



Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children

November 17, 2022

Good morning, Chairwoman Muth, Senator Flynn and members of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee. Thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to provide testimony today.

My name is Kimberly Early and I serve as the Senior Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children (PennAEYC). PennAEYC is the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). We are a part of a network of more than 52 affiliates and nearly 60,000 individual members nationwide. PennAEYC represents a membership of over 2,700 early childhood care and education professionals throughout Pennsylvania and has 10 chapters throughout the Commonwealth.

As a statewide, non-profit membership organization, our membership includes center-based teachers and directors, home-based providers, higher education faculty and students. Our mission is to be an effective voice for high-quality early childhood care and education and we do that through policy development, advocacy and professional development and supports for early childhood professionals. Our vision is that all Pennsylvania families will have access to high-quality, affordable early childhood care and education opportunities for their children provided by a profession that is valued, well-compensated and supported.

PennAEYC is a principal partner -- as are my colleagues at Trying Together and Children First -- in the Pre-K for PA and Start Strong PA advocacy campaigns. Both campaigns are non-partisan, issue advocacy campaigns with grassroots support across the commonwealth led by statewide and regional non-profit organizations. Pre-K for PA advocates to increase access to high-quality, publicly-funded pre-kindergarten for eligible three and four-year-old children. Start Strong PA focuses on increasing access to high-quality, affordable child care. Campaign efforts are grounded in the data and research demonstrating the benefits of high-quality early childhood care and education services for children's healthy development and school readiness and also the benefits to working families and the broader economy.

You have heard a lot today about these benefits, specifically related to literacy, and Lindsey shared how critical early childhood professionals are in ensuring those outcomes come to fruition. The fact is you can't have a high-quality program without high-quality teachers.

Despite the important role child care and pre-k teachers and staff play in shaping the healthy development and school readiness of our youngest children, they are not compensated appropriately for the work they do.

As you know, Pennsylvania's child care system continues to experience a severe staffing shortage. Start Strong PA conducted a survey of nearly 1,000 child care programs in March 2022 and found:

- Nearly 32,500 children sat on waiting lists.
- More than 30,000 additional children could have been served at respondents' sites if they were fully staffed.
- 91% of respondents reported staffing shortages.
- 48% of respondents closed at least one classroom.

We expect new national and Pennsylvania data we can share soon from a survey conducted by NAEYC this fall on the child care staffing crisis and will follow-up with that information.

Low wages are the most significant factor driving the child care staffing crisis. According to the most current wage data for Pennsylvania, the median wage in 2019 for child care workers was only \$10.69/hour and \$13.96/hour for preschool teachers. This leaves nearly 50% of the workforce eligible for public benefits. Providers have always struggled to keep consistent teachers in classrooms, and this creates a further issue for access and exposure to high-quality experiences for children and families. Reduced turnover supports continuity of care for young children and families. Stable high-quality early childhood environments support healthy social-emotional and overall developmental outcomes for the children within them. These ongoing experiences increase chances of a positive trajectory and lifelong outcomes for children, families, and communities.

We appreciate the investment of one-time, federal American Rescue Plan funds in the state budget to hire and retain child care staff. The application process for these funds are underway and are helpful. However, they are not sustainable. Like other COVID-19 relief dollars intended to stabilize the child care sector, they are not permanent and they are not enough to support programs to stem the staffing crisis.

Regarding pre-k, we applaud the sustainable investments made in Pre-K Counts and the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program to serve more eligible children and support programs to offer these services. However, rates do not cover all provider costs, including appropriate wages for teachers.

In addition to the lack of funding to pay wages that reflect the important work child care and pre-k teachers do, there are significant policy and structure changes needed in Pennsylvania's child care payment system.

It is time to move away from the flawed system of paying for child care subsidies based on a percentile of the private market rate and to conduct a study with broad stakeholder input that informs a new a cost-based model that accounts for appropriate teacher compensation and other provider costs. The market rate survey tells us what providers are charging parents in the private market and reflects the price that families can afford to pay. This private pay price still does not cover the actual cost of care provided by those providers and does not tell us the cost providers are actually incurring to provide care or what it would cost to appropriately compensate professionals.

Another solution is more significant scaling of the use of contracting in the child care system. This would build off of the success of the infant/toddler contracted slots pilot. Contracts provide

greater stability to programs and help them increase the quality of the program offered to children. Contracted slots provide funding for a set time and offer more financial stability and reliability for the child care business model. Strengthening the funding and resources to individual programs improves the system and ultimately provides more accessibility to families and their infants and toddlers. Contracts should increase the payment per slot to pay closer to the cost of quality, be available to all provider types and support more families access these slots in high-quality programs.

The Start Strong PA campaign will be issuing detailed reports soon on these two policy topics and will share them with you upon publication.

In summary, we need to address the unmet needs child care providers and professionals face. We encourage you to consider significant state investments in high-quality child care and pre-k that will support the workforce that makes these opportunities for children possible, in addition to supporting the necessary work within the administration to change the child care rate and payment structure and methodology.

If we do not address the child care staffing crisis, we will continue to see negative impacts to children and working families. Waiting lists for child care will continue due to lack of staff and children will experience teacher turnover which negatively impacts their development. Donna will discuss these impacts and the unmet needs for children and families in greater detail.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have upon the conclusion of the panel.