

**Statement of
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**House Education and Workforce Committee Hearing
Strengthening Welfare to Work with Child Care**

March 6, 2018

Chairman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the vital role that high quality early childhood education plays in fostering a strong economy, and supporting the workforce of both today and tomorrow. For more than 25 years I have worked in a variety of practice, policy and research settings devoted to addressing the needs of young children and their families. Currently I serve as President of the Governing Board of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), an organization committed to ensuring that all young children learn and thrive in a society where they reach their full potential. Beyond my volunteer service to NAEYC, I am the President and CEO of The Campagna Center, in Alexandria, Virginia. The Campagna Center serves more than 2,000 children through a range of early childhood education, school age, youth, and family development programs that foster child and family success and self-sufficiency. We succeed in our efforts to educate young children and support their parents by leveraging public and private resources at the federal, state and local levels.

Throughout my time in this field, I have been witness to children who blossomed with the support of knowledgeable, skilled early childhood educators, and to families who have been able to build their lives because they had access to child care that allowed them to work towards a sustainable financial future. And yet I have also been witness to families who were forced to step back from the workforce; turn down a promotion; or choose between medicine, child care, and food on the table, because of the unavailability and unaffordability of child care in their communities.

Working families make sacrifices and hard choices every day in order to put the needs of their children first. But when it comes to child care, parents shouldn't have to choose between affordability and quality. 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. This research firmly demonstrates that early experiences directly affect brain development and future learning, behavior, and health. Adverse experiences in the early years can have consequential and lasting impacts for children, families and our society.^{i,ii} Therefore, it is imperative that we attend to the environments, and the adults in those environments, where young children spend their time as parents engage in the workforce.

Beyond the obvious and important benefits that investing in the early years can mean for children, there are also economic benefits. Today, early childhood education contributes 1.1 percent to the gross domestic product, equivalent to \$163 billion, according to a new report released by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.ⁱⁱⁱ Research also supports that access to child care enhances productivity at work and reduces absences among employees.^{iv} In short, an investment in the early care and education and its workforce is an investment that strengthens our economy.

Yet we continue to underfund the very systems that could support the high-quality child care that we need to boost positive outcomes for children, families and the economy. Nationally, the vast majority of children (84 percent) do not receive the child care assistance and support for which they are eligible. In my home state of Virginia, this holds true for approximately 90 percent of children.

This lack of assistance and support leaves families to shoulder the burden of child care costs – and that burden is significant. Nationally, Child Care Aware reports that in at least 30 states, the cost of child care for infants and toddlers exceeds the average cost of tuition at a four-year, in-state college or university. In Virginia, early education for children 0 to 5 ranges between \$10,850 and \$16,189 per year, representing between 16 and 24 percent of the median income, and putting higher-quality care, which costs more, even further out of reach from the families and children who are most likely to benefit from it. These costs, and the percentage of income required to cover them, jeopardizes a parent’s ability to pay for care while remaining engaged in the workforce and forces families into impossible choices.

At the same time, educators are subsisting on poverty-level wages in order to subsidize the costs of care and are themselves being forced into impossible choices. Even though we know that skilled, supported and knowledgeable early childhood educators are critical to providing high-quality early childhood education, they are paid an average wage of \$10.40/hour. This low compensation not only undermines quality and diminishes the benefits of early childhood education, it also means that 46 percent of educators are part of families enrolled in at least one public safety net program, compared with 26 percent of those in the broader workforce. Even for the most committed early childhood educators, it is difficult to remain in the field for a long period of time on poverty-level wages.

We are here today to talk about work and child care; the truth is that this conversation is about three workforces—first, the broader, current workforce, made up of families with young children who need (but often can’t find) accessible, affordable child care; second, the future workforce, populated by these young children, who need (but often can’t find) high-quality care and education to acquire the cognitive and socio-emotional skills they will need to succeed in that

workforce; and third, the child care workforce itself, which is what supports both the current and the future workforce. All three of these workforces must be attended to in any solution that addresses the affordability, accessibility, and quality of child care and early learning.

At The Campagna Center, 98% of the families in our early childhood programs are living at 100% of the federal poverty level. Yet at the end of our most recent program year, only 5% of them received TANF; 43% received SNAP. Seventy percent of them are working families—and they reflect the broader landscape of families with young children. In Virginia, 67% of young children have all available parents in the workforce^v; and indeed, many of these parents are working multiple, often low-wage jobs to make ends meet. The problem is not that parents are not or do not want to work. It is that their work doesn't allow them to afford child care, and that the child care they can afford on their salaries is unreliable and of poor quality. For example to be eligible for child care assistance in most localities in Virginia a family must earn below 160% of poverty. The average cost of infant care is more than \$12,000 per year, nearly impossible to afford for single mother earning less than \$26,500 per year. According to Voices for Virginia's Children, Virginia has a waiting list for child care subsidy of over 5,600 children on July 1, 2017.

