



November 30, 2023

U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce

Re: High-Frequency Surveys Program/Household Pulse Survey

To Whom It May Concern,

The First Five Years Fund (FFYF) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the [U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce's proposal](#) to collect information for the High-Frequency Surveys Program/Household Pulse Survey. FFYF's mission is to ensure all children from birth through age five have equitable access to affordable, comprehensive, high-quality early care and education (ECE) to support their healthy development and help them achieve their full potential in school and life. As part of this work, we encourage practitioners and policymakers on both sides of the aisle to use ECE data to make effective decisions about serving the nation's youngest learners and their families. This includes continuous and real-time data on the availability of child care, the types of child care that families want and need, the barriers that families face in accessing care, and the impact that access to these programs has on young children's development as well as families' ability to work and maintain economic stability. FFYF relies on the U.S. Census Bureau as the benchmark for high-quality data that is essential to understanding our nation's child care landscape and improving access to quality child care. FFYF commends the U.S. Census Bureau for its work on the Count All Kids initiative to reduce the undercount of young children and particularly acknowledges the Census for its recent efforts in collecting and analyzing data on child care arrangements in the Household Pulse Survey from September to December 2022. On behalf of the ECE field, we thank you for elevating the issue in releasing the article "[Most Parents Don't Have Any Formal Child Care Arrangements](#)". Having the U.S. Census Bureau weigh in on these issues is a significant stride forward in data collection for the ECE field. FFYF looks forward to continued leadership from the U.S. Census Bureau as it pertains to prioritizing data collection on young children, particularly as it relates to child care arrangements for families with children ages five and under.

FFYF firmly supports continuing to collect questions EMP7 and EMP8 about child care arrangements and believes amending D12, and EMP 4,7, and 8, as well as adding the additional questions described below, will increase our understanding of the complex and changing issues families with children ages five and under face, and help to improve access to high-quality early learning opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic upended the lives of parents and children in a multitude of ways; child care programs closed, stay-at-home orders were issued in many states, and parents struggled to take care of their children while balancing work and other responsibilities. While the child care sector was already fractured, the pandemic severely disrupted the child care landscape and shined a light on the essential role that child care plays in our nation's economy. Federal child care and early learning programs are essential to help working parents find and afford the care they need to go to work and ensure their kids can thrive. Yet the high cost and limited supply of quality, reliable child care that works for parents means it can be very hard to find. Wait lists are long and care can be so expensive that many working parents simply can't afford it. According

to [Child Care Aware of America](#), the national average price of child care in 2022 was \$10,853 per year, which on average represents 10% of a two-income family's earnings and 22% of a single parent's earnings.

However, timely and comprehensive data on ECE preferences and experiences, as well as barriers to access, quality, and affordability, are often unavailable or inaccessible. Given its scope and consistent collection, the Household Pulse Survey is well-positioned to better identify and understand the current issues and gaps families experience with child care in near real-time. This data is essential to make informed policy decisions about ECE.

FFYF appreciates the inclusion of questions relating to child care and recommends amending questions D12, and EMP 4,7, and 8 (see detailed amendments below) to more specifically isolate and understand the child care experiences of families with children ages five and under. Children ages five and under experience learning in a variety of early care and education environments and their families face a different set of challenges in finding and affording care than children who are older and can participate in the K-12 school system. These young children's social development and educational progress have been particularly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and more research is needed to properly measure where these young children are receiving care, the types of care that families want for their young children, the barriers that families face in accessing care that works best for their family, and the impacts that child care availability and affordability have on families' employment and economic stability.

Parents rely on a range of options for early learning and care for their children ages five and under, including center-based care, such as child care centers, on-site care (in or near a workplace), preschool, faith-based programs, as well as home-based care, which may include care in a family child care home, or from a relative, nanny, au pair, or babysitter. This diverse landscape of opportunities is often referred to as a mixed-delivery system since there are numerous programs and funding sources that work together to care for children. Given the multitude of options in the early care and education landscape and in order to analyze what child care options parents want and need, particularly after COVID-19 disrupted the child care sector, it is important for these child care options to be included in the survey and analyzed distinctly.

FFYF Suggested Amendments

D12 “In your household, are there... Select all that apply. Children under 5 years old? (1), Children 5 through 11 years old? (2), Children 12 through 17 years old? (3)”

- FFYF recommends amending the following response options:
 - From “Children under 5 years old” (1) to “Children 5 years and younger” (1)
 - From “Children 5 through 11 years old” (2) to “Children 6 through 11 years old” (2)

Justification: Child care and early learning programs serve children through their 5th year. In order for the ECE community to fully utilize the data efforts underway by the U.S. Census Bureau it is imperative to include 5-year-olds in the young children category. This aligns with the ECE sector's definition of serving children from birth through age five.



EMP4 “What is your main reason for not working for pay or profit?”

- FFYF recommends amending the response option from “I am/was caring for children not in school or daycare” to “I chose to care for my children not in school or daycare”.
- Additionally, FFYF recommends adding “I couldn’t find or afford child care” as one of the response options to this question.

Justification: Adding this option will help to distinguish parents who have stepped out of the labor force because they want to be the primary caregivers for their children from parents who want to work for pay or profit but can’t because they face barriers accessing child care. This is essential to understand the impact that lack of access to child care has on employment.

