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Oklahoma Child Care Expert Paula Koos Testifies Before U.S. House Education & the Workforce Subcommittee about Child Care Safety & Strengthening Access to Quality Child Care

Oklahoma City, OK -- Paula K. Koos, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Child Care Resource & Referral Association, (OCCRRA), testified before the U.S. House of Representatives' Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education today, urging policymakers to ensure that child care programs are both safe and promote healthy child development. The subcommittee heard from four witnesses who discussed the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the law that allocates funds to states for child care and reviewed ways to improve the quality of child care for working families.

"CCDBG has not been reauthorized in 17 years," Koos told the Subcommittee. "And, national studies show that there is a great disparity among state policies. Children should be safe in child care, regardless of the state in which they live."

Koos was invited to testify about Oklahoma's child care system, the role of Child Care Resource & Referral in helping families find child care and in training child care providers, and Oklahoma's efforts to improve the quality of child care for all children.

Nearly 11 million children under age 5 in the United States are in some type of child care arrangement every week. On average, the children of working mothers spend about 36 hours a week in child care.

"Child care is a way of life for the majority of families. Yet often, child care is hard to find, hard to afford, and too often of questionable quality," said Koos. She told the panel that "Oklahoma's quality rating system and resource & referral services for families and providers helps take the guesswork out of choosing child care for parents and helps providers offer quality settings."

"Oklahoma has put a stake in the ground for child care safety, accountability, and quality," said Koos. The Oklahoma Child Care Resource & Referral Association works with eight child care resource and referral agencies serving parents and child care providers in all 77 counties throughout Oklahoma. "Families can contact us by phone, use our online search resources, read our consumer education materials (many of which are in English and Spanish), or new last year – use our Find Child Care App through their smart phone," explained Koos.

“Looking for child care can be a stressful experience for parents. Our goal is to alleviate that stress,” said Koos. “We also provide training and technical assistance to child care providers and help to guide potential providers through the state process to become licensed.” Koos urged the Subcommittee to consider requiring business related technical assistance. “Sound fiscal and management practices are the foundation to quality programs,” she said.

Throughout the United States, more than 600 resource and referral agencies offer services to families and child care providers similar to those offered by OCCRRA. “Parents want quality child care,” said Koos. “The U.S. Senate passed child care legislation earlier in March. I’m hopeful that the House will pass legislation in the coming months as well. The economy depends on working parents, and working parents need safe, quality child care.”

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The Oklahoma Child Care Resource & Referral Association supports quality care and education for children through community-based resource and referral services reaching parents and providers in all 77 counties throughout the state. For more information, see <http://www.oklahomachildcare.org/>.