Congressional Visit Talking Points and Meeting Process

Key Goals

- Share urgent, up-to-date child care stories and data from the ground in your states.

- Educate and inform members about the challenges and opportunities for early childhood education, including the importance of investing in the education and compensation of the ECE workforce to drive child care supply and quality.

- Help members understand that our nation's child care crisis is a current problem that requires a current solution, not a future problem that can be addressed with a future solution.

- Urge members to prioritize, protect, and provide:
  - appropriations increases for child care and early learning via CCDBG, Head Start, PDG and more
  - additional investments in the education and compensation of early childhood educators through workforce development, higher education, and apprenticeship avenues.

- Link short term progress to continuing efforts to work towards the substantial, sustainable, and comprehensive ECE investments that are needed.

Step 1: Introductions

- Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We are here as members, allies, and partners of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a professional membership organization dedicated to achieving equitable access to high quality early learning for young children, birth through age 8.
  - *Share your names, what you do and where, how many children and families you serve, etc.*

- NAEYC includes 60,000 members and 51 Affiliates throughout the country, all committed to delivering on the promise of high quality early learning.
  - *Share briefly about your Affiliate and/or your own organization / ECE program as well.*
  - *Together, we work to achieve a collective vision that we know you share: that all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.*

Step 2: Briefly explain why you requested the meeting

- We are here to share our experiences related to child care and early learning, and provide a picture of what it's currently like for young children, their families, and early childhood educators on the ground in our state / district.

- Specifically, we'd like to share information today on how federal and state relief has helped, and why and how Congress needs to build on what works by increasing funding for early childhood programs to address urgent labor shortages, help parents work, support children's learning, and grow our economy in the short and long term.

- Federal relief funding has been a life-saver for child care and early learning, enabling states to enact policies that lowered costs of care for families, raised wages for providers, and supported the supply and quality of child care programs.

- But that funding was not intended to—nor has it—solved the underlying challenges in how the child care system works. As child care relief runs out, the stability those funds brought to programs will evaporate.

- Most programs will not be able to return to the pre-pandemic status-quo. They will be forced to raise tuition for parents who can't afford it; cut wages for educators who will then leave; or close their doors entirely. All of these options will worsen the supply, affordability, and quality crises.

- This isn't a future problem. It's a now problem. Congress can't wait until after all states have expended all relief funds. It will be too late to reverse the damage that is already happening, as programs and educators make decisions right now, in a climate of uncertainty and instability.

- We urge Congress to act, through this year's annual appropriations process, as well as other avenues, in order to provide the investments in CCDBG, Head Start, Preschool Development Grants, and more, to reduce uncertainty, bring stability, and respond to the needs of children, families, educators, and businesses in our communities.

Step 3: Review the need and your requests

- While the pandemic reinforced and deepened public understanding of the essential role of child care and early learning for children, working families, and the economy, it also highlighted the dangerous and negative effects of a child care system that has been deeply underfunded for decades. For example:
    - States are still serving only a fraction of eligible children in child care assistance programs, and still struggle to pay for the cost of quality.
    - Too many families cannot afford the price of child care that they and their children need.
    - Parents, especially women, dropped disproportionately out of the labor market and are struggling to return without child care.
    - Unlike other industries, child care has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, with Bureau of Labor Statistics data showing 100,000 fewer providers.
    - The impacts are worse for families of color, who had trouble finding and affording care pre-pandemic, and who have been especially harmed by the pandemic's economic and health crises.
    - The average wage for child care providers—skilled and valuable front-line professionals who have risked their health to provide education and care —is approximately $12 per hour, with Black and Latina child care workers making even less.
    - Child care providers went to enormous lengths to keep their doors open during the pandemic, with most staying open despite the health and financial risks.

- ***Use your NAEYC Pandemic Surveys and other State Fact Sheets to talk about data that illustrates:***
  - ***The high price that families have to pay for shouldering the burden of child care costs.***
  - ***The low wages that early childhood educators earn, even though we know that skilled, supported and knowledgeable early childhood educators are the cornerstone of quality, and that low compensation undermines quality and diminishes the benefits of ECE.***
  - ***% of programs experiencing staffing shortages / serving fewer children than they would like***
  - ***The impact of staffing shortages, such as longer waitlists and greater burnout***

Message 1: Funding child care is money well spent.

- Even prior to the pandemic, when Congress increased funding for child care through appropriations, states spent the money well and wisely, beginning to reverse the effects of decades of underfunding by addressing child care deserts, serving more children and families, raising payment rates, and improving the quality of care and education.

- Federal child care relief provided critical support to families who rely on child care and to a child care industry that would have collapsed without an infusion of emergency funds.

- ***Use NAEYC Pandemic Surveys and other sources to share information about your state's actions on:***
  - ***Stabilization grants and the % of child care programs that would have closed without them***
  - ***Increasing payment rates, and the % of educators who received additional wages via relief***
  - ***Implementing health and safety improvements***
  - ***Addressing waiting lists, expanding eligibility limits, and waiving parent co-payments so more families can get the help they need to pay for child care.***

- ***Then make it real for Congress by telling the story about what relief funding has or hasn't meant to you, and the children, families, and educators you work with. For example:***
  - ***Did relief help you stay open, reopen, pay down debt, or increase wages?***
  - ***If you or other programs you know of closed, what was the impact on families and children?***
  - ***How did it help when states paid programs based on enrollment not attendance?***
  - ***If you're in higher education, what has a lack of child care meant for your students?***

- Relief funding made a difference in staving off the mass child care closures that would have happened in the absence of public investment. Yet even with relief funding, staffing has remained a tremendous challenge, threatening child care supply, impacting healthy child development, and compromising the ability of the child care sector to support our nation's economy.

- States need more resources to build on their pre-pandemic progress, and pandemic emergency support. Every dollar that goes to early childhood education is an investment in our country's current functioning and its future, which is why Congress must now help states build on the foundation of positive changes, not go back to the crises and challenges of the past when six-out-of-seven children eligible for child care assistance could not receive it, families paid more for child care than for housing, and child care providers were paid so little that nearly half had to be on public assistance to make ends meet.

- That was not sustainable then, and we are facing worse now because the market in early childhood education means that programs are constrained from being able to raise wages on their own. When they can't raise wages, they can't recruit or retain staff; and when they can't recruit or retain staff, there are fewer people to provide the care and education that families and children need—which means child care becomes a scarce resource. Costs go up for families, options dwindle, and quality moves further out of reach. This is the cycle we are experiencing, and without help, it will continue to worsen.

- ***Use your NAEYC Pandemic Surveys and State Fact Sheets to talk about data that illustrates:***
    - ***% of programs who expect to raise tuition and/or cut wages when stabilization grants end***
    - ***% of educators considering leaving their program or closing their child care home***

Message 2: Substantial and sustainable investments in ECE are needed.

- Resources are needed to enact much-needed policies to address the totality of the child care crisis – and to address the significant gaps that existed prior to the crisis.

- Investing in emergency child care relief was essential, in part so that there would continue to be a child care system in which Congress could invest, substantially and sustainably, with a focus on the education and compensation of the ECE workforce as the main driver of child care supply and quality.

- We must build on the bipartisan agreement on the need to double funding for CCDBG and put the program on a more stable foundation as relief funding expires.

- ***Check on your Members' support for child care and early learning. What bills have they introduced, co-sponsored, or voted for? Try to thank them for support they did provide. In general:***

- **WHEN YOU ARE MEETING WITH DEMOCRATS:**
    - Thank you for supporting child care relief, the transformative efforts we tried to achieve through reconciliation, and the bipartisan increase in CCDBG funding in the FY23 appropriations process.
    - We ask you to do everything you can to continue to prioritize and protect necessary investments in quality child care and early learning, and continue working to advance bold and needed investments through higher education, workforce development, apprenticeships, and more.
    - This includes signing onto and prioritizing appropriations requests which—at a minimum—bring funding levels for CCDBG to at least a total of $12.3 billion, with robust and increased support for Head Start, Preschool Development Grants, and other early learning programs so that states can continue to make progress and avoid cuts and cliffs.

- **WHEN YOU ARE MEETING WITH REPUBLICANS:**
    - Our state has made critical investments in child care using relief dollars, and, due to bipartisan support for the FY23 child care appropriations increase, is continuing to make progress.
    - We urge you to continue to join the bipartisan support for prioritizing and protecting necessary investments in child care and early learning that are needed via the upcoming annual appropriations process and other workforce development investments.