EMP7 “Next, we are going to ask about the childcare arrangements for children in the household. At any time in the last 4 weeks, were any children in the household unable to attend daycare or another childcare arrangement as a result of child care being closed, unavailable, unaffordable, or because you are concerned about your child’s safety in care? Please include before school care, after school care, and all other forms of childcare that were unavailable.

- For respondents who answered “Yes” to EMP7, FFYF recommends adding the question “What is the age(s) of the child(ren) who was unable to attend daycare or another childcare arrangement as a result of child care being closed, unavailable, unaffordable, or because you are concerned about your child’s safety in care?” Respondents may select more than one of the following: 0 to 3 years old (1), 3 through 5 years old (2), 6 through 11 years old (3), and 12 through 17 years old (4).

Justification: Adding this clarifying question will isolate the difficulty of accessing child care for families with children ages five and under from that of older children who can participate in the K-12 school system. Additionally, we know there is a pervasive need for infant and toddler care options. Including the 0 to 3 age range in this question would help further stratify that population, as they have unique needs.

- After this question, if a respondent selected that they have a child who is “0 to 3 years old” or “3 through 5 years old”, FFYF recommends adding the following question, “What was/is the primary reason this child was unable to attend daycare or another child care arrangement?” Select one among the following: It was closed (1), There were no more available slots (2), It was unaffordable (3), I was concerned about my child’s safety in care (4), It was not conveniently located (5), The available hours did not fit my family’s schedule (5), Other reason, please specify _____ (6).

Justification: There are a variety of different barriers families face when accessing child care. Adding this question will help to identify the most prominent barriers that families with young children face in near real-time, which is vital to inform federal policy solutions to improve access to quality child care.

EMP8 “Which if any of the following occurred in the last 4 weeks as a result of childcare being closed, unavailable, unaffordable, or because you are concerned about your child’s safety in care?”

- FFYF recommends subsequently adding the question “The affected child(ren)is/are:” Respondents may select more than one of the following: 0 to 3 years old (1), 3 through 5 years old (2), 6 through 11 years old (3), and 12 through 17 years old (4).



Justification: Adding this question is necessary to better understand the particular impact that child care options for young children have on parents' employment and economic stability.

In addition to the above amendments to questions D12 and EMP 4,7, and 8, FFYF recommends adding the following questions after EMP8. Given the following questions focus on child care arrangements for families with children ages 5 and under, we recommend adding a section entitled “Child Care for Young Children” and making them available to respondents who selected “Children 5 years and younger” in question D12:

This section includes questions on child care arrangements for families with children ages 5 and under.

- CARE1. Where is/are your child(ren) age five and under being cared for? Respondents may select more than one of the following: My partner or I care for my child (1), Family member, friend, or neighbor (2) Child care center (3), Family child care home (4), Faith-based program (5), Nanny, au pair, or babysitter (6), Head Start (7) Public Pre-K (8), Other, please specify ____ (9)
- CARE2. Are you satisfied with your current child care arrangement? Respondents must select one of the following: Yes (1), No (2), Unsure (3)
- CARE3. Have you had to change your child care arrangement in the last 2 months? Respondents must select one of the following: Yes (1), No (2)
- CARE4. If selected “Yes” to CARE3- What was the reason? Respondents may select more than one of the following: Previous child care closed (1), Previous child care was unaffordable (2), Previous child care was too far away or inaccessible (3), Previous child care did not fit the hours we needed care (4) I was concerned about my child’s safety in previous child care (5), We found child care that better fit our needs (6), We moved (7) Other, please specify ____ (8)
- CARE5. What are the barriers to getting the child care you need/prefer? Respondents may select as many as apply: Available care is too expensive (1), Available care is not conveniently located (2) Available care doesn’t fit my family’s needs (3), Care is not available (4), Care is not available at the times I need it (5), I want to care for my child but I am unable to (6) I want my partner or a family member to care for my child but they are unable to (7), There are no barriers (8), Other, please specify ____ (9)
- CARE6. What trade-offs have you had to make to access the care you have? Respondents may select as many as apply: I am borrowing money or using my savings to pay for child care (1), I have to arrive at work late or leave early to accommodate my current child care arrangement (2), I have to drive far distances to access child care (3), I had to turn down a promotion because my child care cannot cover more hours (4), I had to quit my job to care for my child (5), I have to work more/longer hours to afford child care (6), I am not making any tradeoffs (7) Other, please specify ____ (8)
- CARE7. How difficult was it to find child care that works for your family? Respondents must select one of the following: Not difficult (1), Somewhat difficult (2), Very difficult (3), Unable to find child care due to difficulty (4), Did not try to find child care (5)
- CARE8. How do you pay for child care? Respondents must select one of the following: I pay entirely out-of-pocket (1), I receive a subsidy voucher to attend a child care program (2), I receive free child care through Head Start (3), I receive free child care through a public Pre-K program (4) I do not pay for child care (5)

FFYF firmly believes that continuous, quality data collection through surveys is crucial to understanding the experiences of young children and their families and equipping leaders and policymakers with the information needed to improve the child care system. We appreciate your consideration of these comments and welcome further conversations and your partnership. If



you have any questions or if we can provide additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out to Amanda Guarino, Managing Director, Policy and National Partnerships, at aguarino@ffyf.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Guarino". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Amanda" and last name "Guarino" clearly distinguishable.

Amanda Guarino
Managing Director, Policy and National Partnerships
First Five Years Fund

