

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 14, 2024**

**Center for Rural Pennsylvania Public Hearing Addresses Critical  
Need for Child Care Access**

**SCHUYLKILL COUNTY** — The Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors recently held a public hearing on rural child care access at the Schuylkill County Technology Center (STC)—South Campus in Schuylkill County. State legislators, local leaders, and child care professionals engaged in discussions addressing the challenges posed by the lack of child care access in rural Pennsylvania.

“Affordable and accessible child care is critical for rural communities in Pennsylvania,” said Senator Gene Yaw, Chairman of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors. “It is a continued priority to address the needs for child care and child care workers to support our youth and get family members back into the workforce.”

“Let’s not overlook the vital role played by child care workers—they’re the unsung heroes serving families with young children across our Commonwealth,” said Representative Eddie Day Pashinski, Vice Chairman of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors. “We need to ensure that they receive the compensation they truly deserve.”

“Access to child care in rural areas isn’t a political issue—it’s a human one,” said Senator Judy Schwank, member of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board. “Bipartisan support is necessary to take action to provide solutions.”

“For child care centers to thrive, we need government licensing reform,” said Representative Dan Moul, member of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board. “It’s time for change to help child care providers accomplish their invaluable mission.”

“Quality child care is a necessity not just for families in Schuylkill County, but across Pennsylvania,” said Senator Dave Argall. “When we have quality pre-K education, we’re helping parents return to and remain in the workforce. As the chair of the Senate Education Committee, I will support the dedicated teachers and child care professionals who do this important work, day in and day out.”

“The Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce and our chamber child care provider members were honored to be able to present testimony on the child care industry crisis and the necessary reforms needed for child care providers, including legislative, regulatory, and financial,” said Robert S. Carl Jr., President and CEO of the Schuylkill Chamber of

Commerce. “The chamber and our members are committed to continued advocacy on behalf of the child care industry and our 800 business and nonprofit members until necessary reforms are achieved on behalf of the children, their child care providers, and the working families of the Commonwealth of PA. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to come before the Center for Rural PA Board and appreciate their attention and sincerity on behalf of the child care industry.”

Key points from the hearing included:

**Increases in Funding:** Testifiers suggested increasing both state and federal funding for child care centers. This could involve allocating more financial resources to support the operation and improvement of child care facilities.

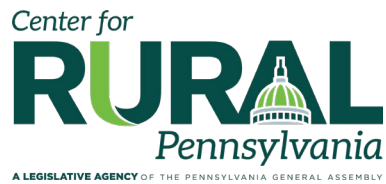
**Higher Wages:** There were suggestions to raise wages for child care workers. This is aimed at attracting and retaining qualified staff by offering better compensation and competitive salaries with other industries, such as public school districts and private-sector employers.

**Universal Pre-K Implementation:** Suggestions were made for the implementation of universal pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs. This would make pre-K education more widely accessible to all children, regardless of socioeconomic background.

**Removing Regulatory Licensing:** The removal of regulatory licensing that hinders the effectiveness and accessibility of child care services was proposed. This includes reducing the frequency of licensing requirements for child care centers and reevaluating the qualifications required for staff in child care settings to make them more realistic and feasible.

Testifiers included:

- Andrea Heberlein, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Early Learning Investment Commission
- Dr. Leah Spangler, President and CEO, The Learning Lamp and Ignite Education Solutions
- Natalie Renew, Executive Director, Home Grown
- Karen Grimm-Thomas, Early Childhood Education Strategy Advisor, The Pennsylvania Key
- Robert S. Carl, Jr., President and CEO, Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce
- Samantha Chivinski, Executive Vice President, Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce
- Mary Ann Devlin, Executive Director, Child Development, Inc.



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- Michelle Dallago, Director and Head of School, Perception Early Learning, Montessori
- Kim Bastian, Regional Advocacy Program Ambassador, Pennsylvania Child Care Association

Access the video recording and written testimony of the public hearing on the Center's website at [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov).

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