

childcare subsidies or improved rates, childcare programs will certainly need expanded training, technical assistance and other supports to achieve and sustain higher quality.

3. Strengthen the Child Care Workforce

- Require those who work in childcare programs to have a minimum of 40 hours of initial training and 24 hours of annual training in key areas such as: CPR, first aid, child development, child behavior and guidance, learning activities, health and safety, and recognition and reporting of child abuse.
- Encourage States to develop programs that help the workforce progress toward the Child Development Associate credentials, Associate and Bachelor degrees.
- Invest in the expansion of programs like T.E.A.C.H and WAGE\$.

4. Enhance Child Care Monitoring

- Require at least annual inspections of licensed programs, preferably more and unannounced.
- Post inspection reports and complaint reports on line for public transparency.

5. Address Subsidy Rates

Most families can't afford quality care. It is just too expensive for families. Center-based infant care alone in 36 States exceeds the cost of college. Current law requires that a market survey be conducted but does not require that it be used in setting rates, nor does the law require a specific level at which subsidy is to be set. I have been told that this issue is likely too costly to address significantly at this time. This is disappointing. At a minimum, I recommend that the National Academy of Sciences be charged with studying the true cost of high quality childcare (not just the fees charged today) and task them with offering suggestions to consider for a better financed childcare system that addresses the early care and education needs of working families.

Thank you for your time today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Ms. Singerman.
Ms. Coro.

STATEMENT OF SUSANA CORO, ASSISTANT TEACHER, FALLS CHURCH-McLEAN CHILDREN'S CENTER, FALLS CHURCH, VA

Ms. CORO. Thank you very much. I want to say thank you for inviting me to testify here. My name is Susana Coro. I'm married. I have two children: Max, 7 years old; Yadida, 4 years old.

I'm coming to testify because my son is in the program at Falls Church-McLean Children's Center. When I tried to find a center, it was very hard for me, because my son has a speech delay. I tried to find a center around my area, and I'd go and talk with the persons, and I never found somebody who said, "I'm going to help."

When I went to the Falls Church-McLean Children's Center, I found the right person. She said: "What do you need?" And I said: "I need a space for my son because he has a speech delay, and I need to find somebody to help my son." And she said: "We don't have a space; can you wait?"

And I started hanging there and every day, every week, I called and asked: "Do you have a space, do you have a space?" Because my son, he needed help. And she said: "Yes, I find a space for you and bring your son."

Then when I went there, I said: "I need help for my son; he has a speech delay." And she said: "Yes, let's work together." And she started giving me referrals. And then I find somebody to help my son with the speech. Then they started working with the teachers in the center; my son, he received help.

That's what I want to say. I put my son in the childcare center because I needed help for him, and I needed to work. I'm so happy

to find the place where my son is safe. I'm so happy to find a place to help me.

Now, I'm working like a nanny before. I received a subsidy from the county. When I put my son in this center, they gave me help with the subsidy to pay the tuition because it's very expensive. At this time my income is not too high, and I received—and I'm very comfortable. Then when I started working and have more income, they stopped helping me.

The CHAIRMAN. They stopped helping you?

Ms. CORO. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Because you started making too much money?

Ms. CORO. Yes. And also I have another daughter, I have another kid. And I said, now what can I do now. But I don't want to pull my son out of the program because he receives a lot of help, because he needs speech therapy and I can't pay outside.

Then when my daughter is going into the program, I said, "Now what can I do? I need to pay a lot of money." And they say: "No, you're not qualified any more." And I said: "Well, what can I do?" I don't want to take my daughter from the program, because it's a very, very, very good program. And my director came to talk to me and she said: "Don't worry; I'm going to help. We do fundraising and I can help." And that's why I keep my daughter in the same place.

But I come to say it's very hard for me to keep paying a lot of money, but I have to pay because I want my daughter and my son to have a very good start in life.

Also, I'm coming to ask to you, try to find a way to help the families like my family. It's true, we don't have a lot of money. But when we start having a little bit more, all the services are cut. I have to pay the school for my daughter, for SACC my son, but it's a lot.

