

## **Safe, Affordable Child Care: Proposals for the Stimulus Package & CCDBG Reauthorization**

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### **NACCRRA, November 2008**

The National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) is our nation's leading voice for child care. We work with more than 800 state and local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&Rs) agencies nationwide. These agencies help ensure that families in 99 percent of all populated zip codes in the United States have access to high-quality, affordable child care. In 2006, local CCR&Rs reported nearly 10 million contacts with parents to provide them with various services, including referrals to child care, subsidy payments, consumer education, language and literacy programs and activities, and training workshops.

CCR&Rs are front-line staff, serving as emergency responders, for parents trying to cope with the worst economic crisis in generations. Parents rely on child care in order to go to work to support their families and, just as important, to ensure that their children are well-cared for in safe environments. However, with 10 million Americans out of work, and another 6.7 million working part-time because they simply can't find full-time work, child care is becoming a parent's nightmare.

#### **The impact of the current economy on children needing child care:**

- On average, care for an infant in a child care center costs between \$4,542 and \$14,591 a year depending upon the state in which a family lives. The average annual cost for a 4 year old in a child care center is between \$3,380 and \$10,787. As parents lose their jobs or have their hours reduced, they are pulling their children from child care centers and putting them in potentially dangerous informal arrangements where they hope and pray nothing bad will happen.
- Child care centers are closing throughout the country due to an inability to meet payroll and other expenses as parents pull their children out for economic reasons.
- States with cash-flow problems are sending payments late to child care centers, which has caused centers in turn to miss payments or make partial or late payments jeopardizing the operation of the center.
- States are cutting child care subsidies and reducing eligibility due to state budget problems just at a time when families need help with child care costs the most.

#### **The Child Care Snapshot: Children in Child Care Every Week**

Over 11 million children under age 5 spend a portion of their day, every week, in the care of someone other than their mother. The average young child of a working mom spends about 36 hours a week in such care. About one-quarter of these children are in multiple child care arrangements strung together by their parents. The quality of the care varies greatly and many working families struggle with the cost of care. With the current economic crisis, quality child care settings are even more important to the healthy development of children. In too many cases involving low income families, child care is the only place that children may receive a nutritious meal and snack, given that food is often one of the first places parents sacrifice as their family budget becomes tighter.

#### **Safe, Quality, Child Care Should be Part of Any Economic Stimulus Package**

Quality child care is the linchpin between working families and safe children. Parents need child care in order to get and keep a job. Children need a safe place to be where they can learn and continue their development appropriately, which is particularly critical as family stress increases during uncertain times. Any economic recovery package should:

- Provide a \$1 billion increase in child care funding (with no state match) to ensure that families who need assistance in affording child care can get the help they need;
- Encourage states to continue child care assistance for parents who have lost their job (or had their hours reduced) while they look for employment (most states discontinue assistance at the end of the month or within a few weeks, whichever is soonest).
- Encourage states to work with child care centers to provide temporary gap assistance to stay open while filling child care vacancies.

## **Long-term Strategies to Strengthen the Quality of Child Care and Improve Child Care Access:**

Families need safe and stable child care in order to find and retain employment, yet for too many families, the quality of child care in their community falls far below the mark. High quality child care is important for healthy child development and to ensure that children start kindergarten ready to succeed. Part of high quality child care is making sure that child care is safe. Part of high quality child care is making sure that basic health and safety policies are in place and followed. And, part of high quality child care is making sure that providers are trained in child development to ensure that children aren't "watched" but actually engaged in developmentally appropriate activities to ensure healthy development.

Child care standards vary greatly among the states. Only 8 states (Illinois, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Texas, Oregon, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Ohio) plus the District of Columbia address all 10 of the basic health and safety standards that pediatricians and child development experts recommend for minimum protections for children.

Background check requirements vary greatly by state and the reality is that most states do not conduct a complete background check on child care providers. 21 states and the District of Columbia do not conduct fingerprint checks and 43 states do not check the sex offender registry for child care center staff. Parents simply can't know if a provider has a violent criminal history unless a thorough background check is completed.

Only three states (Tennessee, Nevada, and Missouri) plus the Department of Defense conduct monitoring inspections at least quarterly. In fact 8 states (New York, Alaska, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Connecticut, Alabama, Colorado, and California) do not even conduct inspections on an annual basis. Nine states grant a family child care home license to providers whose homes have not even received a visit to ensure that the setting is safe for children.

### **As part of the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), NACCRRA recommends that the reauthorization bill:**

- Include written health and safety protections appropriate to the setting of the provider and the age of the children that apply to all child care centers and family child care homes where providers care for at least one unrelated for a fee on a regular basis. *[At a minimum, these standards must address requirements for first-aid, CPR, sanitation procedures and control of communicable disease, child abuse identification and reporting, background screenings, prevention of sudden infant death syndrome, emergency and disaster procedures, medication administration, and basic child guidance policies].*
- Require all paid providers caring for unrelated children on a regular to have at least 40 hours of appropriate and accessible health and safety and child development training, including training on state early learning guidelines and information about working with children with disabilities and other special needs, before providing care to children, and 24 hours annually thereafter.
- Require all paid providers caring for unrelated children on a regular basis to have a comprehensive background check including a state and federal fingerprint check as well as a check of the child abuse registry and sex offender registry;
- Require all paid providers caring for unrelated children on a regular basis to be subject to quarterly unannounced inspections and that inspection reports be made available on the internet for parents to read.