



Federal Child Care Funds Critical to Reopening and Rebuilding PA ***Building Blocks Learning Center highlights the dangerous and negative effects*** ***of an underfunded child care system***

WILKES-BARRE, PA (September 2, 2021) – On Thursday, September 2, 2021, U.S. Congressman Matt Cartwright and Wico van Genderen, President and CEO at Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry, and Lindsay Griffin, Chief Operating Officer at Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry, participated in a tour and roundtable at Building Blocks Learning Center.

"The American Rescue Plan funds provided immediate, necessary relief to stabilize many child care providers in the short term. However, a significant, sustained investment is needed to strengthen and secure the industry for the long term," said Jen DeBell, executive director, Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children (PennAEYC). "Now, more than ever, we understand the critical role child care plays not just for children and families, but for our communities and the economy. It cannot be overstated that our economic recovery is not possible without child care."

The child care sector was in crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic, with eligible families unable to access child care subsidies, poverty-level wages for early childhood educators, and razor-thin margins for providers. The child care sector has been pushed to the brink of collapse by the pandemic.

"The demand for child care has been nonstop as parents are trying to get back to work. The pandemic has made parents realize their child needs a quality foundation and this can happen at a high-quality early care and education center," said Zubeen Saeed, President and CEO of Building Blocks Learning Center, "Finding qualified staff is challenging and without staff we aren't able to open classrooms and we have to turn families away. This impacts the community because people aren't able to return to work if they don't have child care."

Federal relief over the last year has helped many providers; however, between March 2020 and August 2021, over 850 Pennsylvania providers have closed permanently and another 350 temporarily closed. Child care providers are still incurring additional pandemic-related costs while operating significantly under capacity.

"We are urging members of Congress to act on the inclusion of \$450 billion outlined in the American Families and Jobs Plans in dedicated support for child care and preschool," explained Jen DeBell, executive director of PennAEYC. "The child care sector is still reeling and needs an infusion of resources to remain open and help our economy rebound. Programs need help recruiting and retaining staff so that working families can enroll their children."

About PennAEYC

PennAEYC is a statewide, non-profit membership organization of over 2,500 early childhood care and

education professionals. As the Pennsylvania affiliate of NAEYC, we are part of a network that includes 52 affiliates and nearly 60,000 individual members nationwide. Through policy development, advocacy and professional development and support for early childhood professionals we work to achieve the vision that all Pennsylvania families will have access to high-quality, affordable early childhood care and education opportunities for their children provided by a profession that is valued, well-compensated and supported. Learn more at www.pennaeyc.org.

About Start Strong PA

Start Strong PA is an initiative of Early Learning PA. Through a statewide collaboration of partners, Start Strong PA aims to support healthy child development, working families, and the economy by increasing access to and affordability of high-quality child care programs for young children. Learn more at www.startstrongpa.org.