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**TESTIMONY OF BARBARA FABRE, DIRECTOR OF WHITE EARTH NATION CHILD CARE/EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM AND CHAIRWOMAN OF NATIONAL INDIAN CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION**

**BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS**

**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON “EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION IN INDIAN COUNTRY; BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS”**

**FEBRUARY 26, 2014**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I am Barbara Fabre, a tribal member from the White Earth Nation in Minnesota, the largest of 11 tribes in Minnesota. I am the Director of White Earth Child Care/Early Childhood Program and Chairwoman of the National Indian Child Care Association, that is representative of tribal child care programs throughout Indian Country. It is an honor to be here today and I am proud to be here to represent tribal child care. I applaud the Committee on Indian Affairs for its decision to include tribal child care in the oversight hearing on early childhood development.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 1990, (CCDBG Final Rule 45CFR 98 and 99, published August 1992), also known as the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), is to increase the availability, affordability and quality of child care services for children (families and communities). This federal funding is for States, Territories, Indian Tribes, and tribal organizations in order to: (1) provide low-income families with the financial resources to find and afford quality child care for their children; (2) enhance the quality and increase the supply of child care for all families, including those who receive no direct assistance under the CCDF; (3) provide parents with a broad range of option in addressing their child care needs; (4) strengthen the role of the family; (5) improve the quality of, and coordination among, child care programs and early childhood development programs; and (6) increase the availability of early childhood development and before-and-after school care services. While a 1994 mandate, reaffirms a government-to-government relationship between Tribes and the Federal government and directing agencies to design solutions and tailor Federal programs, in appropriate circumstances, to address specific or unique needs of tribal communities, tribal child care programs are designed locally and able to meet the unique needs of tribal communities.

The National Indian Child Care Association is the recognized representative body of the Tribal Child Care and Development Block Grant grantees. The Association was developed in 1993 to provide information, support, coordination, and advocacy for Tribal child care. Two hundred sixty Tribes and Tribal organizations received Child Care and Development Block Grant in FY 2013 (259 Tribes and Tribal organizations (including 20 consortia), encompassing approximately 520 Federally-Recognized Tribes; and 1 Native Hawaiian grantee. (35 Tribes have consolidated their CCDF funding with employment, training and related services into a P.L. 102-477 Plan. There were 30,598 children serviced by Tribal CCDF in FY 2011 (this number reflects only the number of children who received CCDBG child care assistance (subsidy), and does not take into consideration the thousands of children being served in tribally licensed centers or tribally licensed child care providers and other quality initiatives/services that Tribal child care programs do beyond the ACF700 Report aggregate data form). The Child Care and Development Block Grant is the single largest program authorized under the Personal Responsibilities and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) affecting Tribal governments. Participation in the Child Care and Development Block Grant allows Tribal governments and organizations the opportunity to design, implement, and support programs which are beneficial to the unique needs of our Tribal citizens. The mission of National Indian Child Care Association is to unify tribes and tribal organizations to promote high quality culturally relevant child care and development. National Indian Child Care Association provides leadership, support, and communication on behalf of Native America, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiians children, families, and communities. NICCA also recommends that any language regarding CCDBG properly include Native Hawaiians and these proposed technical corrections would not have Native Hawaiian compete with American Indians or Alaska Natives for limited funding. Instead, these technical corrections address the CCDBG bill’s requirements that states serve all Native populations and coordinate with Native organizations; and apply strong child care standards to all Native child care organizations.

The number of Tribal child care programs receiving funding through the Child Care and Development Block Grant has increased. The amount of funding that Tribes and tribal organizations receive each year is contingent upon the number of Tribes and tribal organizations participating and the number of children in each Tribe or service area. The per child amount of funding for Tribes has decreased from $164.00 per child in 2002 to $140.00 per child in 2011. That is less than the per child rate that was received by Tribes and tribal organizations in 2001. The percent of set aside for Tribes and tribal organizations is currently “up to two percent at the discretion of the Secretary.” Currently, tribal set aside is at the maximum we can receive under current law, which has been the same since 1996, although services rendered by Tribal child care programs have significantly increased, cost of living (inflation), the demand for child care (assistance and capacity), and more tribes receiving CCDBG funding has been a hardship for Tribal child care programs throughout Indian Country.

While Tribal child care has been diligently providing quality child care to parts of the country that are typically rural, high poverty areas, funding to maintain that quality and expand services remains a huge barrier. As you are aware, the CCDBG has not been reauthorized for the past 17 years, and with additional tribes receiving CCDBG funding, the two percent has been rationed to even more tribes. While there is hope of a reauthorization of CCDBG, Tribal child care programs will continue to lose ground if the tribal set aside is not increased to five percent. Due to the inadequate investment in child care, tribes are constantly having to decide on what is more important, serving more eligible children or improving quality.

