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For nearly 100 years, and with more than 50,000 members, including early childhood educators, faculty members, students, advocates, and allies across the country, the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) mission has been to increase access to high-quality, developmentally-appropriate early childhood education for all children birth through age 8. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children. As such, and together with the 50 Affiliates who are part of our network, we appreciate the Department of Health and Human Services' interest in and commitment to enhancing the health and well-being of all Americans.

We are providing feedback in response to the Department of Health and Human Services' request for information (RFI) on the regulations for all programs and laws administered by the Department. While we care deeply about many of the federal regulations that protect children's health and safety including those related to air quality, food safety, vaccines, and more, we are focusing these comments on Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant program (CCDBG), the two largest federal programs supporting young children's access to early childhood education. NAEYC appreciates HHS efforts to solicit feedback from the public on the impact of administrative regulations on programs that families and early childhood educators rely on. We encourage you to prioritize the engagement of impacted families, educators, and programs as you make future regulatory decisions, including those based on feedback to this RFI, through the established notice and comment process. Federal rulemaking is more effective and transparent when it is built hand in hand with the expertise of stakeholders like early childhood educators and families with young children.

Specific to child care and early learning programs the Administration governs, we are particularly supportive of opportunities to safeguard regulations that help keep children safe in care, are aligned with children's healthy development and learning, support a thriving early childhood education workforce, and support the effective participation of providers across a range of settings, including faith-based programs, child care centers, and family child care homes, to maximize families' child care options. Within the protective federal framework, states are taking the lead on helpful regulatory reforms that help early childhood education programs be more effective, efficient, and streamlined. We do not recommend that the federal government eliminate important safeguards governing child care and early learning programs; that will be detrimental for children, families, and providers.

In Head Start, this means carefully considering the importance of comprehensive services and supports for young children enrolled, and the role those services play in supporting a strong foundation for future learning and development. It also means continuing support for a highly-qualified, well-compensated, and supported Head Start workforce to improve children's access to high quality care and education. Unique in its design, Head Start provides comprehensive services designed to address the barriers that many of the lowest-income children face in being ready for school, and relies on a highly qualified workforce to deliver on its promise of high quality early childhood education. Federal regulations designed to support the preparation, fair compensation,

and access to comprehensive benefits for that workforce are critical to supporting the continued availability of these high quality early childhood education opportunities for the children who most need them, and should be supported. In our workforce surveys, educators consistently cite competitive wages as the factor that would be most helpful in keeping them in the field.

In CCDBG, this means safeguarding health and safety regulations that keep children safe in care and maintaining payment practices that help stabilize child care businesses and maximize choice for families receiving subsidies. Federal CCDBG regulations outline the baseline standards and practices states and programs must meet for the effective administration and acceptance of child care subsidies; however, states have significant flexibility to set their own rules. We encourage the Administration to continue to support this flexibility, prioritize children's health and safety, and ensure the continued availability of child care options for families receiving subsidies. In particular, this means continuing to support the implementation of important regulations regarding payment practices.

Child care programs are able to operate more effectively when they are paid on a stable, predictable basis, and subsidy reimbursement policies aligned with supporting stable payment practices help ensure that a broader range of provider types is able to serve families with subsidies, maximizing families' child care choices. As such, we ask that HHS continue to support states in implementing regulations designed to support fair payment practices, including:

- Making subsidy payments to providers in advance of or at the beginning of service instead of weeks after service began (referred to in regulations as prospective payments), in order to increase stability.
- Making subsidy payments to providers based on enrollment instead of attendance, in order to reflect the fixed cost of child care operations.
- Providing some child care services through grants or contracts with providers, in order to increase the supply and quality of care for infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and children in underserved geographic areas.

Here are a few quotes we collected in June 2025 from program leaders and administrators around the country about these regulations:

- *"It's allowed us to grow our incredibly high quality program in the past 5 years from 2 sites to now 5 open and 2 about to open this fall of 2025." – Faith-Based Program Administrator, Indiana*
- *"We are more willing to take on children that are on Child Care Subsidy." – Center Administrator, Missouri*
- *"If we are not reimbursed when a child doesn't attend, we don't dock the pay of the staff! So, the parent body as a whole has to absorb that cost, which means higher tuition. Paying staff based on attendance is not possible!" – Center Administrator, Virginia*

We urge the Department to use its regulatory authority to protect the regulations that are helping these programs, families, children, and businesses in every community, and to ground any future changes to CCDBG in principles that advance learning, health, and stability; protect the well-being of children, families, and educators; and preserve program integrity. Safeguarding regulations that protect children's health and safety is vital and key payment practices that allow child care



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businesses to stay afloat must remain in place to expand the supply of child care parents can choose from.

Thank you again for taking the time to solicit public feedback on this RFI. We look forward to continued efforts to ensure that the federal regulatory environment is supportive of increasing access to high-quality early childhood education opportunities for young children and their families, and is contributing to the stability and quality of the early childhood education field.