

**Prepared Statement of Ranking Member Richard Burr**  
**Supporting Children, Workers, and Families by Strengthening America's**  
**Child Care Sector**

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April 27, 2021

Good morning Chair Murray.

Thank you for working with me to schedule this hearing. I'm glad that we are coming together today in a bipartisan effort to discuss the crucial role child care plays in our economy.

Bottom line – Americans can't work if they don't have safe and reliable child care for their family.

I hope rather than a partisan reconciliation process that you and I can listen to each other's ideas and work together on meaningful legislation that stabilizes and strengthens child care and respects and honors parent choice in the care of their young children.

I remain committed to seeking workable, bipartisan policy solutions on child care.

Beginning with my partnership on this committee with Senator Barbara Mikulski, we passed significant health and safety reforms to the Child Care and Development Block Grant program in 2014, a program that had gone almost two decades without reauthorization.

And for the last few Congresses Senator King and I have been working together on the PACE Act, a bipartisan, bicameral proposal to make child care more affordable for families.

I look forward to hearing the experiences of our witnesses today and thank you all for being here to offer us ideas for building a better child care program that works for parents, children, providers, and employers.

I first want to highlight and thank child care providers as the one education sector that never abandoned working parents and their kids during COVID.

Child care understood that, even in a pandemic, many jobs can't be done remotely, and that parents have to have a safe and reliable place to leave their children so that they can work.

To maintain stable employment or participate in an education or training program, parents with young children need child care.

Breakdowns in child care result in a parents leaving work early, being late to work, missing a shift or full day of work, and being distracted while at work. This leads not just to workers missing out on income and promotions, but incredible lost productivity for employers.

While COVID stay-at-home orders forced many Americans to work from home, nurses, EMTs, firefighters, grocery store clerks, and all other essential

workers had to be on time each and every day and not be distracted. Child care understood this.

Throughout the entire pandemic, child care stayed open to care for the children of other essential workers. For almost a year before schools, and their unions, even got around to figuring it out, child care implemented numerous enhanced health and safety protocols that by and large, even in the absence of vaccines, kept children and staff safe.

And when K-12 closed its doors to students, child care, in addition to caring for children birth to five, opened up for the school age children who needed a safe and supported place to do their online learning.

A key lesson learned from COVID-19 is that K-12 has a great deal to learn from child care.

Staying open during the pandemic has come at a huge financial cost to providers.

Even before the pandemic, providers were operating on razor thin margins. Additional staff and supplies to implement health and safety protocols, on top of recurring fixed costs and in an environment of significantly reduced enrollments, ensured that every day child care remained open it was operating well into the red.

In the last year, in three different bills, Congress has provided approximately 50 billion dollars in emergency child care funding to stabilize providers financially so that as parents return to work child care is available to them.

As of today, we have limited to no insight from HHS as to how states plan to use the majority of these dollars and what affect these dollars are having on providers being open and parents being able to find and afford reliable care that meets their needs.

As we look to build a stronger child care sector for the future, I think understanding how this incredible influx of new dollars is being used will be critical.

We also need to understand how the flexibilities given to states to support both parents and providers during the pandemic might best be continued on an ongoing basis.

We need to continue to allow states to more quickly respond to the unique needs they see on the ground rather than waiting for a national emergency or the hopes of a reauthorization happening on time.

Most critical, however, is that we understand parent wants and needs for child care going forward. I cannot say it enough – parent choice and flexibility are paramount.

Nothing is more personal than the choice a parent makes of who will care for their infant, toddler, or four-year-old.

Because children develop on different timelines, parents may prefer one type of provider for one child and another type of provider for another child.

And we need options for parents to meet their schedules. One size fits all doesn't work for child care.

Parents, not government, know their children best. Whatever we do in child care policy we must respect and support parents' choices.

Additionally, it is essential we understand any unintended consequences of good meaning but poorly thought through policy ideas – ideas that may drive-up child care costs higher, make it more difficult for providers to operate and enter the field, or make it even harder to attract and retain a qualified workforce.

As just one example of potential unintended consequences is a poorly designed universal prekindergarten program.

Pushing four-year-olds out of developmentally supportive community child care programs and into an already poorly performing K-12 system, runs the risk of disrespecting the wants of parents, significantly driving up the cost of already expensive infant and toddler care, and setting young children back in their social, emotional, and academic growth.

We presently have a rich and diverse mixed delivery system for child care and early education in this country – centers, family child care homes, for profit, nonprofit, religious, large, small.

As we look to improve access, affordability, and quality in child care and stabilize and better support a labor intensive, thin margin industry, we must do so in ways that build up the things we have right – respecting parents’ choices in the care of their young children through a rich and diverse mixed delivery system.

I hope today is the start and not the end of bipartisan conversation on how to make child care work better for America’s working families. I look forward to working with our witnesses, Chair Murray, and all our Committee colleagues on an issue critical for working parents and their children.

I thank the Chair.