



**Center for Rural Pennsylvania**  
Public Hearing – Child Care Access in Rural Pennsylvania

February 13, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.  
Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29 – Room 2402  
17 Maple Ave., Pottsville, PA 17901

Hon. Gene Yaw  
Chairman of the Board  
Center for Rural Pennsylvania  
362 Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

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Executive Director  
Center for Rural Pennsylvania  
625 Forester St., Room 902  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

My name is Samantha Chivinski. I am the executive vice president of the Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce; co-owner of a business; a board member of two local nonprofits; co-founder of a charity; community volunteer; wife, daughter, but most importantly, I'm a mom.

In addition to my various roles, I'm also a friend. A friend who has to advise my friends when they are trying to become pregnant that they need to consider calling local child care providers to get on the waiting list as soon as possible. They look at me funny - and I tell them to trust me. They later thank me when they learn waiting lists at child care providers can range from months to years.

I'm hopeful my testimony can help paint a picture of the difficulties families and employers are facing due to the lack of affordable, quality early childhood education options in Schuylkill County. It is clear, the United States of America is facing a child care crisis, and Schuylkill County families and employers are feeling it.

Schuylkill County's median household income is \$49,559. On average, parents can expect to pay at least 10 percent of their household income for child care.

In a recent meeting with local child care providers, providers noted many reasons for not being able to retain teachers and/or attract new teachers including wages, inability to provide benefits, and the financial investment needed to be put forth by potential hire for costs like CPR and fire training before they are even hired.

We also learned during the child care provider roundtable that providers have seen an increase in mental health and behavioral issues among children (especially since the COVID-19 pandemic). There are not enough TSS workers, which creates burnout for child care providers.

I firmly believe in working to find solutions, which is why I felt it necessary to submit written testimony. I believe solutions are able to be found. To find them, we need to work together - government officials at all levels, employers, providers and public and private organizations. There is nothing more important than providing our children with the fundamental building blocks that will set them up for a successful future. They should not be left behind because parents can't find care or afford, high-quality care.

Providers should not have to worry every day about whether or not they can keep their doors open, or be fearful that another great teacher is leaving them for a job at the local district or at a local convenience store because they will make more money for their families. Our providers should be focused on our children.

Employers are experiencing historically turnover rates, in addition to not being able to fill open positions. According to a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation study, 58 percent of working parents reported leaving work because they were unable to find child care solutions that met their needs. Additionally, there are no child care options for parents who work second, third and weekend shifts. Potential hires are expressing child care concerns to employers during the interview process.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's reported in its *Untapped Potential: Pennsylvania* report:

\*PA loses \$591 million annually in tax revenue due to child care issues

\*Absences and employee turnover cost PA employers \$2.88 billion per year

\*Fifty-five percent of parents reported missing work due to child care issues

### **Eye-opening findings in the recent child care survey conducted by the Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce:**

*84.2 percent of parents who participated in a recent survey conducted by the Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce said they would be faced with a hardship to keep their jobs if their child care provider closed its doors. 78.9 percent of families do not have a backup plan if their child care provider closed its doors.*

*90.8 percent of families noted that one of the reasons they chose their child care provider was because of the extended hours past a normal school day, which is 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.*

*One parent noted "The prices in childcare have risen exponentially, although wages are not being reciprocated and remain the same, inflation was at stagnation rates and is not quite as high as it is, but high inflation has remained steady, gas prices are increased which makes it problematic to drive a distance for quality childcare as we do. We drive a half an hour to childcare each day, then I drive another 1.5 hours to commute to work everyday, and it adds up. Also, our grocery bills increased \$150.00 per week. We have to work more to meet these financial demands, and we need childcare in order to work, and financially we break even, there are times it would make sense for one of us to quit our job and say home."*

*Parents also recognize that child care teachers can make more money at their local gas station. Teachers and early childhood care providers are some of our most passionate and caring individuals. Many of them are being forced to leave a job they love, caring for children, because they simply cannot make ends meet.*

*Between 6 percent and more than 50 percent of household incomes are dedicated to child care services per month.*

I encourage you to read the survey and its results in its entirety.

The child care crisis is a full-circle problem. Families are struggling to find or struggling to afford high quality child care. Child care providers are hanging on by a thread to stay open, closing classrooms and programs, or closing their doors completely. Employers are struggling to find workers because many eligible workers are unable to find child care. There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution to the many problems facing our providers, families and employers.

I was on a waiting list before my daughter was born. Almost six years ago, my husband and I were extremely lucky to have been moved off of the waiting list. We are a two-income household. My daughter is now in kindergarten, but we still pay for before and after school care. Those hours have been shorted by our amazing child care provider because of staffing shortages. My daughter needs to be picked up by 4:15 p.m. every day.

For working parents, that is extremely difficult to make happen. Without help from our families, it would not be possible. When my daughter was in child care full time, approximately 14 percent of our household income was dedicated to child care. My daughter's education and safety is worth every penny, and we'd find a way to pay more if we needed to, but that doesn't mean we made it happen without times of struggle – as a two income household. Now that our daughter is in kindergarten, I've witnessed children her age not be able to identify their names, know letters of the alphabet, or count. I imagine that would be different if those children had access to quality child care before entering the school system.

I ask that you listen to our experts when they provide potential solutions. They know their industry. They know their children and families. They know their needs. Most importantly, they have the passion. Please, let it guide you. Student loan payments have resumed, credit cards are maxed out, savings are gone - more people will be looking to reenter the workforce. We need more providers. I hope that by looking at options like cutting costs, incentivizing businesses, removing obstacles in regulation and increased funding, policymakers can help our child care providers keep their doors open and open more doors for our children.

Thank you for your time and attention to this extremely important matter.