I believe the data bears out my perceptions: work rates are high among families receiving public benefits, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Sixty two percent of such households with a non-disabled adult worked while receiving SNAP and 87% work in the prior or subsequent year.^{vi} Parents work in low wage jobs that not only make it difficult to afford child care, but fails to provide sufficient earnings to meet basic needs.

Working families need support and solutions, including child care solutions; I am confident this is something about which we can all agree. As we think about child care solutions for working families, we need to pay attention to quality across settings—centers and family child care. We know that parents value choice when it comes to making decisions about early education settings, especially for their youngest children. Across the country, family child care plays a critical role in addressing the needs of military families, immigrant families, rural families, parents working evenings and weekends. Families should be able to choose what meets their needs. And in Alexandria, family child care is an important option for working families as we think about our overall supply: there are so few centers, and the price, as we noted earlier, is high.

At The Campagna Center, we have had firsthand experience supporting 19 Family Child Care providers in our community who are committed to the profession and providing high quality early care and education. These providers have engaged in the necessary work to achieve the required credentials and have increased their quality in large part because of funds invested in them.

To me, this is the critical point: quality and access improve when funds are invested in them. For that reason, I can say that NAEYC, The Campagna Center, and many of our friends and allies were thrilled by the sweeping bipartisan budget deal that will provide an additional \$5.8 billion to the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) over two years. This funding, which amounts to \$2.9 billion each year, represents the largest increase in federal child care funding in history and is an essential step towards the fulfillment of a vision, outlined by NAEYC, in which all children have equitable access to high-quality, developmentally-appropriate early learning delivered by diverse, effective educators and leaders working within a compensation and recognition system that supports their excellence.

This increase is indeed a historic investment and a big step—but still a step. The Child Care for Working Families Act builds on its success and takes this investment to the next level. Both organizations that I represent, NAEYC and The Campagna Center, are proud to support this legislation because Americans 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 dramatically expand access, address affordability, increase quality, and invest in early childhood education professionals. It is also an important opportunity to accelerate our nation's ability to thrive and compete in an increasingly global economy.

There are several important provisions in the Child Care and Working Families Act that I believe are worth highlighting this morning, as we talk about child care, welfare, and work. First, it expands access and makes it possible for more working parents to benefit from subsidy assistance. In addition to expanding access, the Act aims to increase workforce training and compensation supports such that wages aligns with credentials and experiences leading to an increase in the number of early educators earning a living wage. Without the benefit of critical public investments, it is impossible to address growing and stark wage disparities.

Revising the compensation issues addressed earlier in this testimony, I want to draw attention to the fact that, according to a recent report released by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, half of teachers in private centers hold bachelor's degrees; these same teachers earn, on average, \$12.83 per hour, compared to those working in school-based programs that earn more than \$20 per hour.^{viii} Given the knowledge, skills and competencies required to effectively meet the education and development needs of children, birth through age 8, finding solutions to address how we compensate and support early educators who are committed to this work is critical.

The Act also lays out a plan designed to increase federal-state partnerships to make preschool a reality for more three and four year olds residing in families whose income does not exceed 150% of the state median income. While many states have succeeded in creating robust preschool programs that help insure low income families have access to high quality early

education, many having not made enough progress and consequently too many children arrive at kindergarten behind their peers in terms of academic and social and emotional skills. In Virginia, we have made some strides, but currently our state preschool program has not realized its full potential. Serving only four year olds, many communities across the state are unable to access the matching funds needed to draw down state funds to serve all eligible children. This Act provides an opportunity to accelerate our progress.

There are many additional important provisions that the Act addresses that include: a) making certain that the needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities are included; b) urging more articulation agreements between institutions of higher education; c) encouraging program accreditation as a pathway for increasing quality; d) providing funding to support increased service duration requirements in Head Start; and e) elevating the need to eliminate suspension and expulsion as appropriate practices in early care and education. Each of these activities represent important opportunities to facilitate continued progress for children and the early educators who serve them.

Certainly we have all heard the phrase “now more than ever.” Yet I invoke this phrase today because it continues to speak the truth. Never before have we had more knowledge about how we can improve outcomes and better position our children, and the adults who educate and support them, for success. It is time that we act on that knowledge. I thank the Committee for its time and attention this morning and look forward to answering any questions you may have now or in the future.

ⁱ Institute of Medicine (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/9824>

ⁱⁱ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2010). *Early Experiences Can Alter Gene Expression and Affect Long-Term Development: Working Paper No. 10*. <http://www.developingchild.net>

ⁱⁱⁱ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2018. *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24984>.

^{iv} Karen Shellenback, *Child Care & Parent Productivity: Making the Business Case*, (Ithaca: Cornell Cooperative Extension, December 2004). <http://government.cce.cornell.edu/doc/pdf/ChildCareParentProductivity.pdf>

^v <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force?loc=48&loct=2#detailed/2/48/false/870,573,869,36,868/any/11472,11473>

^{vi} <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/chart-book-snap-helps-struggling-families-put-food-on-the-table#part5>

^{vii} Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (2017). *Virginia Early Childhood Workforce Survey 2017*. <http://www.vecf.org/reports-and-tools/>.