Also, in the schools, my son here, he does not receive lunch because they said, you're not qualified. Every week I have to pay \$20. Every month I have to pay \$350 for SACC, the program that's after school. Also, in the center I have to pay \$200 every week because this is the amount when I can pay. The other part the school has paid for me. This is a lot of money.

The CHAIRMAN. A lot of money.

Ms. CORO. It's a lot of money. But I need to do it. You know what, I'm working very hard, but I want to keep my daughter in a safe place.

Also, this center for me is the best center, because the staff is very kind. They work together with the speech therapists, all the therapists there. Also, every time they give me advice to help my son, and now for my daughter.

When I see these kind of things I say, "No, I have to work very hard and give that to my son." One thing my mother always used to say, she told me:

"I don't have money, I don't have lands; just the one only thing I can give for you is to study. Go to the best school, do the best that you can, and then you can have a very good life."

That's why I'm coming to you and say, please help us, because you have the power. You can come to help us, the community.

We work very hard. I'm not coming to ask for food, I'm not coming. But we need your help for the schools, we need, because if we want this country to go up we need to help, and the school's first. [The prepared statement of Ms. Coro follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SUSANA CORO

Good morning. I want to thank the Chairwoman of the subcommittee, Senator Mikulski, and the Ranking Member of the subcommittee, Senator Burr, for inviting me to testify today. I also want to thank the other members of the subcommittee for listening to my story.

My name is Susana Coro. I am married and we have two children, Max who is 7 years old and Yadida who is 4. For 10 years, I was a nanny to a family with an autistic child. I've always been good with children and the family sent me to have extra training to work with children with special needs.

Over time when my son was a toddler, I came to think his speech was not right. I looked everywhere for a center, but I thought to myself, these were no places for my son. A friend told me about the Falls Church/McLean Children's Center. She told me it was a great program—accredited and 4 stars on Virginia's Quality Rating System. For months, I went there and asked about openings. I literally begged them to take my son.

Max was 3 when he started at the center. They helped me apply for childcare assistance. They helped me contact the Infant & Toddler Connection program under ChildFind in Fairfax County. Max was screened and found eligible for speech services. The speech therapist came to the center and worked with Max. The teachers at the center worked with the speech therapist so they could better meet Max's needs as well. There are so many things that I like about the center.

- The staff are kind, professional, well-trained, and give good advice to parents.
- There aren't too many kids in the classrooms and each room has three teachers.
- The staff read to the children; there are lots of art projects, a block area, a sand table, a housekeeping area; the staff take the time to talk to each child, really connect with them.

At first, I was hired to work part-time in the center. When I was promoted to full-time, the county called me. They said I made too much money for subsidy. I didn't know what I was going to do. I didn't want to move my children to a different program, but even making more money, I could not afford the cost.

The director of the program told me not to worry. The Center raised funds for special circumstances. She said they help families who lose their childcare assistance, or who lose their jobs and need to look for a new one. She said if I could pay the \$800 that the monthly subsidy would have paid, the center would cover the rest. The rates are \$1,550 a month for 2-year-olds, \$1,420 a month for preschool children. She told me of the 70 children at the center, 45 are on subsidy at \$800 a month and the center pays the difference.

My daughter, Yadida is 4. I know this is a quality program for her. We pay \$800 a month for her and also another \$325 for my son in SACC, the school-age childcare program run by Fairfax County. If the center did not give me a discount, my daughter would not be here. It makes no sense that I could work in a program that I could not afford to send my children.

I know that the Falls Church/McLean Children's Center is a special place and that most childcare centers cannot afford to subsidize the families who participate. I feel lucky and I know my center is unique in its ability to serve the community. I am thankful that they really helped my son. And, now my daughter is at the center and she is really happy. I am working toward my CDA. I know I will get it.

