ED & WORKFORCE DEMOCRATS

OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Workforce
Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01)
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Hearing
"Supporting Working Families: State-Led Child Care Solutions"
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Tuesday, September 1, 2026 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Affordable, accessible, and quality child care is essential for children, families, employers, and for the economy. And because a substantial amount of brain development happens in the first few years of a child's life, quality early childhood education has a significant return on investment.

Last week, I held a child care roundtable at home in Oregon and heard very clearly from my constituents that Congress as well as states and private sector should be investing in early childhood programs and doing more to address the high cost of child care.

Too many families we represent are struggling to stretch every paycheck to cover necessities, and child care is often one of the most expensive line items in the family budget. In many communities, the problem isn't simply the cost - families simply can't find care. When parents can't find quality child care, they reduce their hours, turn down promotions, or leave the workforce entirely. That's what happened to one of the parents at our roundtable; she told us she had to quit her job because her entire paycheck would be going to child care. When parents stay home and out of the workforce with their kids, it should be by choice; not because they can't afford child care.

In fact, the lack of affordable child care costs our economy an estimated $172 billion every year in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue. That is not a failure on the part of parents or providers. It's a policy failure and we are here, I hope, to discuss solutions to address it. Some of those solutions come from innovation at the state level, so I welcome our discussion today.

It's clear that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to child care; the testimony today recognizes that families have differing needs and schedules, and child care has to reflect those demands. As the witnesses discuss in their testimony, states and localities are finding creative ways to expand supply, lower costs, strengthen providers, and support the child care workforce. And New Mexico for example, eliminated income requirements and copayments for participating families. Vermont uses capacity incentives to help providers expand so they can serve more families. Massachusetts continued to support providers after federal COVID stabilization funding expired. Washington, D.C., has some innovative approaches to improving compensation for early childhood educators. And my home state of Oregon is working to create a child care toolkit specifically for businesses.

We should build on these successful models to expand access without sacrificing quality. I want to caution; however, about shifting the burden of the child care crisis to states, employers, families, or even the private sector, and calling that a solution.

Shifting responsibility will not solve the problem. Employers have an important role to play. But as we discussed at our hearing in January, child care is not simply a workplace perk; it's a necessary investment and a critical piece of our economic infrastructure. Most small and midsized businesses do not have the resources to solve the nationwide child care crisis and shortage on their own. States can help but many states are already facing budget cuts. And it's clear that families cannot solve the workforce shortage by paying more, because the cost is already high.

That is why federal investment matters. For example, during the pandemic the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) demonstrated what federal resources can accomplish. Congress provided additional funding that states used to serve more children, increase provider payment rates, and stabilize participating child care businesses. That stabilization funding benefitted an estimated 225,000 providers serving 10 million children.

That was not government getting in the way of innovation; it was the government giving states and providers the resources they need to innovate and respond to a crisis. Regrettably, we still have an enormous gap. In 2025, CCDBG served roughly 921,000 children, but nearly 6.4 million children were eligible. Current funding levels only allow around 14 percent of eligible children to participate in the program. The expiration of relief dollars paired with stagnant funding has led to increased waitlists and fewer families served. It is my hope that today's discussion will focus on how we take what is working and make it available to more families.

We should support states that are raising provider payment rates. We should invest in child care workers, who are often paid poverty wages. We should expand the supply of care, particularly in rural communities and child care deserts, and we should support providers who are there for parents like firefighters and nurses who work non-traditional hours. And we should make the care that exists affordable.

We should also be willing to acknowledge what has not worked. We can and should investigate fraud and protect taxpayer dollars, but that should be without jeopardizing the care families need. Accountability and investment are not mutually exclusive.

The answer to a broken system is not to abandon it. It is to fix it. Innovation can show us the way forward. But Congress should support those innovations with the investment they need to reach families across this country – even in states with budget shortfalls. What we can and should do is pass the *Child Care for Working Families Act,* which would cap costs for families, expand access to high-quality care, and invest in the child care workforce.

With federal investment, states can better support providers, lower costs, and make child care accessible and affordable to families. Without it, child care workers will continue to be underpaid, and families will be priced out, burned out, and left out.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to the discussion, and I yield back.