    - This includes signing onto and prioritizing appropriations requests which provide increased, robust funding for CCDBG, Head Start, Preschool Development Grants, and other early learning programs so that our state doesn't have to make cuts that harm families and businesses.

Message 3: To be successful, investments need to be comprehensive.

- To provide flexibility for states, and options for families, high-quality early childhood education can and must be provided in all settings—including schools, centers, and family child care homes.

- The science of early learning is as complex for children from birth through age three as it is for children in preschool, and, as such, differences in settings do not dictate differences in the nature of the complex and valuable work of early childhood education and educators.

- One of the lessons elevated in the pandemic is that we don't have care on one hand and education on the other; care and education go hand-in-hand, which is why it is particularly important to ensure, for example, that investments in child care and Pre-K move together as part of a continuum of support for children from birth to kindergarten, including center- and family-based child care and Head Start.

- Investing in pre-K that is provided in centers and homes alongside schools is both critical and doable. At the same time, investing in PreK, even mixed delivery PreK, without simultaneous investments in child care that supports access to quality for infants and toddlers would further destabilize a child care system that is already struggling to survive.

- ***Stories are great here! Without undermining either preK or child care, talk about your perspective on the importance of having federal funding that increases families' options for accessing high-quality ECE in the settings that work best for them.***
    - *Remind the office about the benefits you see when children in working families have access to consistent high-quality child care provided by skilled and compensated educators in your state / community / program – and about what happens when they don't.*

Professional Preparation, Education, and Compensation of the ECE Workforce

- We also ask you to focus on supporting current and future early childhood educators by investing in their professional preparation, development, and compensation.

- Access to affordable, quality ECE professional preparation programs in higher education is critical to our goal of building a stronger, more equitable early childhood education profession that sets our nation's young children on a path to success.

    - ***Stories are welcome here as well, from educators who pursued degrees (but still didn't make more money) or faculty who have seen first-hand the challenges of enrolling students for a high-value but low-wage field, and what that means for supply and quality.***

- Investments in early childhood education preparation programs at colleges and universities, Pell grants, scholarships, loan forgiveness and cancellation, wraparound supports, broadband access, and registered apprenticeships are critical because they recognize the importance of supporting early childhood educators in pursuing degrees and credentials that respond to the science of early learning and lead to professional salaries.

- We encourage you to continue identifying and supporting ways to increase equitable, affordable access to higher education to help the ECE workforce across all states and settings. This includes:
    - Supporting students enrolled in early childhood education preparation programs by maintaining, growing, and improving direct supports, scholarships, loan forgiveness, and cancellation programs for early childhood educators working in all settings;
    - Improving programs that prepare early childhood educators and leaders, by maintaining and improving Title II in HEA, including Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grants;
    - Increasing funding for CCAMPIS to support student-parents by helping them afford and access child care; and
    - Improving TEACH grants to make them more accessible to early childhood educators earning associate degrees as part of an articulated ECE professional pathway.

Step 4: Engage the policymaker related to their priorities

- ***Use your research to adapt your talking points based on the office and their interest. Ask questions about their priorities, process, and timeline.***

- Make a connection based on your research, for example:
    - As a parent herself, we know the Senator can understand the challenges working families face when trying to find quality, affordable, and accessible child care.
    - An investment in child care is an investment in our country's economic growth, as well as our country's small businesses—an area we know the Congressman is particularly interested in!

- Share and find out more information, for example:
    - What are the office's current priorities related to young children and families?
    - What is your sense about the timeline for opportunities related to child care, early learning, and higher education opportunities in this Congress?

Step 5: Offer to be a resource

- As you continue to move forward, we encourage you to think of us and use us as a resource to stay connected to what's happening on the ground in our state / district.

- During any recess, we would also love to have you and Senator / Representative ______ come visit us (in person or virtually) at one of our NAEYC-accredited, high-quality early childhood centers back at home.

Step 6: Thank everyone, leave folder & cookie behind, and follow up via email!

