

U.S. SENATOR JOHN BREAUX ON WELFARE REFORM

SENATE FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY AND FAMILY POLICY & HELP SUBCOMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON CHILD CARE, TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2002

I am pleased to have Senator Christopher Dodd here to co-chair this hearing entitled, "Child Care: Supporting Working Families." It is imperative that the Senate Finance Committee continue its commitment to low-income families by presenting the Senate with a bipartisan bill reauthorizing the TANF Program, including funding for child care. In addition, the Health Education, Labor and Pensions Committee has jurisdiction over reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). I look forward to our committees working together to ensure that child care needs are met.

I share the Administration's goal to "Leave No Child Behind." Children should not be the victims of welfare reform, left behind with inconsistent child care accommodations that do not adequately prepare them for the challenges to come. It is precisely this cycle of dependency and poverty that welfare reform was intended to end.

In 1996, we fundamentally changed the mentality of welfare from dependence to independence by creating the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant. At the same time, we made a commitment to poor families that were sent into the work force at low wages that they would be supported with access to quality child care.

Reliable child care is directly related to job retention. A parent cannot be in two places at once, and an employer is not likely to retain an employee that is unreliable at work due to a lack of consistent care for their child. It is not just about getting a job, this is about helping families keep their jobs and move up the career ladder.

In Louisiana, I hear over and over again about access to safe and affordable child care. Child care is expensive, especially high quality child care. Yet many states pay providers less than what the provider would charge other payers. And families making minimum wage are expected to make up the difference.

Access to child care is often limited by states to families with the lowest incomes. National studies show only 12 percent of children eligible for federally subsidized child care get it. And in many rural areas, there are no child care providers at all. So as the Administration proposes increasing work requirements for people on welfare, the increasing need for working families to have quality child care must also be taken into consideration.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today regarding their personal experiences dealing with child care needs, as well as their ideas for improving access to and quality of child care services.

