

Despite weak economy child care costs continue to rise ^[1]

Author: Family Enrichment Network

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EXCERPTS

According to a report released today by the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), the cost of child care continues to increase while families struggle to afford quality care. Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2011 Update provides results from a survey of Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) State Networks and local agencies, which asked for the average fees charged by child care programs in 2010.

The report, which provides the average cost of child care for infants, 4-year-olds, and school-age children in centers and family child care homes nationwide, reveals that in 36 states, the average annual cost for centerbased care for an infant was higher than a year's tuition and related fees at a four-year public college. In every state, center-based child care costs for two children (an infant and a 4-year-old) exceeded annual average rent payments.

"Child care is essential to working families and working families are key to economic growth," said Linda K. Smith, NACCRRA's Executive Director. "But, child care today is simply unaffordable for most families."

According to the report, in 2010, the average annual cost of full-time care for an infant in a center ranged from \$4,650 in Mississippi to \$18,200 a year in the District of Columbia. Parents of a 4-year old child paid average fees of \$3,900 in Mississippi to \$14,050 a year in the District of Columbia. In New York, parents of school-age children paid up to \$10,400 a year for part-time care in a center. The report also found that in 2010, the average annual cost of full-time care in a family child care home was as much as \$12,100 for an infant and \$11,300 for a 4-year-old in Massachusetts.

"During the critical years of birth through age 5, 90 percent of a child's brain is developed and essential learning patterns are established which affect school-readiness," said Smith. "Children need to be safe in child care and they also need to be in a setting that promotes their healthy development or our early childhood policies undermine our school readiness goals."

In Broome and Tioga Counties, the yearly cost of sending your child to regulated child care, whether family-based care or center-based care, is more expensive than one year tuition at Broome Community College.

"Our parents need child care in order to work," said Jennifer Perney, Child Care Resource and Referral Director at Family Enrichment Network, Inc. "Parents are seeking less expensive options, many times in unlicensed child care, which could potentially jeopardize the development and safety of their children."

In the United States, more than 11 million children under age 5 are in child care each week and although costs are high, most states have inadequate requirements for the quality of care. Currently, the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which provides funds to states to help make child care more affordable for families, does not require that funds be used to pay for licensed care. Nationally, more than 20 percent of children who receive CCDBG assistance are in unlicensed settings. In nine states, 35 percent or more of the children who receive this assistance are in unlicensed settings.

Unlicensed settings do not have to meet state health and safety standards, providers are not required to be trained and the settings are not inspected. "No one knows about the quality of care offered in unlicensed settings, which means children are really left to chance," said Smith. "There should be more accountability for quality when government funds are used to pay for child care," Smith said. To improve the quality of early learning and make child care more affordable for working families, NACCRRA recommends that Congress:

- Require the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to define minimally acceptable quality child care for low-income children.
- Require the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to study the true cost of quality care and to offer recommendations to Congress for financing to support quality options for parents.
- Reauthorize CCDBG and add requirements to improve the quality of care:
 - Require 40 hours of initial training and 24 hours of annual training in key areas such as CPR, first aid, early childhood development, child behavior/discipline and child abuse detection and prevention.
 - Require provider background checks, including fingerprint checks, to ensure child safety.
 - Require quarterly inspections to ensure effective oversight.
 - Invest in Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies to:
 - Assist providers in becoming licensed and in maintaining compliance with licensing standards; and,

Help parents identify quality settings.

-Increase the quality set-aside to 12 percent, increasing over several years to 25 percent (on par with Head Start).

-Provide resources to expand the availability of quality child care, particularly in low-income neighborhoods where there is a shortage of licensed care.

-Reduce barriers that prevent families from easily accessing child care fee assistance.

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