



Kara Johnson: Child Care Shortages Leave Parents in the Dark

Recently the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) began the “Don’t Be In The Dark” About Child Care campaign to educate parents about the dangers of placing their children in unregulated child care in Texas. The Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC) applauds the agency’s efforts to inform parents about the importance of selecting licensed child care, which meets standards regarding safety and quality.

The importance of regulated child care becomes unavoidably clear when one considers the fact that 13 children died while in unregulated care last year. In 2006, 18 children died in unregulated care. In order to prevent deaths like these, children must be cared for in an environment that meets standards for safety.

Unfortunately safe and affordable child care is not as available as it should be in Texas. Many working parents rely on state subsidized child care to meet their needs, but in 2007 the statewide waiting list for subsidized care rose from 17,000 in January to 46,000 by October. Under these conditions, working parents sometimes make the tough decision to turn to unregulated child care.

One part of the explanation about why shortages of subsidized care exist has to do with the rate at which child care providers are reimbursed for caring for low-income children.

For example, in Austin, it costs around \$43.00 to provide a full-day of care to a toddler. However, the state will only pay a maximum of \$24.27 to a child care center serving that toddler. Given this situation, many child care providers are forced to cut the number of low-income children they will serve. Some providers have had to discontinue services to low-income children all together in order to keep their businesses afloat.

In order to maintain employment and self-sufficiency, working families simply have to have access to affordable, safe child care, and improving reimbursement rates is a key component in ensuring that access. Texas owes it to children, working families, and child care providers to improve our child care subsidy system, and TECEC will be working with Legislators next session on this very issue.

As DFPS asks families to take extra care in searching for quality child care programs, it is important for us all to consider the importance of child care in our communities. All types of working families, all across the state, rely on quality child care programs to

provide affordable and safe care to their children, but many parents that place their children in unregulated child care do so because they cannot afford to wait for openings in the child care subsidy system.

Parents have a responsibility to seek out safe child care settings for their sons and daughters, but with waiting lists as long as 47,000, the state of Texas has some work to do in making safe and affordable child care more available. A much needed increase in our child care subsidy rates will encourage more high-quality child care providers to open their doors to low-income children. Opening those doors will shine the light for many parents still “in the dark” about child care.

More information about child care and the child care subsidy system can be found at www.tecec.org.

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