Additional Talking Points To Help You Answer Questions from Congress About Child Care and Early Learning

If you're asked to explain why the end of federal relief won't just result in a return to pre-pandemic "status quo":

- The constraints of the child care market mean that early childhood programs can't raise wages enough to compete with retail and other employment options that have been able to raise wages, and benefits, and which are structured to be able to pass costs along to customers.
- While that is happening, costs have also increased for child care programs due to inflationary pressures, and for programs operating on razor-thin margins, the impacts are substantial.
- Child care programs cannot pass more costs along to families. So, when they can't raise wages, or provide benefits, they can't recruit or retain staff, which results in too many people leaving, and not enough people coming in.
- This means there are fewer people to provide the care and education that families and children need, which means child care becomes a scarce—and therefore increasingly expensive—resource.
- Costs go up for families, options dwindle, and quality moves further out of reach. This is the cycle we are experiencing, and without help, it will continue to worsen.

If you're asked about the impacts of inflation on child care:

- Educators and families are experiencing the challenges of inflation, which makes an even stronger case for investing dollars that raise wages and bring down families' costs for something as important as child care.
- Economists have shown that lowering costs for families can help take the edge off of inflation by improving parents' labor force participation and productivity, which is pro-growth and anti-inflationary.
- The status quo of limited investments, however, would ensure that prices continue to increase, while supply and options decrease. Child care supply is shrinking faster than at any other point in decades—with no end in sight.
- Without action to shore up and strengthen America's child care supply, the early learning market is headed for catastrophe, which would leave all families without care options.

If you're asked about child care supply and deregulation as a solution:

- We'd be glad to talk to you about research that has found no correlation between the strictness of state regulations and supply of child care. There is a lack of evidence to suggest that health and safety protections—like those enacted in the bipartisan 2014 CCDBG reauthorization CCDBG—have reduced the supply of child care.
- Educators report that the primary issue driving them away from the system is lack of support, resources, and compensation—issues that have only deepened in the context of the pandemic.
- In most states, for example, providers receive what amounts to an average of approximately $3.50/hour from the state to provide child care for a 4-year old. Prior to the pandemic, provider

payment rates had dwindled to cover only a tiny percentage of the cost of care. While states have been able to raise rates with federal relief funding, rates need to be raised permanently and in alignment with the true cost of quality in order for states to increase the supply of child care.
- While there are opportunities to streamline and lessen paperwork burdens, and target the revision of regulations that undermine the expertise and autonomy of early childhood educators, policies that make child care less attractive to educators by making their jobs harder (via increased ratios and group sizes) will worsen the supply problem those policies are trying to solve.
- Lowering the bar on child care in an attempt to solve the challenges of supply is misguided and will lead parents to choose between safe child care and affordable child care, compromising quality and harming children and families in both the short and long term.

If you're asked more about "burdensome" or "costly" child care regulations:

NOTE: Remember to differentiate between administrative challenges in accessing grants and contracts, for example, which is something you can discuss with your state agencies, and overarching, generalized conversations about rules and regulations related to child care operations. It's important to use language that references "public health, safety, and quality guidelines" as opposed to "burdensome regulations." That's because we don't give policymakers an option to focus only on the regulations, while ignoring the investments needed to meet them.

- All families deserve the opportunity to be able to choose between quality settings in which their children are safe, healthy and learning. Regulations such as ratio and qualification requirements reflect what we know about children's safety and development, providing important safety protections for children and upholding the quality of early education and care.
- We know too much about the importance of children's development in the early years—and what can happen when children are left in unsafe environments—to have a market without strong regulations.
- Research is clear: states with more effective regulatory structures have a greater supply of higher quality programs, and children who attend higher quality programs demonstrate better outcomes.
- Early childhood education is a labor-intensive field, and providing high-quality ECE is not – nor should it be! – a cheap endeavor. But regulations—based on what we know about child and brain development to promote health, safety and quality—aren't to blame for those costs.

If you're asked about how much high-quality child care costs:

- The National Academies of Medicine's report on *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8* estimated that full financing of high-quality early childhood education with a highly qualified and adequately compensated workforce would cost $140 billion/year, or .75% of GDP.
- Making this investment is making an investment in our nation's essential infrastructure, as important to our collective existence as other public goods, such as streets and highways, clean drinking water, or sanitation, investments which collectively amount to roughly 2.4% of GDP.
- Paying the costs of high-quality ECE is a good deal for taxpayers, and a revenue-generating investment over time, resulting in a broad range of benefits that accrue both to individuals and society at large.

