

children at Risk

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 619 (S. THOMPSON | LOPEZ | BUTTON | TALARICO)

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IMPROVING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION WORKFORCE

CHILDREN AT RISK supports HB 619, which requires the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to develop a statewide plan with goals for helping early childhood educators achieve credentials and degrees, earn living wages, and utilize the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS). If Texas hopes to sustain a high-quality early education workforce, it needs a statewide plan with strategic goals. Specifically, this plan should include recommendations for data collection; compensation and turnover; racial equity; professional development; and local workforce board support systems.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Child care educators are one of the most important factors contributing to quality early childhood education. In addition to setting the foundation for our children's academic, health, and social development, early educators contribute to Texas' economic success by providing the care necessary for many families with young children to work. Despite working in an essential occupation, Texas early educators often receive extremely low wages, limited training or opportunities for advancement, and few benefits. These challenges prevent them from providing the highest quality care. Because child care centers are often owned and staffed by low-income women of color, opportunities exist to address racial disparities in the child care workforce.

Child care educator salaries, especially those in programs accepting subsidy payments, do not reflect the complexity of their job. They receive persistently low wages – often so low that roughly 56% qualify for at least one form of public benefit programs such as Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits and have limited career advancement opportunities. As a result, we see high turnover rates among educators. In addition, earnings do not meaningfully increase as educators earn higher degrees and progress within their careers. In Texas, the average child care educator earns about \$21,000 per year, with an average hourly wage of \$10 per hour.ⁱ An educator working in child care with a bachelor's degree makes on average 50% less than their counterpart in the public school with the same degree.ⁱⁱ

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TECPDS originally began as a trainer registry for trainers to provide professional development to the child care workforce and has evolved to also house the Workforce Registry (WFR). The WFR allows the child care workforce to enter their professional development in an online database to track their professional development requirements. Data collected within this registry provides a better understanding of where the child care workforce is with regards to training, education, compensation, and experience. Currently, there are only a fraction of early educator accounts in TECPDS compared to the estimated 90,000 educators. The registry is underutilized and optional, therefore there is no way to understand the makeup of the current early childhood workforce in Texas.

WHAT THIS BILL DOES

House Bill 619 requires the Texas Workforce Commission to develop a statewide strategic plan for improving the quality of the child-care workforce with goals for helping early childhood educators achieve credentials and degrees, earn living wages, and utilize the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System.

IMPACT

Paying educators' equitable wages reduces turnover and provides stability for both child care providers and families seeking quality care. HB 619 would strengthen the child care workforce and set statewide goals to help educators meet living wages. Additionally, the bill would have TWC encourage the utilization of TECPDS and WFR to assist educators with professional development and career growth. Educators play a critical role in shaping the developmental outcomes a child gets from quality care. When educators are prepared to teach, compensated adequately, and supported professionally, they are better prepared to contribute to a thriving early childhood workforce and the quality-of-care children receive.

ⁱEarly Childhood Workforce Index (2020). Retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/texas>

ⁱⁱCHILDREN AT RISK Calculations using American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2012-2016. IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org