



## PENNSYLVANIA

# Military Child Care System Offers Solutions for Pennsylvania's Child Care Crisis

21 June 2023

Dear Legislator:

Working families' inability to find and afford high-quality child care has quickly become a major point of concern for the state's employers as businesses struggle to recruit and retain their labor force. In fact, a recent report by ReadyNation and the PA Early Learning Investment Commission (PA-ELIC) calculates that gaps in the commonwealth's child care system are costing families, employers, and taxpayers about \$6.65 billion annually in lost earnings, productivity, and tax revenue.

According to the ReadyNation/PA-ELIC report, 70 percent of working parents surveyed reported that access to child care is a challenge and more than half said it is a significant challenge to find child care that is either affordable (61 percent) or high-quality (51 percent). These reactions align to long-standing problems with the commonwealth's child care system, since nearly 60 percent of residents live in a "child care desert," an area where there are over three times as many children as licensed child care slots. The average cost of infant/toddler care is almost that of public college tuition and less than half of Pennsylvania's child care capacity is considered high quality.

These problems are now compounded by the fact low wages (\$12.43/hr. statewide) within the child care sector are causing a crisis marked by high rates of teacher turnover and a historic staffing shortage within the system that is closing classrooms and entire centers.

The retired admirals and generals of Mission: Readiness see solutions in the military's example on how best to invest in the state's child care system to stabilize the system and better support working families.

The military's child care story begins in the late 1980s. The U.S. Department of Defense realized that the shift to the all-volunteer military was dramatically changing the composition of the force to include more personnel with families, families with all parents working, and women. As such, child care quickly became a workforce issue for the military.

The previous child care system for military families was marred with long waiting lists, serious deficiencies in quality, low pay and qualifications for teachers and staff, as well as child abuse allegations. The overriding concern was that, with the changing face of the military, the problems associated with a low-quality child care system would negatively affect recruitment and retention of troops.

In response, Congress passed the Military Child Care Act in 1989, which stimulated and invested in much-needed reforms that led to the current high-quality system that is often cited by experts as a "model for the nation."

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Today's Military Child Care System (MCCS) delivers on quality, access, and affordability for our military families. MCCS providers are expected and supported to meet Department of Defense health and safety certifications and national accreditation standards. A career ladder that links livable wages to training and improved competencies for teachers and staff has drastically reduced turnover and is considered a key factor in the quality and stability of the care given to children.

On the access front, the military continuously assesses need for care and develops long-range plans to expand capacity. As for affordability, public subsidies and private fees charged on a sliding scale put quality care within reach for active-duty military families.

**As you make final state budget decisions, we encourage you to follow the military's example on how to invest in the state's child care system to better support working families. Investing in livable wages and ensuring affordable child care access for families will have lasting impacts for the commonwealth's children, families, and businesses.**

Respectfully submitted,

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