If you're asked about why early childhood educators need degrees or access to higher education:

- We would be glad to share the vast research on this topic, but we can tell you, from comprehensive studies, that based on the "high level of complex knowledge and competencies indicated by the science of child development," research has concluded that "higher teacher qualifications are significantly positively correlated with higher quality in early childhood education and care."
- While child care is a critical support for the workforce, it is also a critical support for child development. Investments in high-quality early childhood education are driven by the science and research on brain development and economic development. High-quality early childhood education strengthens our current and future workforce, and helps all young children have a fair shot at success.

If you're asked about how child care providers run their businesses:

- Organizations that provide professional development to help early childhood educators who are also small-business owners in running their own center and family-based child care are doing important work in support of strong fiscal and program management.
- It is important to provide resources and supports to help early childhood businesses become stronger, more financially sound and efficient, and better equipped to provide compensation as sole providers, and for staff, and to offer high-quality early learning opportunities.
- At the same time, owners and directors of child care programs can't financially plan their way out of a market failure. They can't budget with revenue they don't have, and expenses that exceed what families can afford to pay.
- The biggest issue in child care financing is a lack of financing. Support for programs to run their businesses better can be important, but only in the context of additional funding to make it possible for them to run their businesses at all.

If you are asked about the impact of a "living" or "minimum" wage on child care:

- Everyone working within the early childhood education field, regardless of their education or training, should earn no less than the amount needed to cover basic living standards.
- When child care professionals are well-paid and have good working conditions, their well-being improves, and the child care they provide is more likely to be high-quality and provide a safer and more engaged setting for children so they can thrive.
- In addition, early childhood education, rooted as it is in science and research, is not a minimum-wage job, and a self-sufficiency standard must be considered the floor and not the ceiling.
- Finally, wage increases must be accompanied, simultaneously, with substantially increased public investments in child care, as small child care businesses cannot pass on the costs of increased wages for employees, who have earned those increases, to families who struggle already to afford the price of care.

If you're asked about how faith-based providers are included in the child care market:

- Faith based programs are an important part of our mixed delivery ECE system, serving 15%— not 50% — of working families (via Bipartisan Policy Center).
- Many faith-based programs in the child care sector, both those that accept families supported by subsidies, and those who only serve families who can pay out of pocket, have successfully engaged in quality and licensing systems implemented by the state and external organizations in ways that are non-discriminatory and fully compatible with their faith.
- Programs positively assert that they are both rooted in faith and rooted in a commitment to health, safety, and quality; these concepts are not at odds.
- In the context of Build Back Better (BBB), there was some confusion and misinformation about the inclusion of faith-based providers, but the reality was that language explicitly included them as part of the program's overall design for inclusivity.
  - It was clear that child care certificates would not be considered direct financial federal assistance; in the last version of the BBB Senate text, for additional clarity, it says "child care certificates shall be considered *indirect* Federal financial assistance to the provider."

If you're asked about or want to talk about child care as infrastructure:

- For many years, early childhood advocates have been vocal about the fact that child care is a vital part of our national infrastructure that is central to working families, communities, and the current and future economic success of our country. This has always been true and the pandemic has made it clear that families and our economy depend on a strong, supported, and funded child care sector.
- Child care, as an industry, employs more than 2 million individuals in small and large businesses, most of whom are women, and women of color, and infrastructure investments could upgrade and expand existing centers, build new centers, and cover start-up costs for small family child care businesses.
- In addition, and on a practical level, when we invest in building our nation's roads and bridges, we need to make sure that the workers building them have affordable, accessible, high-quality child care for their children. Simply put, parents cannot work if they do not have child care.