Getting a childcare subsidy not only helped me get my children into a quality program, it really changed my life. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. We understand. We want to thank you, Ms. Coro, for that pretty excellent testimony. You told us your story and it was not easy. We thank you for being here. We thank you for all the thought that you put into your presentation. We thank you for the lessons learned that you teach us here about this.

We also are a committee that believes you should reward work and you should reward those people that want to have a better life for themselves and for their children, and that if you make a little bit more because of your own promotion, because you can move up,

or you earn because you get more hours in what you do, you should not be penalized. And we need to look how in our eligibility and so on that we acknowledge people like yourself for the resources that we have, that we don't punish people who are working and who are trying to achieve both now and for their children tomorrow.

It took a lot to come here today and we want to acknowledge your fortitude. I think that little boy and that little girl should be very happy, not only because of the childcare that they have, because the first provider of childcare is their mother, and you're obviously a real advocate for them.

So thank you very much.

Ms. CORO. No, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. We'll come back now and ask questions in a minute. We're going to now turn to our panel and we'll have a question for you.

Before I ask my questions, I'm going to be the wrap-up. Senator Burr, do you want to have your questions, and then we'll go to Senator Merkley? We welcome him today. Then I'll have the last. I'll have the last word.

Senator BURR. I will do whatever the chairman instructs me to do.

Janet, again thank you, and thank you to all the witnesses for accommodating us today. Janet, if you will, can you talk about why background checks are so important for the population?

Ms. SINGERMAN. As I said in my testimony, it is critical that children in childcare are in safe settings. And background checks are a mechanism of ensuring that those who work in childcare are not in a position—aren't in a position to do harm, haven't anything on their record that would place children at risk. The responsibility I think we have through childcare regulation and through criminal background checks is to ensure that people who shouldn't be in settings with children are not employed by those settings.

In our State, we recently passed legislation to improve our criminal background checks for those who work in early care and education settings in just this last session.

Senator BURR. Do you think most parents take for granted that every State and every childcare facility does that?

Ms. SINGERMAN. Absolutely. Absolutely, and there are surveys that have been done that indicate just that.

Senator BURR. What are the common types of crimes that exclude individuals in the North Carolina system from being hired for childcare?

Ms. SINGERMAN. Well, I have that here, but what we're looking for are people who don't have violent offenses, there aren't substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect. We don't want to see sex offenders in childcare settings. We don't want folks who have been involved in and engaged in behaviors that really would put children at risk in those settings.

We want to see the use of fingerprints at the State level and at the Federal level. We want to see that child abuse registries are checked and sex offender registries are checked. We want to use all of those mechanisms to screen out those folks who really shouldn't be in childcare.

North Carolina has a screening process in place and last year I believe it screened out more than 300 individuals from working in childcare centers and childcare settings.

Senator BURR. From your life in childcare, if we didn't have a criminal background check in North Carolina how many people do you think additionally would try to be employed in the field with a criminal history that would exclude them?

Ms. SINGERMAN. I don't know that I can quantify it.

Senator BURR. Do you think some people never apply because they—

Ms. SINGERMAN. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Senator BURR. It's a deterrent just to have it.

Ms. SINGERMAN. It is absolutely a deterrent to have a criminal background check.

Senator BURR. I say this for my colleagues. It shocked me when I checked to see how many States actually check the sex offender registry. Only 31 States.

Ms. SINGERMAN. That's right.

Senator BURR. Only 31 States check to see if an individual has a sex offense charged against them.

Madam Chair, as we go through this reauthorization—and you have been incredibly accommodating to me and supportive—I hope that the one thing that we will not let get jettisoned is this requirement for criminal background checks. I think it is absolutely essential that our systems live up to what parents believe they have today, but in reality many States aren't there yet.

I also say this for the chair's purposes, and I think Janet has alluded to this: North Carolina didn't reach the level of a model for the country overnight. This has been in the work for over a decade. In our expectations as we institute new goals, requirements, in the reauthorization, we can't expect States to start from 0 and end up at 64 percent next year. But it's absolutely crucial that we have a starting point and that we make a national commitment that safe and quality childcare is available everywhere.

