



20 Erford Road ♦ Suite 302 ♦ Lemoyne, PA 17043
Phone: (717) 657-9000 ♦ Fax: (717) 657-0959 ♦ Toll Free: (888) 296-1917
www.pacca.org

Pennsylvania House Child & Youth Committee

March 29, 2023

Testimony Presented By
Diane P. Barber
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Child Care Association (PACCA)

Good afternoon, Chairperson Bullock, Chairperson Jozwiak and members of the House Children and Youth Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify this afternoon regarding the **Challenges with Child Care in Pennsylvania**. My name is Diane Barber. I am the Executive Director of the [Pennsylvania Child Care Association](http://www.pacca.org) (PACCA).

PACCA is a statewide non-profit, membership organization. For 50 years, PACCA has helped to inform, update and represent child care providers on existing and changing laws, regulations, policies, and research relating to early care and education.

PACCA's members operate over 1,500 regulated center, group and family child care programs who prior the start of the pandemic employed over 20,000 staff and were licensed to serve over 140,000 children aged birth through school-age on a daily basis. PACCA's membership also includes agencies who provide region-wide child care resource and referral services, as well as businesses, consultants, higher education faculty and other entities that provide a service or support to the child care community.

PACCA is also the licensed administrator of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Pennsylvania Scholarship Program. This unique program addresses the challenges of first generation and non-traditional college students by providing the necessary supports to ensure ongoing success and degree attainment. For more than 20 years, with more than \$50 million in investments from both public and private sources, T.E.A.C.H. has provided over 8,000 members of Pennsylvania's early childhood workforce with the critical supports they need to continue their education. PACCA receives public funding from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Departments of Education and Human Services to support T.E.A.C.H.

PACCA is also a principal partner in the [Start Strong PA](#) advocacy campaign, statewide collaboration of partners, that includes the [Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children](#), represented by Kimberly Early who is also testifying here today.

As Pennsylvania businesses struggle to find employees, tens of thousands of working parents are struggling to find child care. The challenges within the child care community are resulting in closures of classrooms and entire facilities.

As I mentioned, PACCA's members are the organizations and individuals that operate child care programs. Since they cannot all be with us today, I want to take this opportunity to share their voices. I

have extracted comments from PACCA's social media, correspondence and committee meetings to prepare this testimony.

"In my 30 plus years in the field, child care providers have never had to face all the issues that have periodically challenged this field (all) at once. It has been a landslide."

PACCA's Facebook Directors' Exchange

It was three years ago this month, that Governor Wolf closed Pennsylvania's child centers to help prevent the spread of COVID 19. Since that time, nearly 2,000 child care programs across the commonwealth have closed permanently.

You have read and heard about the child care crisis. Families are not able to find care and are placed on waiting lists months long. You'll hear from others regarding the importance of having safe, reliable, high-quality child care in order to grow and support Pennsylvania's economy. Child care enables families to work and businesses in the Commonwealth to have reliable employees. Research tells us that the type of care and early learning opportunities that children experience in the first five years of life can mark their social, educational, and economic futures decades later. Choosing a high-quality education and care program is imperative for families and their children.

Unfortunately, we can't increase access, if we don't have staff.

In a February 2023 survey conducted by the Start Strong PA Campaign nearly of 1,100 providers reported 4,000 child care staff vacancies and waiting lists of 38,000 children.

Finding and retaining qualified staff can be a significant challenge for child care providers. Prior to COVID, providers found it challenging to recruit and retain staff. The pay for child care workers is low, which makes it difficult to attract good employees. Additionally, many child care workers leave the industry due to stress and burnout. They have found that it's less stressful to work at Target, WaWa, or Chick-fil-A® and make more money.

Kim Early will share some of the recent detailed data that has been collected by Start Strong PA about child care wages and the staffing crisis. However, a recent post on the PACCA Facebook noted ...

"As much as it broke my heart, I had to leave my job in child care and find something else because I just could not survive on what I was making. My last day was Friday, and I start my new job Monday. I'm not sure how it will go but I had no choice. I had to do what was best for me and my family."

PACCA's Facebook page

Another member shared ...

After 39 years (I) had to close my infant, toddler, and before/after care since (a) new employee ghosted us and (my) assistant just gave one week notice. I can no longer be in three places at once, while doing all my Director's work on weekends. It is so sad and my heart breaks for my families, but if I don't do it now, I chance losing my few remaining great staff members.

PACCA's Facebook Directors' Exchange

Dealing with the health and safety impacts of COVID continue. Pennsylvania's child care programs operate under a comprehensive set of health and safety guidelines, some of the strongest in the country, designed to keep young children safe while their families are working. During COVID-times, providers

also complied with an overlaying set of guidelines from the Center for Disease Control to prevent and mitigate against COVID. However, this did not come without a cost. Throughout the closures child care still had to make payments on the business expenses that continued to accrue. Funding from the federal Child Care and Development Fund CARES Act and discretionary CARES Act funding approved by the General Assembly, helped to prevent closings and supplement low enrollments. We thank our federal and state policymakers for that support.

