



For people with intellectual
and developmental disabilities

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Written Statement for the Hearing Record: US Senate Finance Committee

“Examining the State of Child Care: How Federal Policy Solutions Can Support Families, Close Existing Gaps, and Strengthen Economic Growth”

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Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Crapo, thank you for the opportunity to submit the following statement for the record of the Committee’s July 9, 2024 hearing, “Examining the State of Child Care: How Federal Policy Solutions Can Support Families, Close Existing Gaps, and Strengthen Economic Growth.” The Arc appreciates your leadership to support our nation’s children and families. Examining our nation’s current child care crisis is a welcome opportunity to highlight the disparate impact that this crisis has on families of children with disabilities.

The Arc is the largest national community-based organization advocating for and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families. The Arc has nearly 600 state and local chapters across the United States. These chapters provide a wide range of services for people with IDD, including individual and systems advocacy, public education, family support, systems navigation, support coordination services, employment, housing, support groups, and recreation. The Arc promotes and protects the human rights of people with IDD and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout the lifespan.

Access to high-quality, inclusive child care is crucial for children with disabilities and their families. From birth to age three, children's brains are making millions of neural connections everyday.¹ This development is strongly influenced by interactions with caregivers. Nearly half of families in the United States have two caregivers who work full-time outside the home, making child care essential, not a luxury.²

Babies and toddlers with disabilities have access to early intervention services through guarantees in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), but this does not include child care services.³ Additionally, for families of school-aged children with disabilities, after-school and summer hours present significant care needs.

¹Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, “Brain Architecture,” (2024), <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>.

² <https://worldmetrics.org/two-working-parents-statistics/>

³ Steven Jessen-Howard et al., “Understanding Infant and Toddler Child Care Deserts,” (2018), <https://americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/10/31/460128/understanding-infant-toddler-child-care-deserts/>.

Covid-19 brought child care issues to the national forefront—but our child care system has been in crisis for years. Half of the country lives in child care deserts, where the number of kids under age five far exceeds the number of child care slots.⁴ Families of children with disabilities face even greater obstacles in finding care.⁵ Many child care programs don't know how or are afraid to include children with disabilities. Parents of older children with disabilities express the same difficulties in finding after school care or summer programs—many programs stating they are unable to support a child with disabilities.

Child care programs operate on slim budgets. Accommodations can be costly for providers to implement, which leads to greater exclusion. Additionally, low salaries for early educators have led to a staffing crisis. Many childhood special education teachers are paid less than their general education counterparts, leading to bigger disparity.⁶ While federal laws prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities, they are open to interpretation and do not have stringent oversight.

While IDEA has programs which serve younger children with disabilities, not all families who need services can access them. Federal funding for IDEA has never come close to meeting the promised 40%, and many states have narrowed the criteria of early learning programs to serve smaller numbers of children.⁷

All of these factors mean that families of children with disabilities are three times more likely to experience job disruptions because of problems with child care. They are more likely to have to rely on care from multiple sources—including staggered work schedules, other family members, and nurses or home health aides. It is estimated that 1 in 10 parents of young children with disabilities leave a job, not take a job, or make significant changes to their job because of problems with child care each year. Parents also express high levels of stress, exhaustion, and isolation.⁸

Federal investments in recent years, such as the stabilization funds in the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) have been essential in providing some immediate stability to the child care sector and relief for families. However, these one-time investments will not solve the deep structural issues that affect the entire child care sector, and more acutely families of children with disabilities.

⁴ Rasheed Malik et al., "America's Child Care Deserts in 2018" (2018), <https://americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/12/06/461643/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/>.

⁵ Cristina Novoa, "The Child Care Crisis Disproportionately Affects Children with Disabilities," (2020), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/child-care-crisis-disproportionately-affects-children-disabilities/>

⁶ Christina Veiga, "Same classroom, different salaries: Special education pre-K teachers earn dramatically less than their general education co-teachers," (2020), <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2020/01/02/same-classroom-different-salaries-special-education-pre-k-teachers-earn-dramatically-less-than-their-general-education-co-teachers/>.

⁷ Cristina Novoa, "The Child Care Crisis Disproportionately Affects Children with Disabilities," (2020), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/child-care-crisis-disproportionately-affects-children-disabilities/>

⁸ "ibid."

The Arc appreciates the *Building Child Care for a Better Future Act*, and specifically its willingness to prioritize child care programs serving children with disabilities in grant funding and assessment of supply. However, greater intervention is needed to truly create an equitable system for children with disabilities. Congress must fulfill its promise to fully fund all IDEA programs, including Part C. We need a strong federal investment in training child care workers in how to effectively include children with disabilities in child care programs. Disability service agencies and child care entities should work in greater collaboration to create a more seamless network of services. Finally, the anti-discrimination laws that protect children with disabilities in child care settings need to have greater oversight in their implementation.

The Arc appreciates the focus of this committee on this crisis that has been building for decades and thanks you for your leadership in working to address the problem. We stand ready to work in collaboration to ensure that all children and families with disabilities have equal access to high-quality, affordable child care. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions to Robyn Linscott, linscott@thearc.org.