As a tribal CCDBG Tribal Administrator since 1993, I have first-hand experience of implementing CCDBG services and know the many facets of child care licensing, child care assistance, training, quality rating, school readiness, parent engagement, economic development and early learning. The White Earth Child Care Program was created in 1993 when the Tribe received CCDBG funding, which has allowed us to provide child care assistance, develop our own tribal licensing standards, which in some areas, exceeds the State’s licensing standards for family/group child care, provide quality improvement grants to providers and centers to meet licensing requirements or improvement, School-Age Child Care grants, monthly monitoring visits, early childhood curriculum/child development training, and manage two child care centers (one is funded by CCDBG & parent fees and other is funded by the Tribe & parent fees). We also provide outreach and resources to relative caregivers who provide child care (unlicensed), and provide (free) community trainings on child development, parenting and school readiness. While we are one of the larger Tribal child care program, there are as many high quality smaller Tribal programs, that are struggling to maintain services. The Colusa Indian Community in Colusa, CA for example, receives $26,000, and serves 70 children, could only subsidize approximately 4 children per year based on our current grant award per year, which would only cover tuition. The Colusa Center has made tremendous efforts to meet the highest quality in early learning and development possible and state they are fortunate that the Tribe believes in investing in early care and education. They would turn children away more than accept them in our care if the Tribe didn't invest funding. They also struggle to meet the needs of their children enrolled who have special needs. Services are often limited to one 30 minute session per week, leaving their staff to care for children on a one on one basis, leaving a higher ratio for other staff. They cannot afford to pay for more staff. This is a constant balance and struggle, as well as being able to afford specialized training and / or staff who have the training and education.

In 2010, White Earth Reservation was selected as one of four Transformation Zones under Minnesota’s Race to the Top/Early Learning Challenge Grant, which allows us to administer the Early Learning Scholarship Program, to target children/families who are not in any kind of early learning program and provide direct services to children by allowing parents the opportunity to choose the best quality rated early learning program (parent directed scholarship program) such as child care, head start or school-based preschool, that fits their need. Children are then placed in a quality Parent Aware rated early learning program that will help develop a strong foundation of learning. In order to help families support healthy brain development, parents are required to attend a minimum of 4 hours of child development training per year (parents, providers and community members are invited to all trainings our Program provides) and are assigned a Parent Mentor that provides early literacy and language development resources on a monthly basis. The collaboration with the State of Minnesota is to ensure quality early childhood access to children who would not otherwise be in an early childhood setting prior to entering kindergarten, was made possible because, of our established tribal CCDBG program, as a vehicle for reaching hundreds of Indian families and rural communities. While this is unique to tribes in Minnesota, not all Tribes share this success of working with the State government and much needs to be done to help encourage States to reach out and work with their Tribal CCDBG partners. Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton and the 2013 Legislature approved $40 million in scholarships for families to access high quality, Parent Aware-rated early learning programs this biennium, along with statewide full-day kindergarten that will begin in 2014. These initiatives are expected to have a positive impact on kindergarten readiness and early learning success in years to come. Tribal child care programs take ‘school readiness’ very seriously and work with children in our tribal child care programs to help build skills, knowledge, behaviors and accomplishments that children should know and be able to do as they enter kindergarten in the following areas of child development: physical development; the arts; personal and social development; language and literacy; and mathematical thinking.

Prior to receiving CCDBG funding, the White Earth Reservation had only 8 state-licensed child care homes within a 1300 square mile radius. With 9 rural communities averaging 150 to 1,000 people in each community (10,000 individuals live within the reservation boundaries), there simply was not enough child care. With CCDBG funding, the Tribe developed its own licensing process and standards, there are 7 state-licensed child care homes and 14 tribally licensed child care homes and 2 tribally licensed centers. Of the 16 tribally licensed child care sites, 14 are Parent Aware rated (MN’s quality rating system), with 5 rated 4-Star, 4 rated 3-Star, 1 rated 1-Star and 4 in the process who will be 3-Star. Our Program also worked with 3 state licensed providers within the reservation boundaries who serve our Native children, to help them receive a 4, 3 and 2 Star rating. While the numbers of licensed child care sites have doubled, there are still long waiting lists at these licensed child care sites AND waiting lists at both county and tribal child care assistance programs, to help low-income families pay for child care costs.

Tribes across Indian Country have shared their struggles at their current funding, in Washington, the Tulalip Tribe have 16 on their waiting list. In Muscogee Creek Nation, they have seven tribal child care centers, a child care assistance program, Resource & Referral and tribal licensing. They serve 250 children and have 75 children on their waiting list. The Shoshone Bannock Tribes in Idaho has 81 children on their waiting list in their Child Care Center. While a successful program, they still lack space and have to cut their budgets dramatically over the years with their Centers and trying not to cut child care assistance program. With the ever increasing food costs and utility expenses, they are experiencing the decision many Tribal child care programs are faced with having to use their limited CCDBG funds for quality or quantity. Muscogee Creek Nation in OK, stated that ‘by having more tribal child care programs or expanding the current centers, they could serve more tribal families and more jobs can be offered to tribal members.’ Due to the number of tribal participants, the demand for child care in Indian communities, and fluctuation in tribal funding, Tribes have experienced a significant decrease in the ability to provide quality services in Indian Country. This is particularly detrimental to existing programs, which must reduce the level of child care services to Indian families from year to year.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, American Indian children are the only group that collectively lost ground since 2000 on several well-being indicators. Child poverty continues to rise at a faster rate than for any other ethnic group in the United States. Additionally, the child death rate for children aged 1-14 has decreased by 9% for non-Indian children but has increased by 15% for American Indian children. Indian Country has a poverty rate of more than 31%, the highest poverty rate of any ethnic group in the United States, nearly three times the national average. Reservations are experiencing unemployment rates of 50%, almost 10 times more than the national average. Native children are the most at-risk population in the United States, confronting serious disparities.

