

Recommendations for Reauthorizing the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Improving the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit

High-quality, affordable child care helps families work and children learn. Current funding levels allow only one in six eligible children with assistance under the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which helps families with low incomes afford care so they can work and helps states improve the quality of child care.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant has not been reauthorized since 1996. An ongoing collaboration of national and state organizations has developed a reauthorization proposal that provides Congress and the Administration with a detailed road map for needed systemic reforms to improve the quality of child care and to help more eligible families have access to high-quality child care opportunities. For this reauthorization, Congress should focus both on increasing access to child care and improving the quality of child care.

Middle-class families also struggle with the costs of child care. The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit provides important help for these families.

Recommendations for the CCDBG Reauthorization:

No reduction in access or quality: The reauthorization should not lead to the reduction in the number of eligible children receiving assistance nor in the quality of services. Access to and the quality of child care are important, interlocking components of child care to meet the needs of working families and the needs of children to be healthy, safe, and supported in their development and learning.

Health and safety: The reauthorization bill should require comprehensive state and federal criminal background checks (with due process protections) that are done in a timely fashion and are portable from program to program. Programs should be subject to regular health and safety inspections as well as monitoring and assistance for quality improvement.

Teacher knowledge, skills, and compensation: States should create an integrated professional development system that includes professional standards that specify the qualifications, content of education, and professional development of early childhood education professionals, including (1) initial and ongoing professional development requirements; (2) career pathways to achieve increased qualifications and fair compensation; (3) articulation/transfer of professional development credentials, courses, credits, degrees, and student performance-based competencies; (4) an advisory structure to examine needs and provide policy recommendations; (5) workforce data for planning improvements; and (6) financing of the integrated professional development systems, including supports for programs,

individuals, and the system's infrastructure. Financial resources should be provided to help individuals attain professional development and credentials, and to provide fair compensation.

Quality improvement: States should develop and implement ways to improve the quality of child care, with priority to helping providers and programs that serve a significant share of children from families with low incomes. Such support must include sufficient financial and other resources for strategies that help providers at all levels of quality improve, including increased rates linked to the quality of a provider or program, initiatives to support the education of teachers tied to increased compensation, and ongoing financial resources to assist providers in meeting and sustaining higher levels of quality. States should also use payment practices that reflect those used by private-pay parents. Children should receive a developmental screening within a reasonable time after entering care, with referral to appropriate services as needed.

Affordability and continuity: Continuity and consistency of care is important to young children, families, and providers. Families should receive child care assistance for one year, regardless of changes in employment or income, before having to re-determine their eligibility for assistance.

Subsidy system effectiveness: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should provide technical assistance to states on effective payment mechanisms and on developing and conducting statistically valid and reliable market rate surveys.

Infants and toddlers: The reauthorization bill should set aside a portion of CCDBG discretionary funds for support to programs serving infants and toddlers, such as family child care networks, infant-toddler specialists, and professional development for infant-toddler staff, among other quality initiatives.

Supply of high-quality care in underserved areas and for special populations: States should implement strategies to increase the supply of quality child care in underserved areas, such as low-income and rural areas, and for underserved populations, including infants and toddlers, school-age children, children with disabilities and other special needs, children in families with limited English proficiency, and families with non-standard working hours.

Facilities The legislation should create a separate authorization and appropriation to help improve the quality of child care facilities.

Investing in access and quality: Congress should increase the mandatory and discretionary funding in order to increase the number of eligible children who benefit from child care assistance and to improve the quality of care. For families with low and moderate incomes, the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit should be made refundable and have its value adjusted for inflation.