If you are asked about the possibility of policy changes in CCDBG:

- CCDBG is a foundational and critical program. We can continue to build on it by maintaining state flexibility, increasing parent choice, and supporting health, safety, and licensing standards to keep children safe in all settings.
- We must also go further to really respond to needs: guaranteeing that all eligible families receive support; lowering costs for those families; increasing quality and supply; increasing compensation; and paying providers on the actual cost of quality care.
- There are policy changes that both Democrats and Republicans agree on; we saw a lot of areas of agreement in last year's Republican-led reauthorization proposal for CCDBG that were also in the Child Care for Working Families Act, for example.
- However, most policy changes cost money. For example, expanding eligibility for families above 85% of SMI is a worthy goal; but if states are doing that in the context of limited funds that don't allow

them to raise reimbursement rates for programs, the impact of the policy change will simply be increasing waitlists – it won't increase supply or actually help families at all.
- A bipartisan funding agreement that is in addition to and builds upon annual appropriations is the right place for a conversation about funding that supports agreed-upon policy changes, and we encourage those conversations between leaders and champions to continue even while a focus on core appropriations moves forward for FY24.

If you're asked about federal child care investments amounting to a federal takeover:

- Many proposals for federal child care investments build on existing state and federal programs, increase parental choice, support state flexibility, provide autonomy for provider decision-making about content and curriculum, and help a diversity of providers to expand their services by providing the resources needed to respond to a market failure.
- All 50 states currently develop state rules to administer the child care assistance program that is primarily funded using federal dollars and prioritizes parent choice, and 44 states and the District of Columbia fund voluntary pre-k programs.
- Federal investments are needed to address widespread challenges with access, affordability, and quality in child care and early learning, while reinforcing the benefits of a strong mixed-delivery system that prioritizes parent choice in whether to rely on care and in determining the type and setting of care that best meets a family's needs.
- The scope and scale of federal investments are key to resolving existential flaws in America's child care market caused by decades of underinvestment, which create an entirely untenable business model for providers that often translates into near-poverty wages for early educators.
- A substantial and sustained federal investment need not be a federal takeover of child care; rather, it is necessary to help sustain and strengthen the existing child care programs families currently rely on, provide additional flexibility to states to respond to their communities; and increase supply to give families more choices to find options that best meet their needs.

If you're asked about state engagement in federal child care programs (state take-up):

- Child care isn't a Red state or a Blue state issue – it affects all families, and governors, including our state's Governor, recognize that a key to our state's success economically is ensuring that people who need to work have the ability to do so.
- Last year's polling from First Five Years Fund shows that 71% of voters in 2022 swing states, including 56% of Republicans, believed their Governors should accept funding to expand their state's child care systems if the BBB proposal had become law. That includes voters in many of the states that did not expand Medicaid.
- Already in 2023, more than half of the 36 Democratic and Republican governors who gave State of the State mentioned child care and preschool as high priorities (via Center for American Progress).

If you're asked about "fade-out" or research on the "limited impact of preschool":

- Early childhood education has always been a field that embraces research, and research says that the quality of the program matters in delivering sustainable positive outcomes.
- What we're seeing is that if we sacrifice quality, we will sacrifice the results that we all want, and that we know are achievable with sufficient investments!
- In addition, we know that all of the years from birth through eight matter. The repeated findings of substantial but not sustained effects from early childhood education programs means we have to move away from thinking of preschool as a "once and done" inoculation model. The only way to have prolonged impact is to maintain support, which is why NAEYC's mission is to "promote high quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8."

If you're asked specifically about the Tennessee PreK Study:

- *NOTE: These talking points are adapted from Tennesseans for Quality Early Education (TQEE) in recognition of the study results released in January 2022 that found the VPK children were doing worse than their control group peers by the end of sixth grade in academic achievement, discipline issues and special education referrals.*
- However, it's important to remember that TN Pre-K works. Previous studies by some of the same researchers tracking the same cohort of children showed benefits of the VPK program, and a tremendous body of research demonstrates positive results from high-quality preschool in multiple studies beyond Tennessee.
- It is also important to note that Tennessee's VPK program has made significant improvements; the evaluation actually did what it was supposed to in terms of continuous program improvement. Children who enter Tennessee Pre-K classrooms today have a very different experience from those who participated when the study began. The study underscores that quality matters – not only for Pre-K programs, but also for our early learning continuum Pre-K-3rd grade (and beyond).

