



2300 Vartan Way, Suite 103

Harrisburg, PA 17110

Phone: (717) 657-9000

Fax: (717) 657-0959

www.pacca.org

**Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Children & Youth Committee
August 29, 2007**

Testimony

**Presented By
Terry Casey
President**

**Pennsylvania Child Care Association
(PACCA)**

**Pennsylvania Child
Care Association**

*"Serving Pennsylvania's
Child Care Professionals"*

Good morning, my name is Terry Casey and I am the President of the Pennsylvania Child Care Association (PACCA). PACCA is a statewide non-profit 501(c)3 organization with a membership base that includes organizations and individuals with a professional and business interest in the child care field. Our membership is very diverse and includes Community Engagement Groups, Child Care Information Service (CCIS) agencies, some Head Start facilities as well as the vast majority of our membership – certified child care providers. These providers care for the Commonwealth's children in registered family home based, certified group and center settings. Our members include those programs that are structured as either for profit, or non-profit, as well as many faith based organizations. Child care programs provide care to over 200,000 children in the Commonwealth from infants through school age.

PACCA is the leading state wide advocate for safe, affordable, quality child care for all who need and desire it in Pennsylvania. The association focuses its energies on the development of sound public policy aimed at improving the provision of and access to child care services in the Commonwealth.

Joining me this morning is Mary Graham, a PACCA board member and chair of our Education and Policy Committee. Mary administers Children's Village Child Care Center, a high quality NAEYC accredited, non-profit child care program in Philadelphia's China town. She can help address your specific day to day programmatic and operational concerns from a provider perspective.

We know that every morning, over 200,000 young children awake, get up, wipe the sleepers from their eyes and get ready to go to some form of out of home care for the day. These same mornings, their parents are dashing around the house getting themselves and their children ready for the day. Everyone wants that out of home care experience to be safe, healthy and of good quality. Children need to feel secure and parents need to go to work knowing their little ones are at a minimum safe and well cared for.

Parents have indicated that they work better knowing their children are in safe, reliable care environment. And research has indicated that children thrive and develop in programs that are of high quality. The brain research has demonstrated that the first five years of a child's life are critical to school readiness. Other research has shown that values are instilled by age 8. With over 65% parents working outside the home, it becomes critical that we ensure safe and high quality care for our youngest citizens.

That said, the business of caring for our youngest and smallest citizens is anything but small. Operating a child care program is a complex business!

One of the national organizations PACCA partners with is the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA). NACCRRA has conducted and analyzed state procedures and policies, parent expectations, and the challenges for providers and parents.

Clearly the quality of care is important because the health and safety of children are at stake and 90 percent of brain development occurs between birth and age five, which makes this time a critical period for child development. Yet, child care standards and oversight vary greatly by state. Given the importance of quality child care for children, NACCRRA reviewed state policies and regulations and ranked the 50 states, the District

of Columbia, and the U. S. Department of Defense (DoD) based on key benchmarks to see how states measured up.

What were those results and how does Pennsylvania measure up? The short answer is that the Department of Defense child care system stands alone as a model for states.

The document NACCRRRA published which ranks states and the District was arrived at by analyzing each state's requirements around:

- Oversight and inspections (which includes the state's certification or "licensing" regulations plus the state's monitoring/inspections component).
- Health & Safety Requirements
- Background checks
- Qualifications for those working in the field
- Parent involvement and at will access to care settings
- Child development activities and early learning standards

In the interest of time, I will not address each of these areas in this testimony; some items may be touched on by your questions. PACCA is happy to continue the dialogue or send additional information to the committee if you would like.

Although Pennsylvania is not in the top 10, we are ranked 15th largely due to Pennsylvania's relatively new and strong early learning standards. Our high early learning standards help to offset our low oversight quotient. I would remind this committee and others, that at one time Pennsylvania "led the pack" in high certification regulations and oversight. But over the years, our regulations and monitoring requirements have not kept pace for a variety of reasons and Pennsylvania is now toward the bottom on certification regulations and monitoring.

The base or foundation for the care platform is certification and monitoring requirements. The benchmark for oversight is quarterly inspections. Three states and the Department of Defense mandate quarterly inspections; Pennsylvania has an annual inspection for centers and periodic inspections for home based providers. By the way, 9 states do not even conduct an annual inspection! In Pennsylvania there is a commitment that all complaints are to be followed up within a timely manner.

The qualification benchmark for inspectors is that each have a bachelor degree or higher in Early Childhood Education (ECE) or a related field.

Another piece to the oversight component is caseload for inspectors. It should be noted that Pennsylvania certification inspectors have a caseload that is well **over** the benchmark of 50 to 1. The last time I checked, PA was at 90+ to 1. Progress is being made however, in that DPW is in the process of developing a computerized monitoring tool that will go a long way in helping to streamline the inspection process. This computerization could help our state post those inspection findings on the internet for easy public access. Clearly Pennsylvania could do better in the oversight area and perhaps the Children & Youth Committee members can help in the coming months/years as regulations come before the legislature for consideration.

