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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

of the

AMERICAN PUBLIC HUMAN SERVICES ASSOCIATION

Submitted to the

SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

HEARING ON

EXAMINING QUALITY AND SAFETY IN CHILD CARE PROGRAMS: GIVING
WORKING FAMILIES, SECURITY, CONFIDENCE AND PEACE OF MIND

September 21, 2011



Chairman Mikulski, Ranking Member Burr and Honorable Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee on Children and Families, on behalf of the American Public Human Services Association and the state child care administrators that it represents, we respectfully submit this statement for the record regarding the Senate hearing on “examining quality and safety in child care: giving working families security, confidence and peace of mind.”

APHS A is a nonprofit, bipartisan organization representing state and local human service professionals for more than 80 years. APHS A serves state child care administrators, through the National Association of State Child Care Administrators, and supports its members in developing, promoting and implementing child care and early learning policies that improve the well-being of children and the quality of child care. We bring the state child care administrators’ perspective on issues facing the nation’s low-income children and families to the forefront of Congress and the Administration.

APHS A submitted comments on the previous Senate hearing held in June on “getting the most bang for the buck: quality early education and care.” Our testimony primarily focused on how states are using the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to improve the quality of child care. We are pleased to see that the Senate is interested in building on this topic by taking a deeper look into current investments in high-quality early education and care programs and determine what policies are needed to ensure children’s safety through the program’s reauthorization. In this testimony, we not only discuss the importance of this vital program, but also offer key recommendations that would make meaningful improvements in the CCDBG. Our recommendations work to remove barriers within the block grant so that low-income families can maintain their jobs, children can be school ready, and states can continue seeing noteworthy achievements to improve quality in child care from their use of the block grant.

The CCDBG has not been reauthorized since the 1996 welfare reform act. Unfortunately, federal child care funding levels have not aligned with program needs and the expenditures related to child care costs. States are currently administering the block grant using FY 2002 funding levels. This has become extremely problematic for states with the rise in inflation. The tough economy and decreases in state and federal budgets have also exacerbated the issue, especially during a time when jobs are scarce. States are experiencing increased waiting lists for child care and dramatic reductions in reimbursement rates are occurring so fewer families are able to gain access to high-quality programs.

The 4 percent set-aside amount for quality activities in the CCDBG is also too limited to support the kind of quality improvements needed to ensure that high-quality care is more readily available for low-income families. We know through research that high-quality care contributes to improving the developmental, social, emotional and educational needs of our children and can provide a cost savings in human service programs over time. These important investments ultimately help support children’s learning and development and prepare them for school. Therefore, it is critical to expand quality dollars.

The CCDBG also provides a significant amount of flexibility for states to offer professional development and training opportunities for child care workers, which are essential components for ensuring high-quality child care. Striving for better health and safety standards in child care programs is

another critical component. States use the CCDBG to ensure that children complete their immunizations and child care providers receive health and safety training. Parents need to have peace of mind knowing that their children are safe in their child care programs and feel confident in their early learning environment. We would like to see these activities continue and that states have the necessary funds available to support other initiatives that focus on improving quality and health and safety standards.

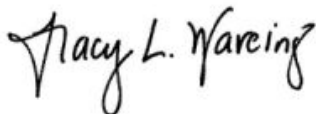
Many states will apply for a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT ELC) grant. These funds will assist states in raising the bar to improve quality and health and safety standards in early learning settings. Grant award winners can also use RTT ELC funds to leverage their use of quality dollars, expand access to low-income children and families and raise their program quality levels through a tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System. While some states are well-positioned to meet the requirements of this grant program, other states will not be a part of this competition as they need more system improvements to become eligible. These funds are also temporary and not designed to maintain sustainability for high-quality early learning programs.

We urge Congress to keep these vital functions in mind and to strengthen the CCDBG to move low-income families into the workforce and support investments in high-quality child care.

We recommend the following:

- Reauthorize the CCDBG and preserve its funding levels;
- Maintain flexibility in the CCDBG for states to support areas within the program that present the greatest need;
- Blend targeted funds within the quality set-aside to support employment for parents and promote quality care for children;
- Relax federal requirements for matching funds;
- Consolidate and streamline federal standards and requirements that focus on improving quality in early learning programs to reduce inefficiencies and duplication of efforts; and
- Support states' efforts to address the workforce development needs of child care workers that promote high-quality care and early education.

We look forward to working with Congress on these recommendations. Thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments and your interest in examining the investment of quality early education and care. If you have any questions, please contact Rashida Brown at (202) 682-0100 x225 or rashida.brown@aphsa.org.



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