



Talking Points about Child Care Policy

Updated February 2010

These talking points can serve as a guide for program directors as they lead Members of Congress on a tour of the child care program. They are suggestions for how to share points about the policies that directly impact our work in child care programs. Program directors do not have to cover ALL of these points, but these are some ideas. This is not a handout to be given to the Member of Congress:

- We appreciate the interest and leadership shown by Congress and the Administration about what we've known for a long time: the early years matter.
- We know that learning begins at birth, and young children need good quality early care and education. We provide this at our program every day, year round.
 - *Suggestion: as you walk through the program, point out some of the things that make it a high-quality early learning environment for young children.*
- Child care *is* early learning. We provide preschool here, and our teachers are the best around.
- Low-income families can access child care programs like this through subsidies, if funding is sufficient. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the core federal program for supporting families' access to child care and supporting the quality of that care.
 - *Suggestion 1:* We enroll about [NUMBER] of children through the child care subsidy program.
 - *Suggestion 2:* We do not enroll any children through the federal subsidy program because the funding is not sufficient to cover the costs of high-quality care in this program.
 - *Suggestion 3:* We are only able to enroll [NUMBER] of children at this program through the child care subsidy program because the funding is not sufficient to cover the full cost of care for our program.
- Funding for CCDBG has been all but frozen since 2002, and currently only 1 in 7 eligible families can access child care subsidies. That's 6 of 7 eligible parents whose employment status is constantly at risk because they do not have reliable child care.
- Limited funding and program policies impact the quality of care for children too, because CCDBG also supports efforts in our state to improve and maintain quality.
- We are appreciative of the inclusion of CCDBG funds in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Those funds are significant, but unfortunately won't be enough to cover the actual needs for access and quality in our states.
 - *Suggestion 1:* As state budgets continue to suffer, many of our children might not be able to be here much longer because subsidy funds are drying up. Where will they go instead?

- *Suggestion 2:* This program currently does not serve families that pay with subsidy because we cannot afford it. This is a business and as much as I want to serve all the families that need me, I have to stay open, and the subsidy payment rates are way too low.
- State budgets are in crisis. Years of frozen federal funding has meant children are on waiting lists, payments to child care providers are far lower than the cost of providing care, sometimes payments are even delayed to us, and we're losing opportunities to maintain the quality of child care.
 - *Suggestion:* Talk specifically about what is going on with the state budget and child care funding in your state. They need to hear why more funds are necessary.
- As you think about your priorities this year as Congress begins the budget process, remember that parents can't work without child care, and early care and learning programs matter to young children. Please support increased investments for child care. This is a priority for me, and for the [NUMBER] of families we serve.
- This isn't just about the funding, though. CCDBG has not been reauthorized since 1996, and it is high time to work together to improve policies to help more families access care, that pay providers better for accepting child care subsidies, and that improve and sustain the high-quality care we know is best for young children.

If asked about the federal Early Learning Challenge Fund:

- We know that learning begins at birth, and young children need good quality early care and education. We provide this at our program every day, year round.
- We also appreciate that Challenge Fund grants would be used to support children birth to 5 and not narrowly targeting one age group or program type. Families don't just have to support their children when they're four-years old, and our program cares and educates children from the first years through school age.
- The Early Learning Challenge Fund could really spur efforts to increase the capacity to increase the quality of care for all children in our state, making sure they have high-quality care like we offer here. And more, it would fund supports to help programs and the early childhood workforce to achieve those goals. "Quality" costs money!
 - *Suggestion:* Give some examples of the effort you put in to ensuring a high-quality early learning environment for young children.
- The success of the Early Learning Challenge Fund in the states will depend on an increased and sustained investment in the core foundation programs, the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Head Start.

If your program participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program:

- The Child Nutrition Act is due for reauthorization. It includes an important program called the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). We want to see some improvements made to CACFP, and we must find the funds to support it.
- Mealtime in my child care program is a time for learning, and we are really proud of the good meals we serve. We would really struggle to do this without the support of CACFP.

- In this economy, with the price of nearly everything increasing, mealtime is a big part of my program budget and I know that families rely on our meals more than before.
 - *Suggestion: Tell a story about recent changes you've seen in the economic downturn.*
- CACFP makes a difference to providers, parents *and* children:
 - CACFP helps providers with the high cost of food, providing helpful training and resources on child nutrition, as well as monitoring and support.
 - CACFP helps parents by providing healthy meals for their children and keeping parent child care costs down.
 - CACFP helps children by ensuring healthy meals which mean healthy development. Mealtime is learning time and healthy choices last a lifetime.
- There are challenges, however, and we need Congress to support some positive changes:
 - Right now, the reimbursement rates for food in CACFP do not meet the rising prices of good nutritious foods. In the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act, we need to increase reimbursement rates to meet the costs of program requirements.
 - CACFP only reimburses for two meals and a snack. In reauthorization, please add reimbursement for a third meal of the day.
 - And, there is so much paperwork involved in this program. It takes a lot of time and resources that I should be spending with the young children in my program. This paperwork could be streamlined and reduced.
- Please cosponsor the Access to Nutritious Meals for Young Children Act. Your support is important in helping us serve children in CACFP.