



**Submitted Testimony
National Association for the Education of Young Children
(NAEYC)**

**Committee on Education & Labor Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary,
and Secondary Education Hearing
Solving America’s Childcare Crisis: Supporting Parents, Children, and the Economy**

**Hearing Held February 6, 2020
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Chairman Sablan, Ranking Member Allen and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony about the vital role that high-quality early childhood education plays in fostering a strong economy, and in supporting the workforce of both today and tomorrow.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a 90+ year-old non-profit organization comprised of 60,000 members and 52 Affiliates across the country, committed to a vision in which all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

We are grateful to this committee for exploring and elevating solutions to America’s child care crisis, which our members experience every day. We all know how working families make sacrifices and hard choices in order to put the needs of their children first. Yet when it comes to child care, parents shouldn’t have to choose between affordability and quality. Educators shouldn’t have to subsist on poverty-level wages in order to subsidize the costs of care. And society’s investments shouldn’t create a false dichotomy between “care” and “education” for our youngest children, whose positive growth and development depends on having both.

Decades of research have told us too much about the critical nature of the early years--and the benefits that accrue to individuals and to society when we invest in those years--for us to continue to sell our children, families, educators, and economy short. The current child care crisis is far-reaching and, as such, has led families to look to their elected officials on both sides of the aisle for the kind of support they need. Eighty-three percent of parents with children under the age of 5 say finding quality, affordable child care is a problem.¹ Likewise, 70 percent of voters are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports child care – including majorities of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.²

¹ Retrieved online from: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/09/13/457470/affordable-child-care-early-learning-families/>

² Retrieved online from: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/overwhelming-number-voters-support-funding-early-learning/>

The interest and urgency in this issue is rising, and as each of the witnesses at the sub-committee hearing testified, bold investments are necessary to create a system that provides families with accessible, affordable, and high-quality child care and establishes a strong workforce with qualifications and compensation that benefit the children they serve.

In recognition of the need and the benefit, Congress has taken significant steps to boost investment, improve access, and raise quality; yet they remain steps. For example:

- In March 2018, Congress passed the biggest increase to CCDBG in its history. This investment - and subsequent increases - have allowed states to help more families afford child care and reduce waitlists; to provide more child care options and improve quality; and to raise child care payments to providers so that more providers can afford to accept children receiving subsidies. However, because the system has been so chronically underfunded, CCDBG still serves fewer than 1 in 6 eligible children.
- In FY 2018, CCAMPIS funding was increased to \$50 million dollars to support more low-income parents in higher education through campus-based child care services, but the overall number of post-secondary institutions providing child care to students - not to mention providing professional preparation for prospective early childhood educators - continues to dwindle.
- Head Start programs have provided more than 37 million children with early learning opportunities since 1965. In 2018, Head Start accounted for one-third of child care programs in rural counties - yet 60% of rural Americans still live in a child care desert.

These data points help explain why, when asked by Chairman Sablan, “What, if anything, have you seen change in terms of the availability and quality of child care since you had your oldest child of 14?” witness Angélica González answered, “Honestly, I have not seen anything change.” Ms. González’s response speaks to the reality for many parents – that while increased CCDBG funding and momentum at state and federal levels has resulted in greater investments, important advances, and more children reached – pressing challenges still remain for each individual.

Compounding the issue of affordability for families is the essential need for a strong early childhood workforce with appropriate education and compensation. Early childhood educators and child care providers face an impossible challenge in earning too little to remain in the profession but unable to raise prices for families for fear of pricing out the children they serve.

Yet as hearing witness Dr. Taryn Morrissey explained, “We know higher-paid workers provide higher-quality care.” The same is true of workers with more experience and higher-level qualifications. There is significant research on this topic, and comprehensive studies indicate that, based on the “high level of complex knowledge and competencies indicated by the science of child development, higher teacher qualifications are significantly positively correlated with higher quality in early childhood education and care.” And it’s *high-quality* early childhood education and care that pays off; in other words, paying the costs of high-quality early childhood education is a good deal for taxpayers, and a revenue-generating investment over time, precisely because it results in a broad range of benefits that accrue both to individuals and society at large.



Yet in the absence of these investments, we remain in a detrimental cycle – low professional pay leads to high turnover in the workforce, which leads to greater scarcity and lower-quality early childhood programs, and to a disruptive experience for families and children at the exact time in their lives that their development thrives on consistency.

Steps must be taken so that early childhood educators are able to gain the experience and higher education necessary to provide quality programs and to be compensated for the valuable, complex work they perform. Until then, at an average wage of \$10.60/hour, the poor compensation in the early childhood field undermines quality and diminishes the benefits of early learning to children, families, and our economy.

We encourage Congress to continue to invest in CCDBG so that states can raise their payment rates for child care providers to the federally recommended level, and to begin to have the kind of funding in the system that simultaneously can solve for the challenges of access, quality, and compensation.

In addition, for the early childhood workforce to attain the necessary level of professional standards, public investment in child care must be expanded to include programs that provide grants and scholarships, increase compensation, and improve retention of early childhood providers with credentials from accredited institutions. To make academic programs for early childhood community college and university students more accessible and less of a financial burden, existing programs like Pell Grants, Teacher Quality Partnership grants, Public Service Loan Forgiveness, and CCAMPIS need to be expanded and funding increased.

Finally, NAEYC is encouraged by the new and innovative measures outlined in the Child Care for Working Families Act, which builds on the success of investments in child care assistance and takes this investment to the next level. NAEYC is proud to support this legislation because Americans do need a comprehensive public investment that delivers on the science of early learning and advances our current and future workforce. By pairing federal investment with state partnerships to expand access, address affordability, increase quality, and invest in early childhood education professionals across settings, including family child care, the Child Care for Working Families Act is an important opportunity to accelerate our nation's ability to thrive and compete in an increasingly global economy. We hope all members of Congress can support this bipartisan bill in the House.

Thank you to the Committee for its time and attention on this important issue and for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of NAEYC.