



BILL SUMMARY

EDUCATION & THE WORKFORCE COMMITTEE

S. 1086, CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT ACT OF 2014 BIPARTISAN, BICAMERAL AGREEMENT

Background

Every month in the United States, approximately 1.5 million children under the age of 13 participate in some type of child care arrangement supported through the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program. CCDBG provides funds to states to help low-income families, working parents, and those in educational or job training programs access crucial child care services.

Unfortunately, due to a wide array of licensing, monitoring and related safety regulations across states, children participating in such taxpayer-funded programs are not always protected as they should be. Further, the variety of programs and the lack of coordination result in parents and families being unaware of their options and unable to determine the best care setting for their children.

This “work support program,” created alongside the 1996 welfare reform law, is a voucher program that emphasizes parental choice. Eligible families with children under the age of 13 may use their voucher (also referred to as a “certificate”) toward service at the child care provider of their choice, including public or private, secular or religious, and center- or home-based care. Under the program, states have tremendous flexibility in the design and operation of their child care policies, although federal law establishes basic requirements around family eligibility, provider reimbursement rates, and providers’ compliance with broad health and safety categories. The program is administered by the Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The program is currently funded at \$2.36 billion in discretionary funding, while \$2.92 billion in mandatory funds (which is under the jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means) are also allocated to this program.

The Senate passed a reauthorization bill, S. 1086, the *Child Care Development Block Grant Act of 2014*, in March of this year. The bill passed 96-2.

House-Senate CCDBG Act Reauthorization Agreement

Overall

It is important to improve the law while maintaining the core purpose of the program, which is to support low-income parents so they can go to work knowing their child is in a safe and quality child care setting. Placing too great of a burden on the states will risk limiting the ability for a range of providers to operate and, in turn, for parents to have a range of available choices.

The agreement strengthens a program that allows parents to find the right child care provider for their children by ensuring multiple providers, including faith-based and community-based providers.

The agreement strengthens prohibitions on the secretary's ability to direct, or place conditions on, states' adoption of standards around early learning guidelines and child-to-provider ratios, in addition to limiting his or her authority to collect extraneous data unrelated to the CCDBG program.

Safety

The agreement includes a requirement for all providers to undergo an annual inspection for compliance with health, safety, and fire standards in the state. In an effort to promote transparency around child safety, the agreement also requires states to report the aggregate number of fatalities in child care settings, categorized by licensed or unlicensed care. Such information is not made public by state lead agencies currently, but it is important this information be transparent and available for parents whose children are, or may soon be, in child care.

Child Development

The agreement maintains the program's focus on the basic principle of providing for the positive and age-appropriate development of a child. The agreement encourages states to conduct ongoing training and professional development to providers and caregivers around child development within every child care setting without limiting the types of providers available to parents. The agreement recognizes the strong research on early childhood brain development by incorporating structure and age-appropriate practices into the child care environment, while respecting the fundamental goals of the CCDBG program and maintaining a mixed delivery system.

Training & Professional Development

The agreement focuses on the ongoing training of providers and caregivers around positive child development. The agreement also requires states to set the number of hours of training required for caregivers, acknowledging the need for adequate training to support child safety and quality child care.

Funding

The agreement authorizes appropriations for a 6-year period with no increase in the first year and then a modest increase over the remaining years to ensure as many kids as needed can access safe, quality child care.

Conclusion

This reauthorization will update and streamline services within CCDBG, improve safety for children, and increase transparency to make it easier for providers and parents to understand their options. Doing so will ensure these early childhood programs have a positive, safe, and lasting influence on children, laying the foundation for future success and achievement in school, the workplace, and life.