I think we're on the right track. I think we've got to get this reauthorization through and, more importantly, we've got to look at the future generations and know that not only will they be safe, but a quality education will be somewhat like Ms. Coro has described in the facility her children are in. I think that's achievable in this legislation.

I thank the chair.

The CHAIRMAN. That was excellent. I just want to say to my colleague from North Carolina that safety is the anchor to quality. You cannot have quality unless parents feel confidence in the facility and children feel safe and secure. For many children, this will be one of the more safe and secure environments that they're in. So believe me, I feel the same sense of insistence that you do.

Senator Merkley.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MERKLEY

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you to all of you for the ideas you're presenting on how we can strengthen our childcare system, which is so important to working families.

Ms. Coro, you commented on the emphasis on the opportunity that's created through the schools. It reminded me of my own father, who as a working class parent, he took me down to the school, he said: "You go through those doors and you work hard, here in America you can do almost anything." The fact that you're carrying that message to your children is very, very powerful.

I did want to ask a couple questions. In regard to, Mr. Acord, you noted some points about Tennessee's requirement for 40 hours of training for new childcare staff. I wanted to ask a couple details about that. Specifically, does it cover all the childcare providers, including the family, friend, and neighbor providers? And if so, in some cases do providers get assistance in covering the costs of that training? And then, third, when those providers are at training is there a system for kind of covering them, especially in this family, friend, and neighbor system, how the children would be cared for?

Mr. ACORD. The training is actually paid for through the CCDBG, so it is free to all early childhood educators, both center and home care. At the end of the 30 hours they receive a certificate verifying. And it's not just for the early childhood educators. There's also a separate training developed under that same path for the administrators, because leadership, administration, is very important; and also for the school-aged, those working with school-aged children.

So we've tried to look very comprehensively at what the needs are out there in the early childhood community to make sure that they have access to that. In some centers, yes, there are funds available to pay for substitutes while they're attending the training if it's during the course of the week. Those trainings are also offered on weekends, too, Saturdays, and sometimes at night.

So I think it's essential if you're looking at quality and if you're looking at improving the industry in the area of qualifications. That training also then is articulated into hopefully helping the individual get a CDA and then articulated into community colleges if they want to pursue an associate degree, and then on to a BA degree, too.

Senator MERKLEY. So the training requirement is to cover the family, friend, neighbor providers?

Mr. ACORD. Yes, home providers, yes.

Senator MERKLEY. So when you talked about some centers providing substitutes, are substitutes provided in that setting also?

Mr. ACORD. I'll find out about that. I'm not confident whether they are in those particular settings. I know they are in centers and in group homes. We have group homes, we have family daycare homes, and then we have the unregulated, too.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you all very much. I appreciate your thoughtfulness in bringing these ideas forward.

Mr. ACORD. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Franken.

Senator FRANKEN. Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is for anyone who thinks they have the answers to these questions. With the tension between access and quality that we're hearing as a constant refrain here, and also the constant reference to fiscal restraint, just what percentage of kids who need subsidies for childcare in this country receive it?

Mr. ACORD. Well, are you going to go for it? Go.

Ms. SINGERMAN. One out of every six.

Mr. ACORD. That's what I was going to say, too.

Ms. SINGERMAN. One out of every six.

Senator FRANKEN. OK, so one out of every six children who needs subsidies. How do you define that? And then what percentage of kids who need childcare get childcare?

Ms. SINGERMAN. Well, there is the threshold of 85 percent of State median income at the Federal level. In our State childcare subsidy eligibility is up to 75 percent of the State median income. So that would be the universe of children we're talking about in terms of who is allowed to be eligible through the Federal legislation.

Our agency serves as the childcare subsidy administrator for Mecklenburg County, which is the single largest county childcare subsidy program in North Carolina. We administer about \$43, \$44 million of childcare subsidy funds, and we're serving an average of just over 7,000 children monthly. Right now we have over 4,000 children on our waiting list waiting to be served. That's not the universe of eligible. Those are just the families that have come to our door that presented as eligible.

