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## Testimony

Submitted on behalf of

The Learning Lamp, a multi-site child care provider serving a six-county region of west central Pennsylvania and a shared services hub representing 57 child care providers and 110 child care locations in the western area of the Commonwealth.

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## Discussion of the Child Care Crisis in Pennsylvania

Before the:  
**Center for Rural Pennsylvania**

Presented by:  
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Pottsville, PA  
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The mission of The Learning Lamp is to engage all children in the support they need to succeed. The Learning Lamp is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, donations to which are tax deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law. The official registration and financial information of The Learning Lamp may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free within Pennsylvania; 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Elected officials, community members, and representatives of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, my name is Dr. Leah Spangler. I am President and CEO of The Learning Lamp, a multi-site provider with 22 child care and preschool locations across a 6-county area of rural west central Pennsylvania. We serve more than 900 children each year. Additionally, through our Early Childhood Alleghenies Shared Services Hub, we represent a network of 57 child care programs with 110 locations serving more than 5,000 children. These centers employ a combined 922 child care staff members in 14 counties of Pennsylvania.

Child care in Pennsylvania is on life support. It is beyond a crisis. Simply put, there is not enough care available for families who need it. The care that is available is too expensive, forcing capable people out of the workforce. Families who cannot find or afford care face a difficult decision. Without care, many opt out of the workforce. Pennsylvania's broken business model for child care is an enormous problem. Child care is a public service that needs investment at the state and federal levels.

Pennsylvania's child care system is failing families. It is also failing child care providers, who struggle to hire staff. Pennsylvania's child care programs simply cannot pay wages that match those of other businesses like convenience stores and grocery retailers paying \$15 to \$20 an hour.

In PA, we require child care teachers to be trained and experienced, but do not pay wages in line with that. For most child care programs, 80% of parent tuition funds staff wages and payroll taxes. The remainder pays for everything else you need to run a child care program including facilities, utilities, supplies and food. Pennsylvania's failing child care system is built on the backs of families who pay too much of their income for child care. It is also built on the backs of the early childhood workforce. The ones who stay in the field go without fair pay because they truly want to serve Pennsylvania's children and families. Staff turnover in

many child care programs is 50 percent or greater each year, with workers leaving for jobs at Wal-Mart, Sheetz, Wawa, and similar places where they can earn better wages.

Pennsylvania's child care industry is facing a staff shortage like never before. A recent study by The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Policy Lab counted **2,395 open jobs among the 762 child care programs that responded to a survey. If those jobs were filled, and an additional 26,000 children** could be served, allowing their parents to go to work. Survey takers represent only about 10 percent of PA's child care programs. Considering the data trend—**if all job openings were filled, child care programs in Pennsylvania could serve an additional quarter-million children!**

To increase the supply of child care for working families, an investment in raising child care wages must be made. At my organization, which serves families in rural Bedford, Cambria, Somerset, Fayette, and Westmoreland counties, we have **97 job openings and 546 children on the waiting list for care. With better pay leading to filled job openings, we would be able to serve an additional 1,286 children.**

That's more than double the number we currently serve. Imagine the relief families on the waiting list would feel if they were able to find child care and go to work to support their families.

Pennsylvania families NEED your help. Investing in them will pay dividends including increased employment and tax revenue for the Commonwealth. It also means more workers available to fill open jobs, increased job retention and productivity, and higher earning potential for parents. Decades of research have proven that every dollar invested in quality early care and education saves between \$4 and \$17 down the road through reduced special education costs, fewer grade retentions, and lower rates of incarceration. Can you think of a better outcome than this?

Finally, children and the need for child care is something all Pennsylvanians can get behind. A recent survey of Pennsylvania voters found that **98 percent of them believe early childhood education is important.** Ninety-eight percent! I can't think of another issue with that kind of support. **Eighty-one percent of those same voters believe allocating state funding to support child care and increased wages for child care staff is a good investment for Pennsylvania.** The bottom line is—when more affordable child care is available, more parents will go to or stay at work.

The time is now for Pennsylvania to put its money where its mouth is. To raise workforce participation, a goal in the Governor's new economic development strategy, people need child care. But it won't happen without investment from our Commonwealth. We must raise child care wages to attract and retain a quality workforce and increase the availability of child care so parents go to work. Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer your questions.