If you're asked about duplication or inefficiencies:

- A congressionally-mandated study from the GAO found that existing early childhood education programs are different, and that they work together. Specifically, they found that nine programs describe early learning or child care as an explicit purpose. GAO also identified an additional 35 programs that did not have an explicit early learning or child care purpose, but permitted funds to be used for these services.
- They noted that even while "some programs with an explicit early learning or child care purpose overlap, given that they target similar beneficiaries, such as low-income children, or engage in similar activities, *these programs often have different goals and administrative structures, and improvement in coordination has helped mitigate the effects of fragmentation and overlap, according to GAO's analysis."*
- We don't have too many programs—we have too few resources. Our most significant issues are the enormous number of unserved children, and the need to improve quality.

If you're asked about the role of tax credits:

- There are opportunities to improve the tax code to address the real challenges families face in paying for child care, but tax credits alone are not the solutions to the child care crisis.
- While direct assistance to families is best, tax-side solutions, such as an expanded, refundable Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC), would help some families and is a complement to further investments in child care.
- Likewise, the expanded advance Child Tax Credit (CTC) supports families with young children and is a critical and important policy which should be made permanent.
- Some families are able to use the credit to help pay for child care, but research shows that others in our community really need it for other necessities like food, housing, and diapers.
- In the end, however, tax solutions, including the important CTC expansion, fall short of addressing the comprehensive investments needed to provide equitable access to high-quality child care because tax solutions are limited in their ability to address quality, support early childhood educators, and increase supply in a broken market where neither parents nor providers can shoulder the full burden of cost.

Focused Talking Points: Infant Toddler and Family Child Care

The science of early learning is as complex for children from birth through age three as it is for children in preschool, and, as such, differences in settings and age bands do not dictate differences in the nature of the complex and valuable work of early childhood education and educators. However, without being explicitly called out, policymakers can overlook the unique landscape and particular needs of educators working in family child care homes, and with infants and toddlers.

- This resource is designed to help advocates talk with their members of Congress about the significance of the infant toddler years and the importance of family child care homes, as well as the specific barriers and inequities.

The talking points outlined below align with the National Collaboration on Infants and Toddlers (NCIT) and are informed by a partnership with All Our Kin and the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). We have also included data points specific to infants and toddlers, and family child care homes, from NAEYC's November 2022 ECE Field Survey.

As always, early childhood educators are in the best position to develop solutions that work for them. We encourage advocates to ensure that educators working with infants and toddlers, and in family child care, are supported to engage with policymakers so their expertise and experience can be intentionally elevated to inform the design and implementation of early childhood policies and systems.

Focused Talking Points: Infants and Toddlers

✓ *Key Policy Recommendation:* Incentivize and support educators working with infants and toddlers, through targeted loan forgiveness, scholarships, subsidy rate increases, tax benefits, and wage increases.

The Need for High Quality, Affordable Child Care for Infants and Toddlers

- Babies' brains develop fastest from birth to age three. Relationships with caregivers and early experiences—both positive and negative—build the foundations of brain architecture, which supports their ability to learn, their behavior, and their overall health.
- Positive experiences early in children's lives promote healthy physical development, while negative experiences can lead to long-term health challenges.
- 1 in 6 children in the U.S. has a disability. Identifying those needs early and addressing them immediately reduces the likelihood of disabilities worsening, decreases the need for later services, and saves money.[i]
- Investments in high quality early childhood programs starting at birth deliver a 13% annual economic return – higher than the 7-10% return from investing in preschool alone.[ii]
- Infant care exceeds the cost of college tuition in 30 states and the District of Columbia. Costs range from 29.3% of a family's income to 93.8% depending on where the family lives.[iii]

- Average wages for infant and toddler care are at the bottom of the occupational ladder at less than $11 an hour[iv], with more than half relying on public assistance even before the COVID-19 pandemic.[v]
- There is a wage penalty for educators working with infants and toddlers; these educators are paid less than individuals caring for and educating older children.
- Low wages disproportionately impact women of color. 45% of early childhood educators are Black, Asian, or Latinx, and half of child care businesses are minority owned.[vi]
- In NAEYC's latest survey of the early childhood education field, 62% of programs serving infants and toddlers were experiencing a staffing shortage.
  - Of those, 42% are dealing with longer waitlists as a result.
  - Less than a quarter of programs serving infants and toddlers felt that their program "will be fine" when stabilization grants end.[vii]

Policy Implications

- One of the lessons elevated in the pandemic is that we don't have care on one hand and education on the other; care and education go hand-in-hand, which is why it is particularly important to ensure that investments in child care for infants and toddlers and investments in preschool for three and four year olds move together as part of a continuum of support for children from birth to kindergarten, including center- and family-based child care and Head Start.

