

Statement of Hon. Ellen O. Tauscher, a Representative in Congress from the State of California

I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to discuss the importance of quality child care to the American working family. Since coming to Congress, I have repeatedly heard from my constituents that finding affordable, high-quality child care is virtually impossible. Parents can find either affordable child care or they can find high-quality child care; but they have a hard time finding a combination of both in one provider. This problem is not only evident to me as a Member of Congress, but as a parent. Before I came to Congress, I founded a company that provides comprehensive background checks on potential child care workers because I realized that it was almost impossible to verify that the person that I was entrusting my child to, was actually qualified. I realized that other parents were facing the same difficulties I was. So I wrote a book which explained how parents should go about finding quality child care providers and settings. My degree in Early Childhood Education and my prior profession where I dealt with numerous child care workers, made me aware of the child care problem. Millions of families deal with a child care crisis on almost a daily basis and struggle to cope. Our job as legislators should be to make the lives of American working families just a little bit easier. While it is not our duty to make decisions for these families, we can help them implement the decisions they have made for themselves.

The fact is that 77% of American families have made a decision that both parents will work at least part-time. Many times, these families have no other option. Single parents must work to provide for their families and low-income families must have two parents working just to keep one step ahead of poverty. While we can hope that families will have the financial means that allow one parent to stay home with young children, we, as legislators, should never take the position of criticizing families for making the choices they do. The fact is that, for whatever reason, only 23% of all families with children younger than 6 have one parent who stays at home. Parents need help dealing with the financial burden that child care poses.

Child care expenses range, on the average, from \$4,000 to \$10,000 per year. Infant care costs are \$1,000 higher, on average. Parents can easily spend more on child care than they do on a year of tuition at a public university. The often insurmountable cost of care, unfortunately, often forces parents to choose between quality day care now or saving for a college education later. This is a terrible choice for parents to have to make. Low-income families are faced with a more stark picture—the choice between quality child care or clothes, shelter, and food. For these parents, low-quality care, where they continually risk their children's health and safety, is a fact of life.

The Federal Government's commitment to child care, in a sense, indicates its commitment to promoting work and a strong economy. The TANF program requires able-bodied recipients to be engaged in work or a work-related activity; yet these parents cannot become reliable, productive, full-time workers if they are constantly worried about their child care situation. Ultimately, the transition to full-time work at a livable wage happens only if parents know that their children are in a safe and quality child care environment.

States, for the most part, have focused their CCDBG funding on helping TANF families who are the poorest of the poor. Left neglected are the low-income working families who make too much to be eligible for TANF and are left to contend with the high cost of child care on their own. Continually underfunding the CCDBG will turn low-income working families into TANF families. The CCDBG allows states to help families with incomes up to 85 percent of the state median income, but 44 states disqualify families before they even reach this level! In many states, there aren't even funds for families who do qualify for a child care subsidy—in California, 200,000 eligible children are on the waiting list and have been there for two years. Two years is a lifetime for young children. Two years of unsafe, low-quality care can produce a lifetime of problems. Quality child care stimulates brain activity, promotes reading and math skills, and prepares children for success in school. An investment in quality child care produces a lifetime of benefits for a child.

Many argue that states are not taking advantage of the fact that they can move TANF funds to the CCDBG to provide child care to low-income working families. In fact, some states are doing this, but there is still substantial need. Florida, for example, has transferred \$117 million to CCDBG, yet families at 200 percent of pov-

erty must pay about 28% of their gross income to provide child care for two children. According the Florida Department of Children and Families, providing child care for children from birth to age five for working families at 200% of poverty and providing child care for the school-age population would cost an additional \$293 million. My home state of California has already committed 100% of its TANF funds and has no means of providing child care assistance for additional low-income working families.

