

Testimony of Susan Peek Hoff
Concerning SB 50
Before the Senate Education Committee
April 3, 2007

Chair Shapiro and members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you this morning. My name is Susan Hoff and I am President and CEO of ChildCareGroup, a Dallas based nonprofit agency dedicated to promoting, expanding, and delivering the best child care services available outside the home. ChildCareGroup was founded in 1901 and has been in continuous operation since that time. We operate 6 model child development centers serving almost 600 low income children and manage the Child Care Subsidy Contract for Dallas County, overseeing the child care of more than 20,000 children every year. ChildCareGroup is also the lead partner for the Dallas TEEM project, which is comprised of 88 reschool classrooms in child care, Head Start and public school settings.

I would like to thank Senator Zaffirni for her ongoing support of the young children, families and early childhood professionals of Texas. I also extend my thanks to Senator Shapiro and the other members of the committee for your support of Senate Bill 76 and Senate Bill 23 in the past 2 regular sessions and for appropriating funds for the TEEM project.

Senate Bill 50 addresses 3 key components, which are critical to ensuring that our youngest and most vulnerable children are well cared for and well prepared for school: increased child care subsidy reimbursement rates; support for the expansion of the TEEM project; and improved training and support for those who care for and teach our children.

Currently, child care subsidy reimbursement rates are well below the actual cost of care. In many areas the rates are less than 60% of the market rate. Dallas County child care providers who accept subsidies are doing so at an average loss of more than \$2,000 each year per child and passing this loss onto non-subsidized parents is not a viable option. Consequently, many providers have decided to limit the number of subsidized children they serve or have chosen not to serve them at all. Programs that do not limit the number of subsidy-funded children must cut corners. The choices are dismal and the cuts hurt every child in care, not just those who receive subsidies. We advocate for awarding higher subsidies to programs that provide higher quality care as demonstrated by participation in the Texas Rising Star program or accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

You've heard testimony today about the success of the TEEM project. I have been involved with development and implementation of this model since the beginning and can attest to its effectiveness. This model works equally well in Head Start, public pre-k and child care centers. I have been particularly proud of the successes in the child care settings – a venue which many believe to be contrary to learning. TEEM proves that teachers in any setting, given appropriate education, support, and materials, can teach, and that all children can learn.

Unfortunately, Texas child care providers generally get the short end of the stick in terms of education and support, and children suffer the consequences. The currently required 8 clock hours of non-standardized pre-service training and 15 annual clock hours of unregulated training for teachers in licensed child care programs are woefully inadequate. Standardizing the pre-service training, regulating training through the state Trainer Registry, creating opportunities for continued education, and developing a career path for child care providers are positive steps toward improving the quality of child care and child outcomes.

Early childhood advocates and professionals have been trying to improve the early learning systems in our state for years. But our work has been a little like trying to build a space ship using only the parts of a broken lawnmower. Not only will such a model never fly it won't even cut grass. The 3 central elements of Senate Bill 50 – increased reimbursement rates, expansion of the TEEM project, and increased and improved professional development for child care providers are the new parts needed to make the system work for the children we all care so deeply for.