The Early Learning Standards that the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) have structured and put in place on a voluntary basis help to address some of

the other national benchmarks such as staff qualifications. Nationally the benchmark for Directors is a bachelor degree or higher in ECE or a related field; the benchmark as the base for classroom staff is a minimum of Child Development Associates (CDA) credential prior to working with children (or be enrolled in a CDA program to receive a credential). Our state's regulations do not require the benchmark level for staff and only require child care staff to earn 6 clock hours of training for the program to remain in compliance. However, we should applaud the Keystone STARS program for increasing the professional development of staff as the STAR or quality indicator increases.

Staff child interaction is critical; education and continuing professional development can help improve interaction, child observation and assessment, and program planning. Even with increased qualifications and professional development many child care program staff are challenged in caring for young children with emotional, psychological, and disability challenges. We must remind ourselves that young children with a diagnosis of autism or PDD is increasing at an alarming rate. More supports are needed to support child care programs and their staff to better care for these children while their parents are working.

The benchmark for child development activities requires center programs to have activities in all six developmental domains. Pennsylvania is one of 13 states that meet that benchmark.

Obviously, the business of child care has heavy reliance on staffing – staff in the classrooms, in administrative and in support roles such as transportation, food service. Raising the quality bar is a good thing and is well worth the investment but it does have an economic impact.

Staffing costs are the single highest budget component for a child care business. It is not unusual for 70% of operational costs to be in the personnel line item. And child care is not a high paying job classification. As we increase the education requirements so we need to increase the wage and benefit components necessary to retain staff. This increases operational costs. Businesses that face increasing costs typically pass those costs on to the consumer – the news media has run several segments lately on increasing prices for milk, eggs, utilities, etc. Child care providers are cognizant of the income level of their customers – parents. We know that parents with young children are typically not at their peak earning potential. Child care is expensive. Providers hesitate to increase tuition and fees to parents who are already financially strapped. Providers did have to increase their rates to address the increase in minimum wage required by the Commonwealth. These increases to parents have resulted in an increase to county reimbursement rates for providers who care for children from poor and low income families which receive a subsidy. Even with this increase, Pennsylvania providers are not at the federally recommended level known as the 75th percentile. PACCA notes that Pennsylvania is making progress and we are appreciative of that but we still have to stretch our financial resources.

As I began preparing this testimony, I did not know the specific concerns that families may have. I can say that bringing their concerns forward for discussion is very positive and constructive. PACCA listens to parent concerns because we know that choosing care for your child is one of the most important decisions a parent or family member can make. The PACCA website has a parent portal with resources and information; our

website and the information for parents has been recognized as high quality by Tufts University.

PACCA uses the website as one means to remind families that there are resources available to help guide them in their search for care. These resources include the certification status of a provider, the STAR level if they participate, and/or program accreditation. These are indicators that the child care program strives toward a safe, high quality program.

Parent involvement is paramount -- from the time you begin looking for care right through enrollment and ongoing attendance in the program. A licensing/certification inspector most likely comes only once a year, accrediting program assessors come once every three years, a STARS assessor may come once a year. But parents come into a child care program multiple times every day to bring their child to care and to pick the child up at the end of the day.

So parents should observe and assess: are children watched at all times, including when they are sleeping? Are adults warm and welcoming? Do they pay individual attention to each child? Are positive guidance techniques used? Do adults avoid yelling, spanking, and other negative punishments? Are positive guidance techniques included setting limits such as "Keep the paint on the paper; or "good sharing, Maria." Is there always someone present who has current CPR and first aid training? Have adults been trained on child abuse prevention and reporting? Do the adults talk WITH the child during the day? Do they ask guiding questions when appropriate? Do adults read to the children? Do they take the children outdoors and is that area safe for play? Do they wash their hands (after diapering, eating, using the bathroom)? Are diaper area surfaces clean and disinfected after each use? Is there a plan to follow if a child is injured, sick or lost? Are parents asked to evaluate the program? Will I be welcome any time my child is in care? Will I be given a copy of the program's policies?

A national poll was conducted last spring of nearly 600 parents to better understand what they consider when they are looking for child care, and what they expect and want from child care, and what barriers they face in obtaining high quality care. The poll reveals that more than any other aspect of child care, parents are concerned about its quality. More than half of the parents surveyed ranked quality as their greatest concern. Cost ranked second.

Moreover, the majority of parents logically assume that standards are in place in child care programs that ensure their children are safe. Parents overwhelmingly think that caregivers are trained in child development and safety and undergo a background check, and that child care programs are inspected frequently.

PACCA understands all parents and families have a variety of needs and interests. One size does not fit all. We also know that no matter what the individual circumstances are, as a parent, you want the best for your children. PACCA supports parents seeking child care by helping to connect them with providers, or to agencies that can help them pay for care each year. For example, we are pleased and proud to be partnering with a new program, Operation Military Kids (OMK); this program is designed to find and assist children of deployed parents.

I thank you for the Children & Youth Committee and Representative Cruz for holding this hearing. I promise you that PACCA remains committed to working with families and providers as well as the administration and the legislators to bring safe, high quality care to all children and families who need it in Pennsylvania.