

**Testimony of Nancy Harvey, Child care provider,  
U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Early Childhood  
Elementary and Secondary Education  
February 6, 2020**

**“Solving America’s Child Care Crisis: Supporting Parents, Children,  
and the Economy.”**

Chair Sablan, Ranking Member Allen and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Nancy Harvey. I am 58 years old. I am a child care provider and the owner of Li'l Nancy's Primary Schoolhouse, a home-based childcare program in Oakland, California.

I am honored to speak with you today about the crisis in child care in our country. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on how our nation's working parents, child care providers and elected leaders can work together to address these issues.

I am truly passionate about early childhood education. Over 17 years ago, I left a career as an elementary school educator in the Diocese of Oakland to become a child care provider so that I could focus on ensuring that more children have a head start in learning and developing in their crucial early years.

When I saw children, particularly from Black and Brown families, repeatedly denied entry into our school system because they weren't ready for kindergarten, I made the choice to use my passion for education to make a change in my community.

Over the years I've seen firsthand the ups and downs of working in this industry. I've witnessed the joys of helping to prepare beautiful little people for the world, as well as the challenges that working parents face in providing for their children.

My family child care program focuses on children ages 0-4 years old. A hallmark of Li'l Nancy's Primary Schoolhouse is a low staff-to-child ratio which ensures that children in my care have the necessary adult-children interactions that promote increased learning opportunities and prevent education gaps from developing. Legally, I'm only required to have one assistant but currently I have four assistants -- two full-time and two part-time -- to make sure that children in my program get the special attention they need.

At Li'l Nancy's Primary Schoolhouse we teach children early language, arts, math, science and social skills. Along with my staff, I enjoy taking my students on field trips including to the local observatory to learn more about our solar system and the community pool to learn about water safety.

I'm also proud that my program is a place that nurtures future educators. I make a point of hiring interns from local high schools who want to pursue a degree in education.

But Li'l Nancy's Primary Schoolhouse is more than just a place for learning. It's an important resource for working parents. My program serves an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse set of families from single mothers accessing state assistance while in school and in entry-level jobs to business executives at Kaiser, UCSF Medical Center, and other corporations. The parents I serve consider me a friend and a counselor with a vast knowledge of resources to help them improve their lives.

Although my work is very fulfilling personally and professionally, it comes with its share of challenges. Financially it's been tough. As child care providers, our jobs are about nurturing the future, but too often, we struggle to keep our doors open and pay our assistants a living wage—and we are not paid enough to provide the basics for our own families.

The costs keep rising for utilities, educational resources, healthy food and other items I need to keep my child care operating. But I can't raise rates for parents. Many of them just can't afford to pay it.

This revenue gap leaves me coming up short on a regular basis. In the past I've had to make catch-up payments to Pacific Gas & Electric and juggle other bills. In recent years, an elected official came to visit my child care, and he remarked that my house needed painting. He didn't realize how tough things are for providers like me – that I struggle with basic maintenance and repair costs in part because state-paid voucher rates had stayed flat—for a decade. Since then rates have increased slightly but they're still too low to cover the true cost of delivering high-quality care.

Over the last years, I have seen other family child care programs either close or relocate to more affordable communities as costs rise and the revenue needed to keep our businesses solvent is harder to find. This impacts children, parents and our communities.

How are we supposed to teach children to grow up with dignity and respect when all too often, despite doing such important child care work, it's so hard to feel this ourselves because we struggle to pay bills, plan for a financially-secure future and have our critically important jobs overlooked by so many of those in power?

In spite of all this, I'm committed to remaining in the child care industry and making it better for myself and others. Years ago, I joined together with thousands of other family child care providers to fight to make changes to California's early education system through collective bargaining. After more than a decade of organizing and fighting we won our right to form a union when last Fall California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law a bill giving 40,000 family child care providers the right to form a union. And now we've begun our election process. For us, having a union means that we can raise up our profession and advocate for our communities and the children in our care. But our work to improve our industry won't stop with this victory.

To build that best-in-the world child care system, we'll need the commitment and leadership of parents, providers and elected officials from every part of the country.

I urge Members of Congress to support working parents and child care providers like me to improve child care in our country by:

1. **Expanding the child care program to make early education more accessible and affordable for parents so that every child has the support they need to succeed in kindergarten and thrive.** I believe that all working parents -- no matter where they're from, where they live or what they do for a living -- want to be able to go to work with the peace of mind of knowing that their children are safe and being cared for in their absence. However, the rising costs of living and stagnant wages forces far too many parents to resort to leaving their children in environments where they are not learning and sometimes risking their safety. Early education is too critical to the future of our country to maintain the status quo.
2. **Giving child care providers a voice in the system to advocate the best quality for the children in their care.** Child care providers like myself do some of the most important work - nurturing and educating the next generation of Americans so that their parents can go to work. We are educators and experts in how children develop, and we should have a seat at the table when it's time to make decisions about safety standards, training and funding.
3. **And increasing child care subsidy reimbursement rates so that they truly cover the cost of providing high-quality care.** That means providing sufficient funding for living wages comparable to similarly qualified elementary school teachers, training opportunities for myself and my assistants, and funding for safety standards.

Whether you're an educator, parent, grandparent or community leader, we all owe it to the next generation to stand together and show them we can lead the way to a better future. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.