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Submitted Testimony
National Association for the Education of Young Children
(NAEYC)

The Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Rural Development, Agriculture, Trade, & Entrepreneurship

"Taking Care of Business: How Childcare is Important for Regional Economies."
Hearing Held February 6, 2020
Testimony Submitted February 20, 2020

Chairwoman Finkenauer, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony about the vital role that high-quality early childhood education plays in fostering a strong economy, and in supporting the workforce of both today and tomorrow.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a 90+ year-old non-profit organization comprised of 60,000 members and 52 Affiliates across the country, committed to a vision in which all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

We are grateful to this committee for exploring the ways in which child care drives economies, and affects working families, as we all know that working families make sacrifices and hard choices in order to put the needs of their children first. Yet when it comes to child care, we also know that parents shouldn't have to choose between affordability and quality. Educators shouldn't have to subsist on poverty-level wages in order to subsidize the costs of care. And society's investments shouldn't create a false dichotomy between "care" and "education" for our youngest children, whose positive growth and development depends on having both.

Decades of research have told us too much about the critical nature of the early years--and the benefits that accrue to individuals and to society when we invest in those years--for us to continue to sell our children, families, educators, and economy short. The current child care crisis is far-reaching and, as such, has led families to look to their elected officials on both sides of the aisle for the kind of support they need. Eighty-three percent of parents with children under the age of 5 say finding quality, affordable child care is a problem.[1] Likewise, 70 percent of voters are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports child care – including majorities of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.[2]

The interest and urgency in this issue is rising, and much of the witness testimony at the hearing emphasized the need for investing in the early childhood workforce to meet the need for child care and education that is affordable, high-quality and accessible.

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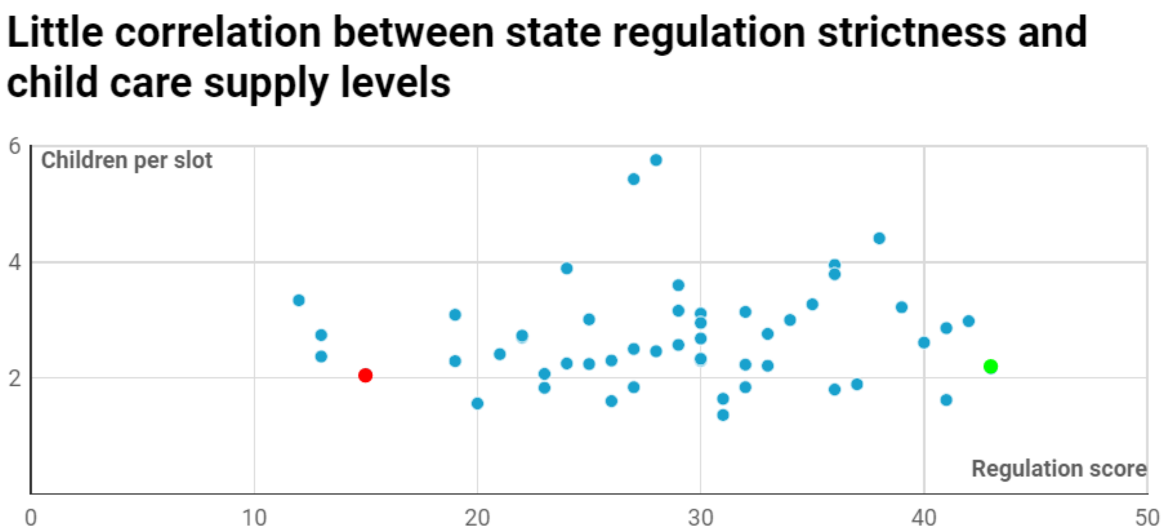
[1] Retrieved online from: https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/09/13/457470/affordable-child-care-early-learning-families/
[2] Retrieved online from: https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/overwhelming-number-voters-support-funding-early-learning/

Yet increasing access to child care must not come at the expense of the safety of children or the quality of the care they receive. We want to be clear that rolling back regulations in an attempt to solve challenges of supply creates an environment where parents must choose between safe or affordable child care, and it isn't supported by data.

New research has shown that [underinvestment – not overregulation] – is the driver of the current child care crisis. There is no correlation between state regulations and child care supply in the state. For example, below, the red dot represents South Carolina, with a low regulation score and 2.06 children per child care slot. The green dot on the right represents Vermont, with the highest regulation score and a nearly equivalent 2.17 children per child care slot.



Regulations provide important safety precautions and uphold the quality of early education and care. Lowering the bar on these regulations, including early childhood educator qualifications, hurts families in the short and long term. We know too much about the importance of children's development in the early years—not to mention what can happen when children are left in unsafe environments—to have a market without strong regulations. Research is clear: higher teacher qualifications are significantly positively correlated with higher quality in early childhood education and care, states with more effective regulatory structures have a greater supply of higher-quality programs, and children who attend higher-quality programs demonstrate better outcomes.

As such, when we demand high-quality education for young children it means ensuring that educators are provided with affordable high-quality professional preparation and fair compensation for the valuable, challenging, and complex work they do.

Indeed, as our country moves toward necessary investments in the education and compensation of early childhood educators, there are steps we can take along the way. The common-sense, bipartisan Small Business Child Care Investment Act takes an important step forward in support of educators working in non-profit child care settings by ensuring that they can access the same small business loans as their for-profit counterparts. With high-quality child care out of reach for too many families, NAEYC is proud to support all efforts to expand access to high-quality, affordable child care that helps children, families, businesses, communities, and our economy thrive.

Thank you to the Committee for its time and attention on this important issue and for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.