Senator FRANKEN. How does this compare to European countries? Does anybody know that?

Ms. SINGERMAN. Entirely different systems.

Senator FRANKEN. Well, I know it's an entirely different system.

Mr. ACORD. Some European countries, France for example, it's available to everyone.

Senator FRANKEN. Again, we've all agreed that early childhood care is crucial to kids' intellectual development and readiness to learn. So from infancy to age 3 an incredible part of your intellectual development takes place. So we're talking about our economy—let's just talk about our economy here. Let's just go straight to it. Forget human beings. Let's just talk about money.

Obviously, what I'm saying here is the reason that our kids should be getting this high quality childcare is for their intellectual development, for their readiness to go to kindergarten so that they can become productive citizens. That's one reason.

There's another reason, which is that kids are beautiful, kids are wonderful.

Ms. CORO. Sir, can I say something?

Senator FRANKEN. Yes.

Ms. CORO. Sorry. I think the earlier the kids start going to learn something new is the best. When you said 2 to 3 years is the more power time, you can teach whatever you want. That's why I think the childcare or the pre-schools, if our kids start early they're going to have better opportunities in their lives.

I tell this because I know my son I read a lot to. I don't have too much information, but I put in practice whatever I learn. Whatever I learn, I put in practice on my kids. I know my daughter, she is 4 years old, and she acts like 6 or 7 years old because I teach her from when she started, 3 months to now. She knows a lot. That's why I say, when you put your kids in childcare and programs like the high quality, they learn a lot.

Senator FRANKEN. Well, she's lucky to have you as a mom.

Ms. CORO. Thank you. But that's why I say to you——

Senator FRANKEN. And she's lucky to be in——

Ms. CORO [continuing]. Please help us to put not only my child, another child. I know we don't have enough money, but I know you have the power, I say it again, you have the power to try to find the way to help us.

Mr. GRAFWALLNER. Senator Franken, I wanted to respond to your question also. Two years ago in 2010, UNESCO issued a report that gets to the question that you raised as to what are the benchmarks and how do States rank within the OECD countries on 10 benchmarks in terms of quality and access to early childhood education. The United States meets 3 of those 10. At the very top are Finland and the Scandinavian countries. England is somewhere in the middle.

Senator FRANKEN. And we know that Finland has, among the OECD countries, the highest, along I guess with South Korea, the highest academic achievement, and it's probably no accident.

I know my time is up. I want to thank you for your commitment to this work, and I wish that we made this commitment to this work, because I think that our Nation's future is very much tied up—I think it's obvious—is tied up with this issue of access to quality childcare. I wish we would wake up.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. First of all, I really want to thank the panel, each and every one of you. For those of you who have administrative responsibility, the creativity that you've had to meet really compelling human need and the challenges both fiscally, a changing society, where there's less social network at the grassroots level, less family support, all of your work has been quite ingenious.

We thank you for your ideas and recommendations. It goes along with the keeping, I know shared by Senator Burr and myself, which is that the best ideas come from the people.

Now, I have a question for the three administrators before I come back to Ms. Coro. Tell me what is the waiting list in your States for childcare, these childcare subsidies? Rolf?

Mr. GRAFWALLNER. Yes. It's a serious issue. We right now have a waiting list since March 2011 and it's approaching 20,000 families that cannot access the program.

The CHAIRMAN. OK. I just want to keep going down. So it's 20,000 in Maryland. Tennessee?

Mr. ACORD. In Tennessee, as I said in my testimony, now we're using CCDBG funds to only support recipients who are in TANF. So that means no working poor. If I have a parent who comes to me with a job that doesn't qualify——

The CHAIRMAN. I understand that. So tell me what is the official——

Mr. ACORD. Well, the last when we were keeping records it was like 37,000.

The CHAIRMAN. OK.

Ms. Singerman.

Ms. SINGERMAN. 37,600.

The CHAIRMAN. Could you use the microphone, please?

Ms. SINGERMAN. More than 30,000.