

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the primary federal grant program that provides child care assistance for families and funds child care quality initiatives. CCDBG is administered to states in formula block grants. States use the grants to subsidize child care for working families earning low incomes. Most of this assistance is administered through vouchers or certificates, which can be used by parents for the provider or program of their choice. In addition, the law requires no less than 4 percent of CCDBG funding in each state to be used for activities to improve the overall quality of child care for all children within a community. CCDBG also funds Child Care Resource and Referral services and quality projects for infants and toddlers.

NACCRRA recommends that Congress conduct hearings on the condition of child care in the United States, paying special attention to the lessons learned from the military child care program. Twenty-two years ago, Department of Defense (DoD) child care was not accountable, quality was poor, and the safety of children was compromised. Congress passed the Military Child Care Act in 1989 to ensure that funds would be spent in an accountable manner, that care would be of quality, and that child care would be provided in an affordable manner for families. NACCRRA calls on Congress to use the lessons of the military to reauthorize and strengthen CCDBG so that civilian families have access to affordable, quality child care in all communities. Congress should also ensure that funding is sufficient so that eligible children are able to receive assistance.

NACCRRA recommends that:

Congress:

- Reauthorize CCDBG in the 112th Congress and appropriate sufficient funding to ensure that eligible children are able to receive assistance, and that states can meet quality improvement goals.
- Conduct hearings that focus on the safety, quality and affordability of child care.
- Establish quality child care as a goal for any use of related federal funding (i.e., funds used for child care through CCDBG, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] program, and the Social Services Block Grant [SSBG]).
- Set clear expectations about what quality means and establish a floor for what is minimally acceptable.
- Require states to conduct comprehensive background checks on all paid child care providers who regularly care for unrelated children.
- Require all paid child care providers who care for unrelated children on a regular basis to complete 40 hours of initial training (primarily CPR and other basic safety and health training in addition to child development) as well as 24 hours of annual training.
- Require quarterly unannounced inspections of licensed providers (the same standard Congress required of the military child care system).
- Require CCDBG quality funds to be linked to measurable program outcomes, especially training and preparation of the workforce.
- Require federal minimum health and safety protections for children for receipt of federal subsidies.
- Require states to provide an evidence-based rationale for any child care that is exempt from licensing and to post such information on the Internet.
- Require states to share information with Child Care Resource and Referral agencies about license revocations and suspensions and other information that will help parents select safe, quality child care for their children.
- Require states to include child care in disaster planning, response, and recovery efforts.
- Require states to not only conduct current market rate studies, but use the studies in setting subsidy levels to ensure that families can access no less than 75 percent of providers in the community; and, provide higher subsidy rates for nontraditional hour care, care for infants and toddlers, and care in underserved communities (rural or urban).
- Require states to create or strengthen Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to tier provider payment rates based on quality indicators and to ensure that low income children are in quality care.

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- Permanently authorize the set-aside for infant-toddler care, school-age care, Child Care Resource and Referral services, and Child Care Aware®, and increase funding for these programs.
- Increase the federal quality set-aside immediately to 12 percent of the basic block grant, moving toward 25 percent over time, bringing child care on a parity with Head Start.
- Include a specific set-aside for licensing-related activities to promote the safety and healthy development of children.
- Authorize funds for pilots in rural communities in areas of high poverty to enable braiding of early childhood funding to better meet the child care needs of parents with children (meeting the criteria of the strongest funding stream to ensure safe, quality care for children).
- Require the Department of Health and Human Services, in conjunction with the National Academy of Sciences, to determine the cost of quality child care by setting and report back to Congress.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

- Permanently authorize a Department of Early Care and Learning within HHS, which encompasses the Office of Child Care and the Office of Head Start, providing sufficient administrative funding to ensure adequate oversight and technical assistance to the States.
- Authorize the Office of Child Care to impose penalties when state plans fail to meet minimum protections for children, including poor state monitoring practices.
- Establish definitions and specific qualifications for child care paid for by federal funding
- Support state efforts to create an infrastructure through which quality improvement projects can be systematically supported.

States:

- Require all paid child care providers who regularly care for unrelated children (as a business) to obtain a state license.
- Require child care paid for with federal funds to meet minimum health and safety protections for children.
- Require transparency in licensing and ensure parents have access to information about licensing and violations (i.e., require states to post inspection reports and substantiated complaints on the Internet).
- Require that the input of parents be sought as states make child care public policy decisions (through public forums, the Internet or other means).
- Require comprehensive background checks, including federal and state fingerprint checks, on all paid adult child care providers who regularly care for unrelated children.
- Require all paid child care providers who care for unrelated children on a regular basis to complete 40 hours of initial training (primarily CPR and other basic safety and health training in addition to child development) as well as 24 hours of annual training.
- Require quarterly unannounced inspections of licensed providers (the same standard Congress required of the military child care system).
- Require states to have more effective sliding fee assistance phase-out plans to ensure parents who receive a modest raise do not lose all child care assistance.
- Raise provider payment rates or reimbursement rates to at least the current 75th percentile of market providers and allow families to receive assistance for 12 months without recertification similar to Head Start eligibility.
- Require states to apply early learning standards (for children from birth through age 5) to all types of early care and education settings including child care.