

March 4, 2022

The Honorable James Clyburn
Chairman
U.S. House Select Subcommittee on the
Coronavirus Crisis
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Steve Scalise
Ranking Member
U.S. House Select Subcommittee on the
Coronavirus Crisis
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Clyburn and Ranking Member Scalise,

On behalf of the Bipartisan Policy Center's (BPC) Early Childhood Initiative (ECI), I submit this letter for the record regarding the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis's hearing, "COVID Child Care Challenges: Supporting Families and Caregivers," which occurred on March 2.

With an increased demand and an unstable supply, the child care sector is facing a crisis. Child care programs continue to recover from the pandemic and are struggling to maintain staff with many leaving their positions because of low pay, lack of benefits and exhaustion. Parents who are seeking to remain or return to work are finding it increasingly difficult to secure safe, high-quality care. BPC recognizes the essential nature of child care programs and believes that they are critical to our nation's economic recovery while also combatting learning loss and preparing children to learn and succeed for years to come. BPC's work is dedicated to advancing policies that support families and strengthen the labor force by focusing on equipping states and providers with proper resources to be able to provide affordable and quality care to all families who need it.

Recent reports from the Department of Labor indicate that labor force participation among women is lagging behind men (67.9% vs. 56.8%)¹. The discrepancy among participation in the labor force among men and women grows starker when accounting for parents, by sex, with their

¹ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/data/widget>

youngest child under six years of age (93.4% vs. 69%) and under three years (93.5% vs. 63.3%).² Unstable child care is attributed for much of this gap. Between 2020 and 2021, among mothers, the share of women that left the workforce was linked to the age of their youngest child and highest among those with children under six.³ A full 1.3 million fewer mothers were employed in September 2021 compared to before the onset of the pandemic.⁴ BPC's own [survey data](#) shows this is highest among women with children under two. Now with a national unemployment rate of 4%, as a nation, we cannot afford to ignore the situation of women and child care.⁵

Child care has its own challenges. With a workforce that is predominately female (92%), poorly paid (average hourly wage is \$12) and few benefits, child care is struggling to compete for workers in this tight labor market.⁶ Many of our child care programs are not operating at full capacity because they simply do not have the staff. Without the additional support provided by Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), programs have few options and will likely continue to turn parents away.

BPC thanks you for Congress's continued support for both families and child care providers in the face of the pandemic. While the COVID relief packages, including most recently under the American Rescue Plan (ARP), have helped stabilize child care throughout the pandemic, unfortunately, the need remains. Without continued and robust funding in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 and FY23 appropriations, states are facing an insurmountable fiscal cliff. BPC urges you to support increased federal investments in child care and the quality improvements that are so critical to each program's success. Specifically, BPC urges the Subcommittee's support for significant investments in the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) programs. These programs have long enjoyed bipartisan support and are the foundation of child care and other early learning programs in our country.

To ensure these needs are addressed, BPC urges Congress's support for doubling the discretionary funding for CCDBG and increasing PDG funding to \$450 million. According to the latest Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) CCDBG data, roughly 1.4 million children are currently served per month; this represents a fraction of children eligible.⁷ BPC estimates that in doubling CCDBG funding in FY22 and FY23, HHS will likewise be able to double the number of eligible children served. Similarly, an increase in the PDG will allow HHS to maintain support for the 28 states and territories that presently receive grants as well as expand funding for nearly all remaining states that are currently unfunded.⁸ States utilize PDG grants to

² <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/wb/data/latest-annual-data/labor-force-participation-rates#Labor-Force-Participation-Rate-of-Mothers-and-Fathers-by-Marital-Status-and-Age-of-Youngest-Child>

³ <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/caregiving-for-children-and-parental-labor-force-participation-during-the-pandemic-20211105.htm>

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/11/08/why-havent-us-mothers-returned-work-child-care-infrastructure-they-need-is-still-missing/>

⁵ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empst.pdf>

⁶ <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/characteristics-of-the-child-care-workforce/>

⁷ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/fact-sheet/characteristics-families-served-child-care-and-development-fund-ccdf-based>

⁸ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/grant-funding/preschool-development-grant-birth-through-five-grant-competition>

identify unmet needs, develop critical data systems, and systemically improve the long-term capacity of early education programs to develop, enhance and expand access. Increases for both programs would bring added stability and capacity to serve a greater number of families through high-quality care.

BPC appreciates the continued bipartisan dedication to child care and early learning programs throughout the pandemic and look forward to working together to improve our systems to help children, families, and providers. If you have any questions, you can contact Brittany Walsh at bwalsh@bipartisanpolicy.org or Matt Sifert at any time at msifert@bpcaction.org.

Sincerely,

Linda Smith
Director, Early Childhood Initiative
Bipartisan Policy Center