

February 7, 2024

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families

Re: Survey on Where Parents Look for and Find Information and How They Use Information
When Selecting Child Care

ICR REFERENCE NUMBER: 202401-0970-004

To Whom It May Concern,

The First Five Years Fund (FFYF) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)'s [proposal](#) to collect nationally representative survey data on where parents look for and find information about child care and early education (CCEE) as part of the Consumer Education and Parental Choice in Early Care and Education (CEPC) project. FFYF is committed to ensuring all children from birth through age five have equitable access to affordable, comprehensive, high-quality CCEE to support their healthy development and help them achieve their full potential in school and life. Quality data is essential to achieve these goals, as it allows practitioners and policymakers to make informed decisions about serving the nation's youngest learners and their families. This includes continuous and real-time data on 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 applauds ACF's efforts to collect data on how parents find and assess information about CCEE, including their preferences about child care arrangements, their decision-making processes, the extent to which options met their family's needs, and their experiences finding information. Understanding how parents navigate the process of researching, finding, and selecting child care is imperative to crafting an effective, high-quality CCEE system that aligns with their needs. Today, 26.8 million people rely on child care in order to do their jobs, but millions are struggling to find available, affordable child care options.¹ This new data collection will fill a crucial knowledge gap because timely and comprehensive data on CCEE preferences and experiences, as well as barriers to access, quality, and affordability, are often unavailable. Having a better understanding of parents' experiences and choices will allow for stronger and more efficient policies and practices.

FFYF strongly supports the information ACF proposes to collect. We believe that data regarding "parent's assessments of the CCEE options at the time they made their last CCEE decision" is

¹ Fast Company, "[The High Price of Parenting](#)"

particularly important to help researchers and policymakers better understand what viable child care options are available. Given the limited up-to-date data on the subject, FFYF strongly encourages ACF to utilize this opportunity to begin comprehensive research on child care deserts, which are areas where there are too few licensed child care spots for the number of children in need. According to the Center for American Progress (CAP), a leader in this research, more than half of the U.S. population lives in a child care desert.² However, the most recent research on child care deserts (from CAP) was in 2017, and the child care landscape has changed significantly since then. Additionally, the existing research on child care deserts is not inclusive of informal child care arrangements, such as care provided by relatives, friends, neighbors, or nannies, which are used by and the preferred option for a substantial proportion of the population. Robust research that analyzes child care supply, availability, and options across the nation is imperative to inform policy efforts. Additionally, we recommend that ACF carefully considers the differing opinions and expertise of national organizations regarding the appropriate methodology for analyzing and addressing child care deserts.

The federal government has invested significant resources to help parents make informed decisions about CCEE by supporting states in building Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRISs) that evaluate the quality of programs based on a common set of metrics. However, little is known about how effective QRIS have been at helping parents navigate the CCEE landscape. QRIS can be a valuable source of consumer education, as research indicates that parents may not be able to tell on their own whether a preschool program is high quality.³ We urge ACF to use this survey to gauge the extent to which parents are aware of QRIS systems and whether they are instrumental in their decision making. States can use the survey results to construct better information campaigns around their rating systems and to reevaluate the data about programs that they prioritize collecting and sharing.

In addition to asking parents questions about their experience, we also recommend ACF include a question seeking parents' input on potential solutions they believe would have been helpful to their experience. Compiling these responses would provide valuable insights that could be leveraged by policymakers and advocates to center parent voices in improving CCEE experiences.

The proposed information will be vital to informing the consumer education efforts of Child Care Lead Agencies. We request that the findings from this survey also be distilled in a publicly available report. It is crucial to analyze the data across various demographics, such as race, ethnicity, geography, age of children, parent education level, and CCEE settings, to gain insights into variations and trends. This would be a valuable tool for policymakers and child care advocates, providing evidence-driven insights that can support improvements to CCEE in this nation.

² Center for American Progress, "[Child Care Deserts](#)"

³ Child Care and Early Education Research Connections, "[Do parents know "high quality" preschool when they see it?](#)"



Addressing the barriers to child care access requires a deeper understanding of parents' opinions and experiences with the current market. Continuous, quality data collection through the proposed surveys will better equip leaders and policymakers with the information needed to improve the child care system. We appreciate your consideration of these comments and welcome further conversations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Guarino".

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

