

## NCFN Endorses the Child Care is Infrastructure Act

March 16, 2021

The early care and education (ECE) sector has long encountered barriers to providing high-quality, affordable child care to families across the income scale. Lack of access to stable, high-quality ECE programs limits parents' ability to maintain gainful employment and impedes the need for children to grow and thrive in a safe and enriching environment.<sup>1</sup> While the *quantity* of ECE facilities is important to address the nation's shortage of child care slots—especially in low-income and rural communities—the *quality* of ECE facilities is equally essential. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the facilities-related health and safety challenges that have long confronted the child care sector, necessitating an even more urgent response from the federal government.

**The National Children's Facilities Network (NCFN) applauds Congresswoman Katherine Clark (D-MA) for re-introducing the Child Care is Infrastructure Act and urges Members of Congress to swiftly adopt the measure.** This legislation makes important investments that will help stabilize the sector, address health and safety conditions that pose challenges to ECE providers, and expand access to high quality programs in appropriate settings. The legislation is particularly groundbreaking due to its three-pronged approach to addressing facilities concerns:

- **Assessment of need.** As primary providers of critical facilities financing and business capacity building services for the ECE sector, NCFN Members know that an accurate assessment of need is essential to any strategy addressing the condition, quality, and availability of ECE facilities.
- **Dedicated capital for infrastructure grants.** Dedicated federal funding for ECE infrastructure projects is necessary for stakeholders to assemble the financing required to acquire, construct and improve the health, safety, condition and quality of indoor and outdoor spaces. NCFN enthusiastically supports the legislation's establishment of Infrastructure Grants to Improve Child Care Safety.
- **Intermediary technical assistance (TA).** ECE providers—who are overwhelmingly BIPOC women—operate on razor thin profit margins that leave little room to support debt on a property. These providers are consistently faced with making very difficult decisions about how to best allocate their limited resources to address facilities issues. TA is not only critical to ensuring effective navigation of construction and real estate financing but is also important to setting providers on a path to greater financial stability. The legislation makes a direct investment in intermediaries, including Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), who have proven track-records providing TA to ECE providers.

NCFN is committed to working with congressional leaders to ensure that children and families in local communities have equitable access to care in high quality settings. We look forward to working with Congresswoman Clark to advance this important federal legislation.

### ABOUT NCFN

The National Children's Facilities Network (NCFN) is a coalition of more than 30 nonprofit Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), financial and technical assistance intermediaries, and child care stakeholders dedicated to helping ECE providers develop high-quality physical learning environments and sustainable business models. By providing technical assistance and financing to early learning providers, we seek to address capital needs and business capacity challenges that limit working family's ability to gain equitable access to high-quality ECE programs. NCFN works to generate federal resources that support the development and improvement of early childhood facilities in underserved communities nationwide. The Network collaborates with other children's advocacy leaders concerned with addressing the supply and quality of early childhood facilities across the country.

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<sup>1</sup> An investigation in 10 states conducted by the U.S. Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General found that 96 percent of child care inspected during unannounced visits had one or more potentially hazardous conditions and noncompliance with health and safety requirements. Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation. National Survey of Early Care and Education 2010-2015. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-early-care-and-educationnsece-2010-2014>