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Congress of the United States
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PROJECTION FORCES

September 7, 2021

The Honorable Robert C. Scott
Chairman
House Committee on Education and Labor
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Scott,

Thank you for your strong leadership of the Education and Labor Committee throughout this devastating pandemic. I am especially grateful for everything you have done to prioritize American families amid our recovery – particularly around the issue of child care – and I am honored to be an original co-sponsor of the Child Care for Working Families Act.

As you know, there was an acute child care crisis well before the pandemic. It will not be enough to simply remake the child care infrastructure as it was before this crisis. With that in mind, I am writing with input for the child care portion of the Build Back Better Act.

As you may know, prior to being elected to Congress, I founded San Diego for Every Child, an initiative focused on ending childhood poverty in San Diego County. In the early months of this pandemic, San Diego for Every Child adapted our efforts to directly respond to the crisis, ensuring essential workers had the emergency child care their families needed as they worked to keep our hospitals open and our economy afloat.

I believe what we did in San Diego can be a model for our country to address child care constraints. In addition, having worked closely on the distribution of CARES Act funding, I have suggestions on how we can ensure that the child care funding in the Build Back Better Act can be best administered.

While I understand the desire to have States primarily implement this funding, I believe there will be great value in having a federally run system that is uniform across jurisdictions and ensures families are able to easily access the benefit.

If States will be the implementing entity, there are a few key things I think we need to ensure:

First, we need to expand the eligibility of those who can access subsidized child care, eliminating income caps and work requirements.

Child care remains the top issue I hear about from my constituents, and the prohibitive cost of child care isn't limited to any income, zip code, or political affiliation. Additionally, changes in eligibility based on changes in work status or income create unnecessary uncertainty for both families and care providers, further burdening an already overburdened system.

If we don't remove income caps and work requirements, Americans will watch Congress pass a \$3.5 trillion bill and still not have their basic needs met. The results will be devastating for our economy, for female workforce participation, and for our Democratic Caucus, which has worked tirelessly to help our constituents and our country Build Back Better.

Second, we need to focus not only on quality, center-based care, but also on family based-care and family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care.

As you know, many of the most vulnerable kids generally do not go to center-based care, and families should be able to choose from a full range of care options. Many families – including families that work non-traditional hours, those with children who have disabilities, and those that prefer a caregiver who shares their language and culture – rely on family-based and FFN care because it is the best or only option to meet their needs. The Build Back Better Act should account for these realities and ensure we aren't inadvertently leaving family-based and FFN care providers behind and subsequently the families that rely on them.

Finally, we need to address the shortage of child care slots available, even for families able to pay.

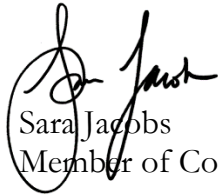
In San Diego County – one of the wealthiest counties in the country – 60 percent of families couldn't access the child care they needed before the pandemic. And this problem has almost certainly worsened this year: more than 500 San Diego child care providers closed during the pandemic. Those are child care spots that were already scarce, getting scarcer. And San Diego is by no means the exception. Pre-pandemic, just over half of all American families lived in a child care desert.

We know that a number of factors contribute to this scarcity – including low wages for care providers, low reimbursement rates for providing subsidized care, state-by-state licensing requirements for providers and their facilities, delays in funding distribution, and more. Simply addressing the demand won't adequately address the historic failure of investments in the child care industry.

Additionally, we saw with CARES Act funding that many States took a long time to distribute funds, and once those funds were distributed, often in the form of vouchers, the process to receive them was complicated and inaccessible for eligible families. If we want the full benefit of this funding to be felt by American families, we should include language in the Build Back Better Act that requires States to get the funds out the door quickly, and ensure the administrative burdens of the program do not deter families from accessing it.

Thank you again for your leadership on this vital issue, and for your consideration of this input as we work to Build Back Better.

With gratitude,



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress