



TESTIMONY OF DR. LYNETTE M. FRAGA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
CHILD CARE AWARE® OF AMERICA
TO THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT
REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
January 6, 2016

Chairman Meadows, Ranking Member Connolly, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Good morning and thank you. I am Dr. Lynette Fraga and I serve as the Executive Director of Child Care Aware® of America. I am here today to provide information and answer your questions about the transition of the Army Fee Assistance Program from the General Services Administration (GSA) back to Child Care Aware® of America. This charge and responsibility is not only squarely within the nonprofit mission of Child Care Aware® of America, it is also very personal. My father is a retired sergeant major who proudly served in the Army for nearly 30 years, I was the spouse of a former Army active duty soldier and Reservist, and I worked, among other professional roles, with Army Child and Youth Services, as a director of a child development center. These personal and professional experiences have afforded me a unique firsthand insight into the very real needs and challenges of Army families and I am committed to effectively delivering the services to them that they so fully deserve.

Child Care Aware® of America, formerly known as the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), is the nation's leading voice for child care with a mission to advance a child care system that effectively serves all children and families. We aim to accomplish this vision in multiple ways, with one key imperative: to provide excellent personalized customer service to assist families looking for quality child care.

Since 2004, Child Care Aware® of America has operated the Navy, Marine, and Air Force Fee Assistance Programs, as well as the Exceptional Family Member Fee Assistance (EFMP) program for the Navy and Air Force since 2008 and 2011 respectively, and we are proud to continue to serve in this capacity. Through this work, we currently serve nearly 4,000 Navy, Air Force and Marine families; process payments in five days or less, process completed application packages in ten days or less, and distribute approximately \$3,000,000 in monthly subsidy payments. As you can appreciate, through this experience we have been able to refine our processes, achieve economies of scale, and increase our efficiency. Most importantly, we build meaningful relationships with both families and child care providers.



Between 2004 and 2014, Child Care Aware® of America operated the Army Fee Assistance Program – providing child care subsidies to Army families who could not take advantage of child care centers on-post, ensuring quality providers were available, and assisting families in identifying providers that best meet their needs.

In September 2014, the Army Fee Assistance Program was transitioned from Child Care Aware® of America to the GSA.

After the Oversight hearing held on September 10, 2015, Child Care Aware® of America began discussions in earnest with the Army regarding transition of the program back to Child Care Aware® of America. These discussions included a discovery period, so all involved parties could effectively plan for an informed, deliberate, and orderly transition of all programmatic activities. In examining the details of the transition plan, you will find an aggressive strategy to execute all aspects of the program using a phased approach. This approach will allow us to ensure we uphold our commitment to high quality services for military families, communicate with both families and providers effectively, and ensure this transition is as smooth and seamless as possible.

Since initial discussions with Army, Child Care Aware® of America has been developing the required infrastructure to ensure programmatic success to include (1) a family-centered approach; (2) exceptionally trained and experienced staff; and, (3) robust workflow and data management systems and protocols.

Family-Centered Approach

High quality customer service is the cornerstone of Child Care Aware® of America and critical for the families and providers that participate in the programs that we administer. This includes the use of our very successful family-centered case management approach in working with families and providers. Our training ensures Child Care Coordinators (Family Case Managers) and Provider Liaison Specialists (Provider Case Managers) are able to build working relationships to help service the families, are familiar with the special circumstances facing Army families, and are able to resolve customer service challenges and/or recommend the best solution within program guidelines.

Highly Trained and Experienced Staff

Child Care Aware® of America staff understand the complexity and importance of the Army Fee Assistance Program to families. We have assembled a high-performing team that includes staff who formerly worked on the Army Fee Assistance Program prior to its transition to GSA and leadership with many years of fee assistance and military expertise. These individuals are highly qualified and committed to excellence in program redesign and implementation. Additionally, Child Care Aware® of America has implemented an in-depth training and mentoring program



for new staff spanning customer service and Fee Assistance Program policy to state-by-state child care licensing and accreditation standards and supports. The expectation is that our staff are not only experts on the Army Fee Assistance Program, but also in the field of child care resources, armed with information to effectively meet Army family needs for child care. Each staff entrusted to work on the Army Fee Assistance Program undergoes a minimum of 80 hours of training to include handling personal identify information data, quality customer service, Army Fee Assistance Program guidelines, military culture, and unique stressors on military children, just to name a few examples.

The executive management staff overseeing the program is a former Marine Corps Colonel, and the program manager has been leading fee assistance and related efforts for several years with our organization. In fact, over 90% of the leadership team that will be working on the Army contract have experience with military fee assistance.

Workflow and Data Management Systems and Protocols

We have put into place systems and supports to ensure an effective transfer of parents and providers from GSA to Child Care Aware® of America. Of paramount importance - we are working diligently to ensure we have the proper levels of data protection. Ultimately we want to be confident that service member information and their family members' information is not at risk. Our members deserve to be able to trust that their private information *remains* private and secure.

Child Care Aware® of America is continuing to take many steps to ensure all documents containing Personal Identity Information (PII) data are kept strictly confidential and limited to the staff that work directly on the project. This includes keeping documents in a secure, web-based system with permissions only granted to high level managers, and only giving access to employees who have undergone a full comprehensive background check. Child Care Aware® of America's fee assistance platform is undergoing software updates and workflow testing to ensure that it will be ready to handle the volume of family and provider data that will be received, as well as confirm that all business rules are functioning correctly.

Communication

In order to facilitate consistent and effective communication throughout the transition, Child Care Aware® of America, the Army, and GSA have developed a multilayered communication plan and schedule. This communication plan includes over 28 communications to parents and providers during the transition period and in multiple formats to include a dedicated website and webinars with chat functions, email and phone outreach, and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, digital newsletters, press releases, and other forms of electronic communications.



Transition Plan Implementation and Timeline

Looking forward, we are pleased to say, under the terms of our contract with the Army, that Child Care Aware® of America will accept all new family and provider applications beginning February 22, 2016.

For current cases, transition will occur in several phases by state groupings. As Child Care Aware® of America assumes processing of applications by phase, GSA will relinquish administration of the program. We are confident that the full transition will be complete and Child Care Aware® of America will be fully operating the program by 28 October 2016.

We are excited to continue our tradition of excellence in operating the Army Fee Assistance Program. Throughout our tenure operating the program, Child Care Aware® of America received praise from parents as reflected in testimonials we have received over the years. I'd like to share the story of one of those families that speaks to the quality of our work:

"I wanted to take a minute to tell you about [your] child care coordinator, [he] is an outstanding employee and has exceptional customer service. He went over and beyond for our family to ensure our paperwork was approved before the registration dates for my son's school and is always very knowledgeable and understanding. You are lucky to have someone like him on your staff."

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today. We appreciate the sacrifices that military families make for our country and Child Care Aware® of America is proud to do our small part to support them in their mission critical work. I am immensely proud and appreciative of the military service members in my own family, and you have my personal commitment that we will do whatever it takes to ensure our military families have access to quality and affordable child care. Child Care Aware® of America has always been committed to serving Army families and stands prepared to meet their needs – now and in the future. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynette M. Fraga".

Lynette M. Fraga, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Child Care Aware® of America