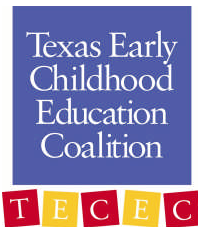


Testimony of:

Kara Johnson  
Executive Director  
Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition  
(TECEC)



Before the:

Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)

Monday, March 16, 2009

Good afternoon. My name is Kara Johnson and I am the Executive Director of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC). TECEC represents more than 275 organizations and thousands of members from across the great state of Texas. Our partners include representatives from public schools, Head Start, child care, the business community, higher education, foundations, community based organizations, and more. I would like to begin my remarks by thanking each of you for your leadership and hearing my testimony today. On behalf of TECEC's members and partners, I would also like to thank Larry Temple and his staff at the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) for working hard to present a list of recommendations that leads not only to children being able to access the system, but also ensures quality.

The purpose of my remarks today is to comment on the incredible opportunity we have with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to provide families with needed financial relief; create new jobs; grow a capable, team-ready workforce for the future; and save Texans money. Pending Governor Rick Perry's approval, Texas will receive \$214,851,600 in total Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding. \$17,761,545 of those dollars must be spent on quality initiatives, and another \$10,286,262 must be spent directly on infant and toddler initiatives.

TECEC and its members and partners want to ensure those dollars are spent efficiently, and will benefit the children and families in Texas. The benefit must be to both the parents going back to work in order to stimulate the economy, as well as the children who need access to high quality early learning

programs that prepare the workforce of tomorrow. This will ensure the stimulus dollars have both a short and long-term impact on the Texas economy.

Unfortunately, the current child care subsidy system in Texas is strained. The majority of providers serving children in the child care subsidy program receive less than half of what it costs to serve those children. According to a recent statewide survey conducted by the Texas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (TACCRRRA) and the Collaborative for Children, the consequences of low subsidy rates include increased fees for non-subsidized children; reduced enrollment of subsidized children; discontinued participation in the subsidy program; and reduced services and activities for all children.

An Austin child care provider said it best when she said, “We often laugh that it’s a good thing that we are faith based, because faith is the only thing that keeps us open...Our staff helps to subsidize low income children. We are always pinching pennies—the director counts the number of paper towels children use and sometimes we can’t afford supplies for the children. It’s quite distressing.” This quote is one of hundreds we have received from child care providers struggling to serve low income children and in some cases even to keep their doors open.

The stimulus package provides an incredible opportunity to help the child care industry in Texas, while helping parents go back to work. Therefore, in addition to the good quality recommendations laid out by the Texas Workforce Commission, TECEC would like to recommend you consider the following:

1. Utilize a portion of the \$10 million dollars in targeted infant and toddler funds to increase reimbursement rates to child care providers serving infants and toddlers in the child care subsidy program. Because there are minimal infant and toddler slots across Texas, this would help to increase the number of available providers serving infants and toddlers.
2. I would also like to suggest using a portion of the \$17 million of targeted quality funds to bring the TEACH professional development model to Texas. T.E.A.C.H. takes place in 23 states and is annually providing more than 15,000 scholarships to early childhood education professionals. T.E.A.C.H. addresses the problems of poor education, low compensation, and high turnover in the child care sector by providing early childhood professional development opportunities for teachers, directors, and family child care providers. Austin currently uses a similar model, but the TEACH model would ensure that the Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDB's) have the technical assistance necessary to implement the program. I have attached a one-page brief for your review explaining the T.E.A.C.H model.

As each of you makes the difficult considerations on how to spend the stimulus dollars, we ask you to invest these dollars in high quality efforts, which we know will give us a solid return for our investment and prepares the workforce of tomorrow. In addition, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) always has

the flexibility to use a greater percentage of the CCDBG funding towards quality initiatives.

Currently, we use just the minimum required 4% on quality initiatives, which goes towards Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to monitor the minimum health and safety requirements of child care centers. While we believe this is critical, we think the state of Texas can do more. There are some states that use up to 12% of its CCDBG funding to ensure safe and high quality early learning environments. We believe the stimulus dollars provide a great opportunity to invest in quality initiatives that will give Texas a guaranteed return on investment.

In addition to copies of my testimony, I have included a “wish list” from child care providers and other stakeholders on how they would like to see the stimulus funding appropriated. Finally, I have included a one-page brief on the T.E.A.C.H. professional development model for you review.

On behalf of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition, thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.