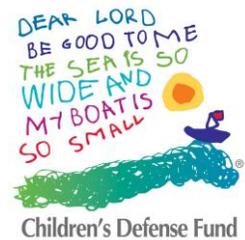


March 2016

Child Care Access to Resources for Early-learning Act (S.2539/H.R.4524) Expands Child Care for Low-Income Children and Families



*High-quality child care that supports children's healthy development is crucial for working families. Quality early childhood development programs can help mitigate the negative effects of poverty and create lifelong benefits for America's most vulnerable children. Unfortunately, the high costs of child care can be prohibitive for many families. In 2014, the average annual cost for an infant in center-based care was greater than the cost of a year of public in-state college education in 28 states and the District of Columbia.¹ Federal and state funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) serves just over one in four eligible children under age five, and this number is declining as child care costs increase. Currently, CCDBG funding is at a 15-year low and 360,000 children have lost child care subsidies since 2006.² The **Child C.A.R.E. Act** would provide mandatory funding to ensure all children in families with income levels below 200 percent of poverty have access to high-quality child care in the next 10 years.³*

The Act would expand access of child care so all families with children under age 4, income levels below 200 percent of poverty, and a need for child care would receive services.

- The Secretary of Health and Human Services will allot funding to states based on their population of low-income infants and toddlers. States that receive such funds will reserve 80 percent to be used for direct services and expanding access to care for infants and toddlers who do not receive assistance under CCDBG.
- Additional federal funds will help states to sustain access to child care to all children served before the act.
- States must conduct a study on the cost of child care at least once every three years and use this data to set provider payment rates. Payment rates must be sufficient to attract, support, and retain high-quality child care providers and keep pace with inflation.

The Act would redefine quality child care and ensure all child care programs meet certain quality benchmarks.

- States will ensure all infant and toddler child care providers that receive funding under CCDBG meet the following **quality standards** in the next 10 years:
 - Child care staff will have qualifications, knowledge and skills to promote child development and learning. Teachers will have credentials or higher education degrees.
 - Child care will be full-day, full-year or otherwise meet the needs of working families.
 - Programs will have rich learning environments with evidence-based classroom practices.
 - Child care activities must be aligned with the State's Early Learning and Development Guidelines and the Head Start Child Development and Learning Framework.

- Child care must be coordinated with other public and private service providers to provide comprehensive health, mental health, family, and nutrition services.
- Child care should engage with parents and families in their child's early care and learning.
- States will reserve at least 12 percent of allotted funds **for activities to improve the quality of child care programs**, including:
 - Improving the skills and competencies of the child care workforce with higher levels of training and education.
 - Supporting training and technical assistance through a statewide network of infant and toddler specialists, mental health consultants, and coach mentors that provide onsite assistance to providers.
 - Providing startup grants to purchase equipment and materials for high-quality care and learning experiences.
 - Establishing networks of family child care providers to share workforce training and technical assistance.
- States will **conduct and employ studies on the cost of quality child care** to ensure provider payment rates are set at a level that allows for fair compensation for providers, recognizes quality practices and allows for the retention of a quality child care workforce.

The Act would enhance access and quality of care for America's most vulnerable populations.

- States will use a needs assessment conducted by the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care to identify special populations with barriers to child care. These vulnerable populations include **children with disabilities, homeless children, children in foster care, dual language learners, children in rural areas, and children whose families work nontraditional hours**. States will develop plans to increase availability of high quality care to these populations.
- States must reserve six percent of allotted funding for making grants to support **child care during nontraditional and unpredictable hours**. The Secretary of Health and Human Services can adjust the requirement of meeting quality standards as necessary to address the need for such care.

¹ Child Care Aware of America. 2014. Parents and the High Cost of Child Care.

² The Center for Law and Social Policy. "Implementing the Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization: A Guide for States."

³ The Act was introduced in the Senate by Senator Robert P. Casey Jr (D-PA) and in the House by Representatives Joseph Crowley (D-NY) and Lois Frankel (D-FL) February 10, 2016.