- Investing in pre-K that is provided in centers and homes alongside schools is both critical and doable. At the same time, investing in PreK, even mixed delivery PreK, without simultaneous investments in child care that supports access to quality for infants and toddlers would further destabilize a child care system that is already struggling to survive.

Focused Talking Points: Family Child Care (FCC)

✓ *Key Policy Recommendation*: Increase investment in the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start-Early Head Start, and the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) in support of a robust mixed-delivery system that includes FCC and expands parent choice.

The Need for Investments in Family Child Care

- Family child care (FCC) is a critical component of our nation's child care system.[viii]
- FCC programs serve a disproportionate share of infants and toddlers; children from low-income families; Black, Latinx, immigrant & Indigenous communities; and those who live in child care deserts.
- The supply of licensed FCC has plummeted, narrowing the choices of families in these communities.
  - 52% of FCC homes closed from 2005-2017, while another 10 percent closed permanently during the first year of the pandemic.[ix]
- In NAEYC's November 2022 ECE Field Survey, 22% of respondents identified as FCC providers.
  - 85% of FCC survey respondents received stabilization grants. 39% said their program "would be closed without the support" from those grants, compared to 19% of respondents from non-FCC homes.

- FCC respondents who received stabilization grants were 3-times more likely to have reported a wage increase than FCC respondents who did not receive stabilization grants.
- The substantial benefits of stabilization grants experienced by FCC homes also means that there may be substantial losses ahead for them, when stabilization grants end.
  - While 34% of respondents overall could say that their program "will be fine" when the stabilization grants end, only 13% of family child care homes could say the same.[x]

Policy Implications

- Reimbursement rates tied to market rates are unsustainable for all providers, especially FCC providers and others who care for a large share of infants and toddlers.[xi] To stabilize families' access to child care, it is more important than ever to increase provider reimbursement rates based on the actual cost of quality care, in order to sustainably increase compensation.

- The pandemic economy increased housing insecurity among FCC providers. Policy change is needed to build supply and streamline pathways to housing assistance for FCC providers and access to infrastructure and child care facilities funding.

- Like all early childhood educators, those working in family child care homes need accessible career pathways that link their education, training and professional competencies to higher compensation. During consideration of workforce development approaches and access to higher education, policymakers must design and equitably fund programs that are accessible to family child care providers at times, locations, and in the languages they prefer. Staffed Family Child Care Networks are shown to be particularly effective in supporting FCC professional development.

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[i] Center for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/index.html
[ii] National Bureau of Economic Research. "Quantifying the Benefits of a Prototypical Early Childhood Program." https://heckmanequation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/w23479.pdf
[iii] Child Care Aware of America. (2019). The U.S. and the high cost of child care. http://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/research/costofcare/
[iv] Whitebook, M., Austin, L., Amanta, F. (2015). The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. "Addressing Infant Toddler Teacher Compensation." http://cscce.berkeley.edu/addressing-infant-toddler-compensation/
[v] Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018. https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhoodworkforce-2018-index/
[vi] Politico. (July 2020). "Crashing Down": How the child care crisis is magnifying racial disparities. https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/22/coronavirus-child-care-racial-disparities-377058
[vii] National Association for the Education of Young Children. November 2022 survey. https://www.naeyc.org/pandemic-surveys
[viii] Licensed child care is also known as certified or listed care. Some states also have regulated family child care. Most states license Family and Group Child Care, also known as Small and Large Family Child Care.
[ix] Addressing the Decreasing Number of Family Child Care Providers in the United States, National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, Rev. March 2020; Demanding Change: Repairing Our Child Care System, Child Care Aware of America, 2022.
[x] National Association for the Education of Young Children. November 2022 survey. https://www.naeyc.org/pandemic-surveys
[xi] The Center for American Progress (Workman, S. (2021) *The True Cost of High-Quality Child Care Across the United States)* estimates that state subsidy rates reimburse family child care providers, on average, for 66 percent of the cost to provide a "base level" of care and 29 percent of the cost to provide care at a high-quality level. In many states this results in FCC payment rates that are well below minimum wage and don't include benefits.