

**Testimony Before the Pennsylvania House Children and Youth Committee  
Christie Balka, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth**

Good morning. My name is Christie Balka and I am the Director of Child Care and Budget Policy for Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY). For more than 25 years PCCY has been a leading voice for children in Southeastern Pennsylvania. By advocating for public policies that increase their access to health care, economic security, quality early education and basic education, we are improving the lives and life chances of children in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties.

I would like to thank members of the House Children and Youth Committee for your support of legislation that builds the child care system in Pennsylvania. As a result of your efforts, in the last six years Pennsylvania has moved from a position near the bottom of state rankings to the middle in terms of the quality and accessibility of child care. With changes approved in the FY 2007-2008 budget, this progress will continue.

Focusing only on how Pennsylvania compares to other states, however, obscures a number of important realities for families with young children. In Southeastern Pennsylvania there are more than 250,000 (256,674) children under the age of five, of whom 62% (159,137) have both parents in the workforce.<sup>1</sup> One hundred thirty nine thousand (139,457) of these children are enrolled in licensed child care.<sup>2</sup> The remainder – nearly 20,000 (19,681) children from birth to age five – are in unlicensed child care or without regular child care arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> 2005 American Community Survey, United States Census. “Both parents in the workforce” includes children in single parent families, if their parent is in the workforce.

<sup>2</sup> Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL).

Unlicensed care runs the gamut from the woman up the street who, in spite of having no formal training, has provided a warm and stimulating environment for every child on the block over the past two decades, to the child care provider who cares for six children by herself, has limited play space, leaves her charges in front of the television set when she needs a cigarette break, and when life gets her down she takes it out on them. Unlicensed care can also mean exposure to lead paint, leaky pipes, dangling electrical wires and hazardous play equipment.

Ensuring that every child care provider meets Pennsylvania's licensing standards and any applicable local standards is the least we can do for our children.<sup>3</sup> But this does not, by itself, guarantee quality.

Why is it important to do more? As my colleagues will note, numerous longitudinal studies including those conducted by the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, the Carolina Abecedarian Project and the Chicago Child-Parent Center demonstrate that at-risk children who participate in high quality early education have much better academic and social outcomes than their peers who do not. These outcomes include better high school achievement and graduation rates; higher employment rates and child bearing age; and lower arrest rates later in life than their peers. The authors of one study estimate that for every dollar invested in quality early education, the public saves \$17 in future costs.

We also know that better outcomes obtain for children who have participated in high quality care compared to whose care has not been particularly high quality. University of Pennsylvania Professor John Fantuzzo has examined the outcomes of children who participated in a variety of child care arrangements before attending kindergarten in the School District of Philadelphia. He found that

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<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Philadelphia has several noteworthy programs that deserve mention here. Healthy Homes for Childcare provides lead paint remediation to child care homes with support from the CDC; and the Child Care Facilities Fund, a public-private initiative that provides grants and loans for capital improvements and a One Stop Shop for Child Care, which provides workshops and hands-on technical assistance to help child care providers meet licensing requirements.

high quality care has a protective influence over children with multiple risk factors. The same is not true of those who attended programs that were not considered high quality.

With such compelling evidence, PCCY believes the Commonwealth should do everything in its power to provide high quality early education to every Pennsylvania child. In particular, there are five initiatives that will help us achieve this goal. You voted for two of them as part of the FY 2007-2008 budget.

**Keystone Stars** is the centerpiece of Pennsylvania's effort to improve child care quality. Begun in 2002, it offers intensive technical assistance and financial incentives to providers as they advance through four successive levels of quality. To move from one level to the next, they must demonstrate improvements in teacher credentials, facilities, administrative infrastructure and performance. Forty-two percent of providers statewide have elected to participate in Keystone Stars since the program's inception. An independent evaluation released in 2006 shows that child care programs today operate at a much higher level than they did in 2002 because of Keystone Stars.

In addition to offering Merit Awards that enable providers to move to a new level of quality, Keystone Stars offers Education and Retention Awards that help providers retain their most experienced teachers, an issue that I will return to shortly.

I thank you for the budget increase to Keystone Stars that you approved for this year. Your continuing support for this program is crucial to improving the quality of early care and education. If the overall budget for Keystone Stars does not keep pace with growth in the number of participating providers it creates a disincentive for them to participate, as they must spend more

money than they are eligible to receive in financial incentives to earn a new Star rating. We must continue to increase the budget for Keystone Stars. In addition, there is something else you can do to support this program. Keystone Stars is a quality rating system for the public. Encourage parents in your districts to enroll their children in a Keystone Stars program, and encourage providers to participate in it.

Another quality improvement initiative that you voted for this year, and which deserves your continuing support, is **Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts**. Pennsylvania has taken a major step forward by establishing this program for 11,000 eligible three and four year olds statewide. Children who participate will be taught by well-qualified teachers at high quality nursery schools, child care programs, Head Start programs, and schools. They will follow a curriculum that is consistent with Pennsylvania's early learning standards and focuses on helping them make a smooth transition to kindergarten. This year's budget funds only about 10% of Pennsylvania's three and four year olds. I congratulate you for supporting this program and urge you to increase the resources available for Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts in subsequent years.

At the same time we must turn our attention to **infant-toddler care**. Higher staff-child ratios make it less economically viable to care for our youngest children. We have evidence that providers are closing their infant and toddler classrooms because they can no longer afford to care for this group. Fewer spaces for infants and toddlers will drive more families into the unlicensed child care market, something we want to avoid. Over the next year child care advocates will be formulating a series of policy recommendations, including better financial support for infant-toddler care, for your consideration during the FY 2009-2010 budget cycle.

Meanwhile, we currently have a **subsidy waiting list** of more than 9,000 children statewide. Approximately 3,300 of these children are in the five Southeastern Pennsylvania counties. In some parts of the region it can take almost a year to receive a child care subsidy. If we want to improve academic and social outcomes for children and encourage working families to become self-sufficient, we will do everything in our power to eradicate the subsidy waiting list. I urge you to fund an 8,000 additional subsidy slots as part of the FY 2008-09 budget.

In closing I want to address the issue of compensation for child care practitioners. Why is this a quality issue? Those of you with young children who have been cared for outside of your homes know that the rate of turnover among child care practitioners is abysmally high. You know this because forming an attachment to a teacher who leaves is a big event in a child's life. When this happens too often, it interferes with his or her ability to form trusting relationships with adults. Low salaries and benefits are the primary reason for this turnover. In 2005 the average group supervisor in a child care program in this region earned less than \$21,000. We are losing the most experienced teachers, those in whom we have already made the greatest investment, from the field.

Subsidy reimbursement rates largely determine salaries and I applaud you for approving adjustments to these in this year's budget. In addition, health care is a major compensation issue. Fifty-seven percent of child care practitioners in Southeastern Pennsylvania did not have employer-sponsored health insurance for themselves; 83% did not have it for their families in 2005. **Cover All Pennsylvanians**, the Governor's health insurance proposal, was designed for uninsured individuals and employers with fewer than 50 employees, a majority of whom earn less than the state's median income (\$39,000 in 2006). This applies to most child care practitioners. Legislation for Cover All Pennsylvanians will be introduced in the House within the next few months. As you deliberate over

it, I urge you to consider the children of this state and this region. Please cast your vote in support of them and the adults who care for them. Thank you.

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