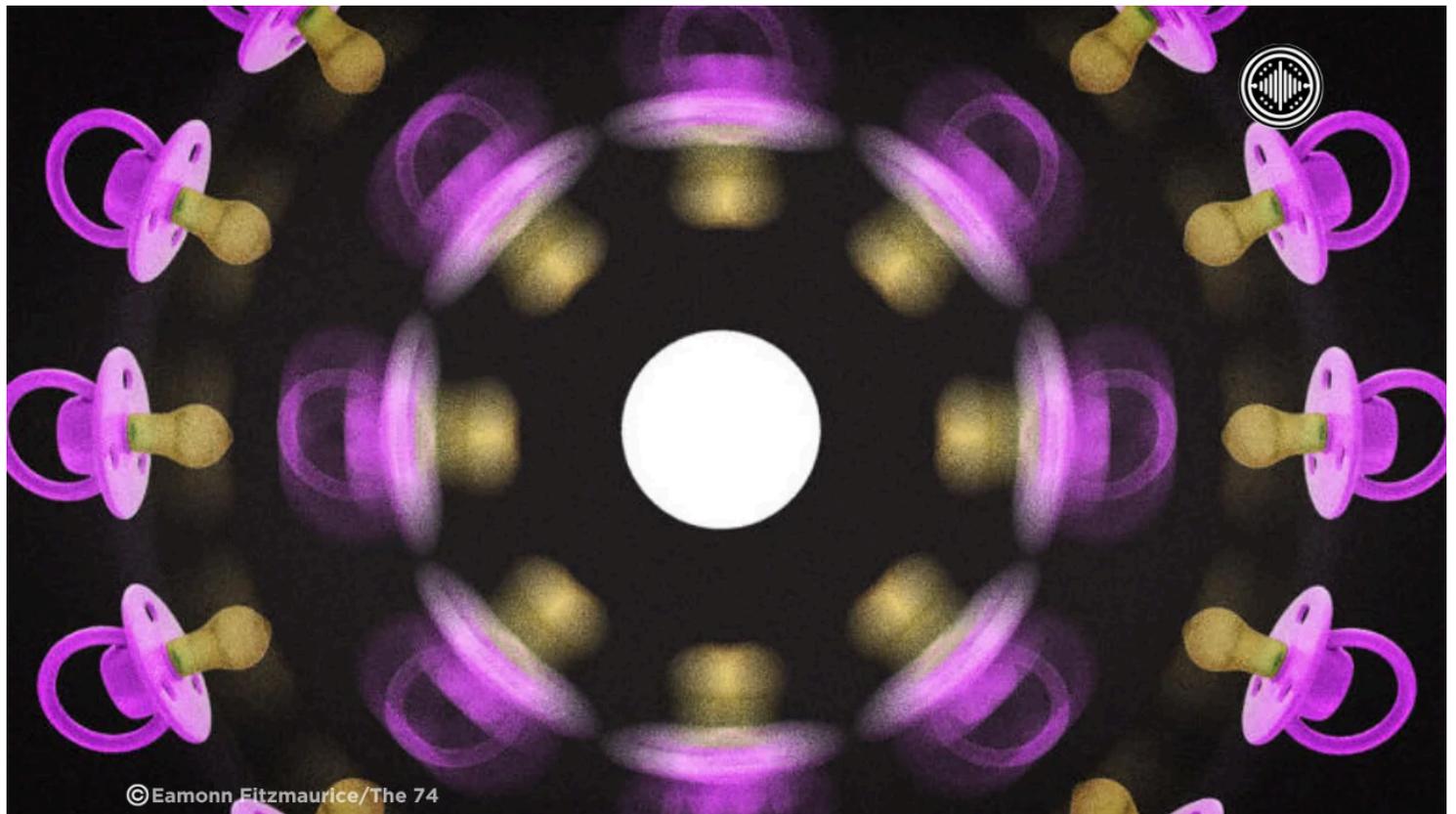
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## Some States Push to Loosen Child Care Rules, But Parents and Experts Push Back

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As federal pandemic relief funding dries up, several states are considering scaling back child care regulations to ease strain on the sector. But as lawmakers attempt to deregulate, citing cost concerns and staff shortages, advocates and families are fighting to maintain child safety standards, arguing that such rollbacks risk preventable tragedies.

In the wake of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) passed in 2021, many state child care systems received a much-needed financial boost. Now that the funds have been exhausted, lawmakers in at least nine states have introduced proposals to relax child care rules, most notably staff-to-child ratios. These ratios dictate how many young children each early educator can legally supervise, a cornerstone of maintaining safety and quality in early learning environments.

One of the most extreme proposals came out of Idaho. House Bill 243 (HB243) initially sought to eliminate all mandated caregiver-to-child ratios for small child care providers caring for six or fewer children, placing full discretion in the hands of individual providers. If passed in that form, Idaho would have been the first state in the country to remove ratio requirements for small child care providers caring for six or fewer children. The bill was rushed through the House with minimal notice, giving advocates and concerned citizens little time to prepare a response. “You can’t get child care providers and parents there in that amount of time,” said Christine Tiddens, Executive Director of Idaho Voices for Children, during an interview with local press.

Despite the bill’s momentum, opposition quickly built as the consequences of deregulation became real for many. One of the most compelling testimonies came from Kelly Emry, an Idaho mother whose 11-week-old son, Logan, tragically died while in the care of a home-based provider. According to a coroner’s report, Logan suffocated after being placed between a rolled-up blanket and a pillow and left unattended for hours. The caregiver was looking after 11 children alone, far above the legal limit. “It was completely preventable, and that’s what’s so hard for me to come to terms with,” Emry said in a podcast interview aired in January.

As the bill moved to the Senate, resistance intensified. Hundreds of advocates, parents, pediatricians, law enforcement, nurses, fire marshals, and child care professionals attended public hearings. Out of 40 individuals who signed up to testify, 38 opposed the bill. Logan’s uncle and other grieving family members gave emotional testimonies that appeared to sway sentiment. Thousands of emails and calls were directed at lawmakers, and Tiddens ensured every senator received the audio of Emry’s interview.

Though the bill narrowly passed the Senate committee, a strategic maneuver from an opposing senator led to a compromise. The Senate agreed unanimously to send the bill to amendment, ultimately removing the most dangerous elements. While ratios were

preserved, they were adjusted to be more lenient, leading to Idaho's ranking on national child care standards dropping from 41st to 45th, according to Child Care Aware of America.

Tiddens called the outcome "bittersweet," noting that the emotional testimonies of grieving parents were the turning point. "How could you listen and not have your heart changed?" she remarked.

As other states watch Idaho's experience, the debate underscores the difficult balance between fiscal responsibility and protecting the well-being of the nation's youngest. While easing regulations may offer short-term relief for stretched providers, it raises long-term concerns that should not be dismissed lightly. The Idaho case is a stark reminder that when it comes to children's lives, safety must remain the top priority.