



November 16, 2015

Ms. Elizabeth Connolly
Acting Commissioner
NJ Department of Human Services
P.O. Box 700
Trenton, NJ 08625-0700

Dear Acting Commissioner Connolly:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) FY 2017 budget. On behalf of the New Jersey Child Care Association (NJCCA), I am writing today to urge you to increase the DHS commitment to child care centers under the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program that affects so many of the nearly 4,000 privately licensed facilities in the state.

For decades, private child care facilities have been providing options for families in their pursuit of early childhood educational opportunities for their children. In some cases, a family may choose to enroll their child in a center close to home, while in other cases, a center in close proximity to a parent's place of employment makes more sense. In either case, private child care has always provided a viable option for New Jersey's working families.


To assist income eligible families with child care alternatives, the DHS, through the Child Care Development Block Grant, provides vouchers for low-income families to pay for early education programs. Currently, on average, these vouchers cover only about *half* the cost of a regular program. As a result, many centers cannot accept vouchers as full payment, and in some cases, programs have closed down because the voucher subsidy rate has completely eroded their ability to make ends meet.

Inexplicably, New Jersey's subsidy rate for these CCDBG vouchers has not increased since 2008. During that time, employee wages have increased, fueled by a state-mandated increase to the minimum wage. The cost of providing health care to employees has gone up consistently, and other cost drivers like rent and taxes have increased as well. Private providers who have consistently championed early childhood education programs urgently need a higher voucher rate to continue to serve eligible families and maintain quality programs.

For this reason, I respectfully ask that you increase the child care voucher payment rate at least to the federally recommended level of 75 percent of market rate *and* increase the total amount of funding for vouchers in your FY 2017 budget. By doing so, private providers who accept this subsidy can continue to provide educational opportunities to at least the same number of children and working families.

Thank you for taking time to hear our concerns. If you or a staff member needs to discuss this situation, I can be reached at **(609) 223-2223**, or via e-mail at curt@nj-cca.org.

With best regards,


Curtis S. Macysyn
NJCCA Executive Director