



**Testimony Concerning
“Implementing the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014:
Perspectives of Stakeholders”**

**Submitted to the U.S. Senate Committee
on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
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Senator Mikulski, Senator Burr, and distinguished Committee members, good morning. My name is Margaret Williams, and I am Executive Director of Maryland Family Network (MFN). It is an honor to be here today to offer a state-level stakeholder’s perspective on the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014, for which all of us concerned with child care and early education owe tremendous gratitude to the co-chairs of this hearing. Personally, I consider it a high privilege to testify before Senator Mikulski, who has represented me and all Marylanders with such great distinction for many, many years.

MFN has worked since 1945 to improve the availability and quality of child care and other supports for children and families in Maryland. We have been active in state and federal debates on child care policy and are strongly committed to ensuring that low- and moderate-income working families—and indeed, all families—have the supports they need to care for their children and to be economically self-sufficient.

Chief among these supports is access to high-quality, affordable child care, which keeps children learning and parents earning. I believe it is impossible to overstate the importance of safe, healthy, and nurturing child care from the time of birth until a child enters school. High-quality early education sets the foundation for a child’s success in school and in life. As a parent, a grandparent, and an employer, I also know that safe and reliable child care is essential to maintaining a productive workforce. Distinguished economists and other scholars have repeatedly documented the fact that investments in high-quality child care pay enormous dividends, both to the families involved and to society as a whole.

And yet, for many Americans and Marylanders, high-quality, affordable child care lies out of reach. In some cases, parents entrust their children to care providers who fail to meet even the most basic health and safety standards, with tragic consequences. Evidence is sadly very close at hand. In Virginia, over the course of a decade, 43 children died in unregulated child care programs, as the Washington Post

reported two years ago. In Maryland, between 2010 and 2014, at least 13 children died in unregulated care, as did two more early this year even as our State legislature debated a bill to strengthen the inspection process and improve parent and provider education about the benefits of licensed child care.

Government surely cannot prevent every tragedy, nor can it ensure that every parent and every child care provider make perfect decisions all the time. But government can—and, I submit, should—strive to ensure that its actions motivate good behavior and that taxpayer dollars are spent according to standards and with accountability. State spending on child care subsidies for low-income families—buttressed to a large degree by federal block grant dollars—provides a prime example, and that’s one of the important reasons I applaud the CCDBG Act of 2014.

For the first time, providers will need to undergo comprehensive background checks in order to be eligible to receive CCDBG-funded subsidy payments. This new provision applies both to regulated and license-exempt providers (with only limited exceptions for situations in which all the children are related to the caregiver). In Maryland, we saw the need to check the backgrounds of license-exempt providers receiving subsidy dollars several years ago. In addition, we discovered that even licensed providers were not routinely cross-checked against the Maryland Sex Offender Registry. Our research had an immediate impact: 80 Sex Offender Registry “hits” were recorded, and in six identified cases, circumstances dictated that child care, not just subsidy, be terminated. Legislation enacted in Maryland in 2013 in many ways anticipated the new CCDBG background check provisions. Similarly, Maryland has for many years conducted the types of child care provider inspections that the CCDBG Act of 2014 now requires as condition of receiving federal subsidy funding. We are convinced that these provisions will significantly enhance the health and safety of children in care around the country.

There is much more to child care, of course, than basic health and safety considerations. Care of poor quality can be extremely detrimental to child development. That is why I find it particularly praiseworthy that a commitment to high-quality care is deeply embedded in the CCDBG Act of 2014. States were previously required to set aside four percent of their block grant funds for quality improvement. Under the new Act, that set-aside requirement will more than double, gradually rising to nine percent.

Wisely, the CCDBG Act of 2014 does not prescribe what quality-improvement activities the states must undertake. Different states have different needs and priorities, and quality can be improved through multiple means. In Maryland, by way of example, we hope that the increased quality set-aside will fund an expansion of services provided by

our network of regional Child Care Resource Centers (which, in the interest of full disclosure, MFN manages on behalf of the State). This priority reflects our belief that the single most important factor in high-quality child care is the quality of the child care workforce. Child Care Resource Centers provide critical training and technical assistance that helps providers not only meet but surpass licensing baselines to become the best professionals that they can be. They leverage resources from and for the communities they serve. They do an excellent job for the providers they assist, but they could reach so many more providers, and do more for them, if their resources weren't so constrained. We look forward to learning how our sister states plan to deploy their quality set-aside dollars, and we'll eagerly steal the ideas that fit best for Maryland.

Low-income parents who rely on child care subsidy also have much to be thankful for in the CCDBG Act of 2014. One of the Act's key provisions mandates that families retain subsidy eligibility for 12 months before redetermination, regardless of temporary changes in employment or income. The 12-month eligibility period supports two notable goals: family economic stability; and continuity of care, which is a cornerstone of optimal child development.

I heartily applaud this "family-friendly" provision of the CCDBG Act of 2014, and point out that it comes with a considerable price tag. In Maryland, approximately 75 percent of families' redetermination periods are shorter than 12 months, in many cases much shorter. The added cost to Maryland of implementing the 12-month eligibility provision could be significant. The absence of a significant increase in the federal CCDBG appropriation may force Maryland to make difficult choices, perhaps with unintended consequences and negative outcomes among the very population – very young children and their families – whom we want to help with CCDBG legislation.

Other states are similarly grappling with the fiscal implications of the CCDBG Act of 2014, in some cases for different reasons. Some states must beef up their inspection processes, for example. On their behalf as well as Maryland's, I urge you to give these fiscal concerns your utmost consideration as budget deliberations continue.

I am grateful for your time, your attention, and your outstanding leadership on the CCDBG Act of 2014. I'd be happy to answer any questions.