However, even with that assistance providers continued to use cash reserves, extend their debt, sometimes used high-interest credit cards, or requested deferment of debt.

As we entered 2023, COVID, RSV and the flu continued to stress our child care programs even with our stringent health and safety guideline and many of the COVID protocols still in place. As PACCA members noted:

"I had to close Monday and Tuesday this week because I had too many staff out sick (Covid and other illness). I hate doing it, but I can't be everywhere, covering everything. I tried to give my families as much notice as I could (let them know Saturday that closing was a possibility). thankfully my families were able to use their back up care, but man, I wish all this sickness would go away."

PACCA's Facebook Directors' Exchange

"The call-outs and lateness are killing me here. I have a small program, so if one person is calls out or is late it screws up the entire day. Every week I'm dealing with shifting kids and/or staff around. It's been impossible to get classroom observations, paperwork updates, etc. done because I'm always covering a classroom. What do you do to keep staff in attendance without being a Witch about it, because I'm about to get out my broom?!"

PACCA's Facebook Directors' Exchange

"I know there is no right answer to this but looking for some suggestions that maybe we haven't thought of. I know everyone is having a rough year with kiddo behaviors and I was curious how do you anticipate and support the behaviors on a day you know is going to be crazy, like the day after holiday break. As a lot of people have the same issue still, we do not have the extra staff to help with kiddos who are having big emotions. We also have most of our classrooms with only one teacher. It is not ideal but we are still struggling to get people in. I just had two floaters who had to leave and I haven't been able to replace them."

Member of PACCA's Education and Policy Committee

Changing regulations and policies have also challenged child care providers. Some report it taking up to six weeks to onboard new staff due to delays in processing child care clearances and pre-service training requirements. By that point, they have already taken another job.

"The inability to hire staff, upcoming regulations, economic nightmares, knowing we can't up our rates because families can't afford it. I gave my notice in January and they can't find a good replacement. Of my 14 staff, only 4 are staying in childcare. They are burnt out."

Member of PACCA's Education and Policy Committee

[The Open Data PA list of Child Care Providers including Early Learning Programs Listing Current Monthly Facility County Human Services dated 2/24/2023 indicated nearly 41% of Pennsylvania's 6,500](#)

certified child care providers (center, group and family child care providers) were noted as having negative sanctions; 575 are STAR 3 and STAR 4 programs. A Negative Sanction is an indicator that the Department is planning to not renew a license, to remove a license, or downgrade a license. This is compared to the just 15% of the 7,364 certified child care providers in September 2018.

Comment from D.P. Barber:

I have deleted this section of my written testimony regarding Negative Sanctions. The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) clarified that the report I pulled from the public data portal to calculate the percentage of child care providers with negative sanctions ***“will note “yes” if a provider has any history of a negative sanction. It will not provide negative sanctions cited monthly or within a “point of time”, it includes providers that currently have a regular license. Based off of our March facilities report, 4% of our facilities were under negative sanction.”***

This was welcome news that only currently 4% and not 41% (260 out 6,500) child care providers have Negative Sanctions. OCDEL Deputy Secretary Shante’ shared she is working with her team on it.

This is a field under daily stress.

Having Robust and Viable Child Care Matters

- Child care providers need funding to cover the costs of maintaining their facilities, paying staff, and providing supplies and equipment.
- Child care providers need access to ongoing training and professional development opportunities to stay up-to-date on best practices, regulations, and licensing requirements.
- Child care providers need policies and regulations that support their work and provide them with the resources they need to operate safely and effectively.
- Child care providers need access to resources and support to ensure the physical and mental health and safety of the children in their care.
- Child care providers need the support of their communities to continue to operate. This can include support from local businesses, government officials, and families who use their services. It can also include partnerships with other organizations, such as schools or community centers, to provide additional resources and support.

I leave you with this last note from a PACCA member ...

Ladies and gents ... I want to thank you all for the support you give each other through kind words, pointers, and the general "you got this" attitude. It has been awesome bouncing thoughts off of each other. As a Director, hearing I wasn't the only one going crazy was a help! Unfortunately, due to....pretty much all the junk we talk about....my Center will be closing in October. It is my prayer that the Centers around ours and all of yours can continue to weather the storm. But, I also want you to keep your wellbeing and your family right in front of you. Take care of yourselves and recognize when the job is just too much to carry, and set it down if you need to. Good luck everyone!

Unfortunately, this is not the exception in child care today. Thank you again for inviting me to this hearing.