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THE FINAL WORD

Forced unionization: Lawmakers should look into state's collusion in organizing babysitters

Our editorial

Lawmakers should get to bottom of the murky dealings under which a state-sponsored council helped unionize home-based child care providers throughout Michigan and continues to operate despite the Legislature's attempt to abolish it by stripping its funding.

Taxpayers deserve better answers than the vague ones that have been offered so far by the administration of Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

The Legislature last year ended payments to the Michigan Home Based Child Care Council, a liaison between the state's Department of Human Services and a controversial labor union that, under questionable circumstances, came to represent people who receive government subsidies for providing day care in their homes for children of low-income working parents.

Lawmakers recently learned that Human Services officials have defied them by shifting money within the department to keep the council's \$200,000 contract intact.

A Human Services spokesman said this was done because the department has a contractual obligation to fund the council through the end of this year. The spokesman also claimed that the Legislature's action, taken as part of its approval of the department's budget for 2010, did not include a specific prohibition against further payments to the council from other funds.

That tortured explanation shouldn't fly. Nor should the bigger question of how 40,000 home-based day care providers came to be represented by a new union, affiliated with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and United Auto Workers (UAW), when many of those providers weren't aware the union was being formed and weren't given a chance to vote on it. Not to mention that they are private business people, and not employees of the state.

Many of the providers object to having a union forced on them and having mandatory dues deducted from pay-



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ments they receive through the Department of Human Services. Lawsuits challenging the setup have been filed in state and federal courts.

The process that led to union involvement in child care in Michigan is as suspicious as it is

bureaucratically dense.

The Michigan Home Based Child Care Council was created in September 2006 through an agreement between the Human Services department and Mott Community College in Flint, which has training programs for child care providers. The council's job was to develop child care policies, but it also -- somehow -- became the intermediary between the department and a new AFSCME- and UAW-affiliated union called Child Care Providers Together Michigan.

In December 2006, AFSCME announced that the state had certified that a majority of home-based child care providers had chosen union affiliation. AFSCME said its drive to unionize child care providers encompassed eight other states, including neighboring Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin.

The [Mackinac Center for Public Policy](#), a free-market think tank involved in one of the lawsuits, reports that the Michigan union was certified after somewhat more than 5,000 day care providers voted in favor of it. That doesn't seem to meet the standard for approval of a 40,000-member union. And forcing union dues on care providers never given a chance to vote and who consider themselves self-employed is patently unfair.

Lawmakers are right to call a halt to funding. Human Services officials have a lot more explaining to do.