

Opening Statement of Vice Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
“Strengthening Welfare to Work with Child Care”
2175 Rayburn House Office Building
March 6, 2018 at 10:00 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding today’s hearing. From early childhood through college, education is the best investment we can make in our future. Investment in early learning, including quality child care, is especially wise because early learning programs are truly two generational: children benefit from high quality care and parents can look for, find, and advance in their jobs knowing their kids are learning in a safe and stimulating environment.

According to a 2017 poll by the First Five Years Fund, even 82 percent of Republicans believe we should make quality early education more affordable and accessible for working families.

The public supports quality child care, and research proves that it benefits children and families. According to the Abecedarian (*EY-BEE-SEE-DAIR-EE-UHN*) Project in North Carolina, the Perry Preschool in Michigan, and the Child-Parent Centers in Chicago, high-quality programs – including high quality child care – lead to higher graduation rates, improved job outcomes, and longer life expectancies. The economic benefits are so great that Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman estimates that society receives \$7.30 for every \$1 invested in high-quality early learning programs.

Currently, too many parents are priced out of high-quality preschool and child care. In Oregon, the annual cost of child care for infants and toddlers is higher than the cost of a public, four-year college. I hear from working families who are struggling to come up with the thousands of dollars they need for child care or preschool. Our assistance and support is woefully inadequate. More than 80 percent of families who qualify for child care assistance don’t receive it because of lack of funding.

That’s unacceptable. No child should be denied a strong start just because of their family’s economic circumstances.

Because I recognize the importance of affordable child care, I am an original cosponsor of H.R. 3773, the Child Care for Working Families Act, introduced by Ranking Member Bobby Scott and cosponsored by 117 Members of Congress, including every Committee Democrat. This legislation will give all working families making up to 150 percent of their state’s median income access to affordable, high-quality child care. It will support and grow small businesses, many of which are owned by female entrepreneurs, by investing in child care providers. And it will make sure that all early learning professionals are paid a living wage.

The bill will allow an additional 10 million children to attend high-quality child care and one million more parents to find, hold, and advance in a job, which further shows that early learning and care isn’t just an education issue. It’s an economic issue – quality, affordable childcare and early childhood education empowers workers and equips future generations with the foundational tools for success later in life.

The Child Care for Working Families Act is a fraction of the cost of the partisan tax reform bill recently signed into law, yet it provides more support for working families, which is why more than 100 national and state groups and more than 40,000 individual Americans publicly endorsed the bill in advance of this hearing. I would like to submit for the record the list of organizations endorsing the bill and the petitions from individuals across this country urging Congress to pass the Child Care for Working Families Act.

It's time to stop talking about child care and actually provide American working families with the solution they deserve. It's time for Congress to make sure that every family has access to affordable, high-quality child care. It's time for real economic stimulus that puts working parents and kids before tax cuts for millionaires. The Child Care for Working Families Act is the answer, and I urge every member of this Committee to support its passage.

I thank the witnesses for testifying today and look forward to hearing from them about what more the federal government can do to make sure all working families have access to high-quality child care and other early learning opportunities.

I yield back.