American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children need quality child care settings to improve lifelong outcomes. Increased risk factors such as poverty, low birth weight, and low educational attainment of mothers contribute to the need for investment in quality child care in Indian country. There are many challenges faced by American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children, Tribal child care is a vehicle for intervention and support of quality care and cultural strengths. The Federal government must take into account the needs by tribal communities, which must be determined by tribal communities, and served by tribal programs in order to make meaningful changes to practices. Reduced funding and resources will continue to undermine tribal culture and American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children’s development. Mayor Charlotte Brower, North Slope Borough, Alaska stated “….Child Care is the number one issue for all working parents. In order to keep full time job, working parents, need this service. I support sustainable, quality and affordable child care services and will support working parents.”

 The flexibility of CCDBG funding, allows Tribal child care programs to uniquely braid and immerse, culture and Native language teachings throughout their programming and classrooms. There continues to be emerging evidence that dual language early childhood education programs have solid potential to help children prepare for school, and helps the Tribe revitalize and maintain their language. If you were to visit Tribal child care classrooms around the country, you would see parent engagement, language immersion, regalia making, dance and drum. For children, parents and staff, making the regalia helps understand its meaning and helps provide an opportunity to re-engage with our culture from which we have become disconnected.

While tribal child care looks slightly different in every community, the priority is the same, to provide high quality child care to tribal communities which are typically the highest poverty areas in the state. Tribal child care programs vary from offering center-based services, child care assistance, child care licensing, monitoring, quality improvement and health/safety grants, professional development, after-school programs and working with partners such as head start, employment agencies and schools to ensure quality and a continuum of services, as no one program or school can serve all the communities children.

Tribal grantees participating in the CCDBG have increased from 226 in 1994 to 258 in 2010; however, all federally recognized Tribes are eligible to participate and some Tribes also provide services for descendants of tribal members, who may not have the blood quantum to be enrolled. Current Head Start legislation authorizes a minimum of 4% set aside for Indian Head Start programs. With inflation at approximately 3% per year, Tribes have experienced a significant decrease in the ability to provide services in Indian Country. This is particularly detrimental to existing programs, which must reduce funding of all child care services to Indian families. This greatly affects the children of families that are working to transition off of public assistance programs through work and educational opportunities.

**No Access for Additional Funding for Tribal Child Care.** Although demands on Tribal resources have increased, Tribes do not have access to additional funding. States have a tax base that generates funds for necessary programs, and the myth that if Tribes have a casino, they are wealthy, when in fact, casino revenues are generally limited (with the exception of a few) and are put back into helping their tribal communities. States also have access to additional federal funds that tribes do not have access to, because of no tribal set-aside or tribal language included in new or existing initiatives. Child Care Development Block Grant funds are the only funds for Tribal child care. Native American, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiian parents must have access to high quality early learning experiences for their children. Indian children, who are in quality early learning environments at home, in care with family or friends, or in more formal early childhood settings, experience positive outcomes later in life, as proven through the extensive research shows that investing in early childhood has a return investment.

 According to a report, “one of the most productive investments that is rarely viewed as economic development is early childhood development (ECD). Several longitudinal ECD studies that are based on a relatively small number of at-risk children from low-income families, demonstrate that the potential return is extraordinary. In a previous essay, we found that, based on these studies, the potential annual return from focused, high-quality ECD programs might be as high as 16 percent (inflation adjusted), of which the annual public return is 12 percent (inflation adjusted),” (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2006).

When it comes to economic development, tribal child care is one of the key important components of economic development planning in tribal communities, next to jobs and housing. Jobs cannot be created without the support of child care services. Tribal child care is a vital service in Tribal communities to insure parents have the ability to maintain education and employment for self-sufficiency and to help our tribal families go off or stay off the State’s TANF rolls.

In closing, Tribal child care is not babysitting, it is a vital services to tribal communities and is often the glue to collaboration between preschool programs, school districts, parents and economic development. Tribal child care programs are help their State by being able to offer comprehensive child care/early childhood services to the most vulnerable communities in the State - tribal communities, and who better to serve tribal communities and tribal families but Tribal programs. Child care teachers/providers who are supported and monitored by Tribal CCDBG programs are proud of the services they offer; early childhood screenings, assessments, authentic observations, social and emotional skill building, culture/language, early interventions for children with special needs and parent conferences, that reinforce parent engagement and a continuum of foundational learning skills from home to child care, to head start on through school. While there are many gaps, probably the biggest one is funding, when it comes to what our Congress can do for tribal child care, is to help Tribal Child Care be fully funded by providing the 5% increase in the CCDBG tribal set aside.

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