When families cannot afford quality child care, their children suffer. They suffer not only physical health risks because of unsafe environments, but their cognitive development can suffer as well. Numerous studies show us that high quality child care predicts better school readiness and higher language scores. Unfortunately, high quality child care is the exception rather than the rule. Studies indicate that 35% of family-based and 40% of center-based infant and toddler care is inadequate or even potentially harmful to children's safety and development. This unacceptably low standard of care results from numerous factors such as high child/staff ratios, inadequate training for staff, and a lack of health protection and promotion guidelines.

We cannot continue to place our children at the bottom of the priorities list. An investment in child care is an investment in our children's future and an investment in American families. Today I will introduce the Affordable Child Care, Education, Security, and Safety or ACCESS Act on behalf of the Democratic Caucus. I would like to thank the ranking minority member of the Human Resources subcommittee, Mr. Cardin, for introducing the sections of the bill that fall under the jurisdiction of the Ways and Means committee. I would like to thank a number of my colleagues for their efforts in the creation of this bill. Representatives Cardin, DeLauro, Maloney, Lofgren, Slaughter, Tom Allen, Woolsey, Moran, and Weygand along with many others have been invaluable in the crafting of the ACCESS bill. This bill has 81 co-sponsors and has the support of the Administration. The ACCESS bill makes significant investments in child care to benefit all parents, regardless of income or family structure. Every family deserves access to quality child care and our bill ensures that no family needs to shortchange their children.

The ACCESS act is a comprehensive bill which makes significant investments to improve the affordability, availability, and quality of child care. ACCESS provides an additional \$1.5 billion per year in mandatory CCDBG funding which can be used after states have used existing CCDBG funds. Seventy percent of the funds must be used to help low-income working families so that they can stay off welfare for good. ACCESS also provides tax relief to millions of Americans through expansion of the Dependent Care Tax Credit, providing an annual tax cut of \$345 to 3 million families. Stay-at home parents, who often sacrifice a second income for the sake of their children, can also get relief because of the ACCESS bill which would allow parents with children under the age of 1 to claim at least \$1500 in child care expenses under the DCTC.

In addition to government funding, we must also encourage public private partnerships in developing innovative child care solutions. The ACCESS bill would do just that by providing a tax credit to businesses who build or expand their child care facilities, for 25% of their qualified costs. Small businesses, which often cannot afford to provide child care on their own, can form consortias with other small businesses to start quality child care centers, and receive federal and state matching funds under the ACCESS bill. In addition to business partnerships, we need to use existing infrastructure such as schools. School buildings often stand empty from 3 pm, when the last bell rings, until the next morning. The ACCESS bill increases funding for the highly successful 21st Century Community Learning Center Program that helps schools develop or expand after school programs. Under the ACCESS bill, an additional half a million children would be able to participate in quality, after-school programs that could improve academic performance and reduce the incidence of juvenile crime. The ACCESS bill also allows the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to insure mortgages to build new child care facilities or renovate existing facilities.

While we need to make financial investments in increasing the affordability of child care, we also need to specifically target the issue of quality. The ACCESS bill establishes a Model States Early Learning Fund which would provide challenge grants to states that are interested in specifically improving their quality of child care. Quality is directly related to staff and teacher training and the ACCESS bill provides scholarships to students who make a demonstrated commitment to working in a licenced child care facility upon completion of their education. Children require continuity and the ACCESS bill would ensure that they are cared for by a trained and familiar adult.

American families do not need one-size-fits-all child care. Every family is unique in make-up and circumstance and we need to address the issues that every one of them faces. The ACCESS bill represents a variety of common sense proposals that ensure that parents do not have to make the choice between food and quality child care, that school-age children do not have to come home to empty houses, and that all American families get financial support for the costs of child rearing. Raising children is an individual, family, and community effort, and our society as a whole benefits when our children are cared for in a safe and nurturing environment. The ACCESS bill puts children and families first. I would like to thank the Committee on Ways and Means for recognizing the importance of child care and holding a hearing on this very important issue. Thank you.