

Opening Statement of Rep. Kevin Kiley (R-CA), Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary
Education

“Child Care and the American Workforce: Removing Barriers to
Economic Growth”

June 24, 2025

Child care is essential to helping working parents thrive and our local economies grow.

At the same time, child care can be exceedingly expensive, and the cost is only climbing.

According to a 2024 data analysis by Child Care Aware of America, my home state of California has the third highest cost of infant care in the country - \$22,628 annually for center-based care.

U.S. Department of Labor data from 2022 demonstrates that families spend between 8.9 and 16 percent of their median income on full-day care for one child. One analysis of 2024 costs found the national average price of care to be \$13,128.

I think most parents would agree this is simply unsustainable.

While cost is one obstacle, so is access. Using 2019 data, the Bipartisan Policy Center calculated the first known estimate of the national gap in child care: roughly 11 million children needed child care but the national supply only created 7.8 million slots, creating a 31.2 percent child care

gap.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant is the federal program governing child care programs for low-income working families. The block grant program exists to help working parents access affordable child care, giving them the freedom to remain in the workforce and increase their economic opportunity – one solution to the problem of child care affordability and access.

Choice is a pillar of the program, giving parents the freedom to make both lifestyle and economic decisions that best meet their individual family's needs. When choice is limited—either circumstantially through a lack of child care slots, as rural areas disproportionately feel, or because grants and contracts are given priority over family decision making—those families and our economy suffer.

Worker support is another pillar of the block grant program, with multifaceted economic benefit. Child care helps parents remain in the workforce, which meets the needs of American industry in light of a national workforce participation rate that is currently just 62.4 percent according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But the work requirements of the block grant program also help parents and families grow their economic opportunity and realize financial freedom, often helping low-income families move beyond the need for a federal safety net and thrive independent of government support. Together, families, businesses, and our communities see boosted economic growth as a result. The block grant program is a great support for those least likely to access and afford child care, but it alone cannot solve the problem most parents in America feel.

As I mentioned earlier, child care can be very expensive to provide – plain and simple. The high standards in health, safety, and caregiver to child ratios are necessary to provide for the needs of our children and give parents peace of mind but they come at a significant cost. There is also a threshold beyond which parents can no longer afford to pay for

care, which explains why some parents—particularly moms—have to leave the workforce, to the detriment of businesses, local economies, and families.

The differential between the cost of providing care and what parents can afford is so vast that no one entity can provide all the needed resources, including the federal government. We do not have to look back too far to see proof of this. During and after the COVID pandemic, the federal government provided unprecedented funding to the child care sector. All told, pandemic-era legislation increased regular child care block grant funding by nearly 300 percent. And while this additional federal spending of taxpayer dollars may have kept child care providers open, it seems to have done little to address the affordability and sustainability of the child care market. Costs to families are still exorbitant, providers are fighting for their needed workforce, a significant care gap remains, and employers see the effect a lack of child care has on their business.

The only reasonable approach to addressing the affordability and sustainability of the child care sector is through public-private partnership. Many examples exist throughout the country. And today we are privileged to hear testimony from policy experts and state leaders who are tackling this economic conundrum head on. From statewide initiatives, to local investments, to much needed policy reforms, we can inform and encourage our communities to think creatively about modernizing our child care sector toward affordable and sustainable solutions.