



le petit elephant
infant nursery ★ preschool ★ jrKindergarten

July 11, 2025

The Honorable Scott Wiener
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8620
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: FIX NEEDED – PROTECT ALL DAYCARES FROM CEQA ABUSE

Dear Senator Wiener:

On behalf of Le Petit Elephant Nursery and Preschool, I write to strongly urge you to revise the recently-enacted Senate Bill 131 to protect all daycares from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) misuse.

Senate Bill 131 sought to protect daycares from CEQA abuse, but unfortunately missed the mark and changes are necessary. While we sincerely appreciate the Legislature's attempt to exempt daycares from CEQA, that exemption does not apply to daycares located in a residential areas where the overwhelming majority of childcare facilities are (and should be) located. Instead, SB 131 merely provides a CEQA exemption for daycare facilities located in commercial, industrial, or agricultural areas. This is an odd fit that will increase traffic, vehicle miles traveled, and environmental exposures to our youngest residents. Many municipalities don't even allow childcare centers to be located in these areas as they expose a sensitive population to pollution and industrial waste by-products.

It is hard to imagine that anyone involved in CEQA's creation could have conceived that it would be used to try to kill a desperately needed neighborhood daycare facility.

I started Le Petit Elephant Nursery and Preschool in December 2015 with a simple dream: to create a nurturing, joyful, and inclusive space where children could learn through play, explore the outdoors, and be immersed in the magic of early childhood education. After years of working in schools and partnering with families in Napa, I knew our community needed something more, something that honored the whole child and supported working families, regardless of their income.

When I opened LPE, I poured my heart into building a program rooted in love, nature, language, and equity. We kept our class sizes small, paid our teachers fairly, and

offered need-based scholarships on a sliding scale so that every child could have access to quality care. I watched our little school blossom: families felt supported, children thrived, and our waitlist grew faster than I could have imagined.

With demand soaring and families reaching out daily, and a landlord who was not accommodating to our desire to expand on his property, I knew it was time to grow and find a new home. After an exhaustive 10 year search, we found the perfect space at 15 Chapel Hill that checked all of the boxes required by child care licensing for a childcare center (a rarity in Napa). It was the former LDS Church of Napa: beautiful, safe, and well-suited for young children and with it, we could open our doors to even more Napa families who were desperately seeking care. I worked closely with the City of Napa and local leaders to ensure everything was done by the book. We received our approvals, and I truly believed we were on our way.

We were also given incredible support on all levels, local, state, and federal for this expansion. This wasn't just my dream; it was recognized as part of a critical national effort to address the childcare crisis. We were awarded:

- \$1.2 million in federal ARPA funding to help expand access to care in Napa County.
- A \$1.5 million Major Renovation and Repair Grant from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).
- An additional \$90,000 Minor Renovation and Repair Grant from CDSS.
- And an additional \$150,000 grant from Napa County to support the project.

Every level of government agreed: this project mattered. It would create jobs, serve children and working families, and address an urgent need in our county.

But shortly after our plans were approved, a small group of four neighbors filed a lawsuit to block the project. Even though we followed every rule, met every zoning requirement, completed every traffic/fire safety study and had community and government support behind us, their legal challenge brought everything to a grinding halt.

The impact was devastating.

- We lost over a year of time. I couldn't build, couldn't enroll students, and couldn't move forward on any of our grant-funded work.
- The lawsuit caused us to lose our pre-approved SBA loan, which was critical to keeping the project financially viable. We were forced to obtain a high-interest, high-fee bridge loan to purchase the property so the property wouldn't get scooped up by a developer instead.
- We lost over \$500,000 in operating and scholarship funds, both raised and anticipated, that had been earmarked for serving local children.

This wasn't just a personal or financial setback. It was a direct blow to a publicly supported, community-centered effort to bring high-quality childcare to Napa. It nearly sank the entire project, all because a handful of NIMBY neighbors didn't want to hear "children laughing in their neighborhood" (pulled from public comment during the appeal hearing).

The experience was brutal. We were finally able to settle the CEQA lawsuit on terms laid out by the neighborhood and they had absolutely nothing to do with the environment and everything to do with controlling our project for their convenience. They took things away from the children of Napa that would have entirely benefitted the community for decades to come. Now I will have to answer to this small neighborhood group of five individuals called the "Alta Heights Neighborhood Coalition" in perpetuity if I ever want to offer more to the families of Napa. I was exhausted, heartbroken, and for a time, uncertain if I could keep going. But I couldn't walk away. Not from the children, not from the families, and not from this vision I've held so close for so long.

Le Petit Elephant is still standing. We're still here, serving families, weathering the storm, and continuing to fight for growth, equity, and access in early childhood education. This lawsuit didn't just hurt me, it hurt our entire community. But we're still dreaming. Still showing up. And we're not done yet. But now we need to make sure this doesn't ever happen to anyone again, and that is something you can help us with.

Please find below some relevant articles about our project:

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/california-ceqa-reform-20342916.php>

<https://www.kqed.org/news/12011579/lawsuit-from-napa-neighbors-could-block-much-needed-child-care-expansion>

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to amend Public Resources Code Section 21080.69(a)(1) to exempt all daycares from CEQA, as follows:
21080.69. (a) Except as provided in subdivision (b), this division does not apply to any of the following projects:
(1) A project that consists exclusively of a day care center, as defined in Section 1596.76 of the Health and Safety Code, ~~that is not located in a residential area.~~

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at MissMilli@LPEnapa.com or 707-690-8797.

Sincerely,

Milli Pal Pintacsi
M.A. Columbia University Graduate School of Education
Founder/Head of School Le Petit Elephant Nursery and Preschool

cc: The Honorable Mike McGuire, Senate President Pro Tempore
The Honorable Robert Rivas, Assembly Speaker
The Honorable Christopher Cabaldon, California State Senate