

**STATEMENT BY CHERYL MORMAN**  
**COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS**

**Hearing – Solving the Crisis: Meeting the Needs of Working Families and Child Care Workers**

**May 31, 2023**

My name is Cheryl Morman, and I have owned and operated Blessings From Above Child Development Center, a family child care program in Richmond, Virginia, for over 20 years. I am the current president of the Virginia Alliance for Family Child Care Associations (VAFCCA), the only statewide association in Virginia solely focused on family child care, which refers to small child care programs operated from someone's home. I am a member of the National Association for Family Child Care, which supports FCC throughout the country as educators make the intentional professional choice to offer high-quality early care and education in their homes. I was recently selected for the Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC) to represent publicly funded family child care providers. As an ECAC member, I will help shape the unified early childhood care and education system in the Commonwealth to improve access to high-quality early childhood care and education so that all Virginia children will be well prepared for school and life.

I am a wife, a mother, a grandmother, and an educator. I have been married to a wonderfully supportive husband for 27 years. We have two sons and three beautiful grandchildren between the ages of four and one, who simultaneously wear me out and bring me great joy.

***Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, despite the essential role my program played for families, there was not enough support to assist families in accessing child care.***

I am licensed to care for 12 children between 6 weeks to 5 years of age. Before COVID, I remained full with a waiting list. I had two full-time teachers along with myself. I was able to maintain payroll and my expenses. I could only pay my employees a minimum wage of \$12/hour and could not offer health benefits. My access to health insurance came through my

husband's employer. Whenever the child care program fell short, we would have to rely on my husband's stable income. Sometimes parents struggled to make the tuition payments, but they made too much money to qualify for the subsidy. I would develop flexible payment arrangements with families to ensure their children could remain in my program. However, I couldn't make payment arrangements for my expenses. I still had to pay my staff and buy food for my child care program.

I participated in the Virginia Quality Birth to Five program to continue ensuring I was meeting our families' needs and the development of the children entrusted in my care. We also participated in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and offered healthy and nutritious meals to children.

We always used a developmentally appropriate curriculum that helped their development in the classroom and offered ideas to carry over to home. FCC educators disproportionately care for infants and toddlers and children from low-income families, families of color including Black, Latinx, immigrant, and Indigenous, as well as families living in rural communities. We were one big family. We provided occasional date night services and opportunities for families to connect as their children formed trusting relationships with their peers.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, one of my priorities was advocating for an increase in the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) reimbursement rates for providers. Before COVID, my program was full with 12 children enrolled; however, only the family of one of the children had subsidy assistance. I wanted to care for more children on the subsidy, but there were two significant challenges. First, the rates for all providers, regardless of setting, were significantly lower than the cost of providing high-quality care. The issues were even more challenging for family childcare providers who were reimbursed at an even lower rate. My rate was more than the rate set by the Department of Social Services, which means the difference would either be absorbed by the parents, who couldn't afford much more, or myself. Second, the subsidy payments are not made until 1.5 months after I provide the care, and I could not afford to wait

this long for the reimbursement. It has always been challenging to sustain our programs, but we made it work to provide the care and early learning opportunities families need.

***When COVID began, child care programs like mine struggled to stay open for families, but the historic child care relief funds saved the sector.***

Then COVID hit. We continued to stay open using the reserved cleaning supplies and paper products. We shopped in bulk but quickly ran out of supplies and needed help finding what we needed. Shopping was done early in the mornings before our programs opened. This helped us to reduce the amount of contact with others in stores. I also had to help with remote learning for two school-aged children enrolled in my program.

Many daycare facilities began to close; however, many family child care facilities continued to operate –according to an NAFCC survey, one-third of all FCC programs remained open. We depended on one another to get information out. Family child care providers did their best to keep their doors open and environments safe.

The funding provided by Congress for Covid-19 relief, particularly \$50 billion since December 2020, helped me stabilize and get through without sacrificing critical services to the parents I serve. To help families with the cost of child care, the federal funding allowed the state to increase the income eligibility and do away with their co-pay, which meant more families could qualify for childcare assistance.

My program went from 11 private pay families before COVID to 3 privately paying families and six families using childcare subsidies. Some were new families, and some were families I had cared for before, but they now qualified for child care assistance. Eventually, the state also increased the number of absences covered, providing resources based on enrollment rather than attendance. If that child or family had COVID or was exposed to COVID and had to be out for 7 – 10 days, the provider still received tuition, and the child remained with the program. Other crucial assistance received included: up to 4 rounds of CARES grant; \$25,000 in American Rescue Plan Stabilization Funds; a Payment Protection Plan (PPP) loan; unemployment insurance and COBRA coverage when my husband lost his job after almost 30

years with the same company; and finally, a Small Business Administration loan of \$46,000. This loan was needed to keep my program doors open and a roof over our heads since operational expenses increased dramatically regardless of all the help. I installed humidifiers to help with airflow and individual desks to help with social distancing. I bought new age-appropriate materials and supplies to keep children engaged. We also expanded our playground area to give children more freedom to play and enjoy the outdoors. My life during the COVID-19 pandemic was about survival, and in many ways, it still is.

**We must build on the success of the child care funding to ensure children are well prepared, families have access to care that meets their needs, and child care providers have compensation and respect worthy of their contributions to society.**

The emotional, physical, and financial strains continue. We're not wearing a mask, but we are fighting to keep our heads afloat daily. I want to reiterate that the relief funding was critical to saving the child care industry and, more specifically, my business. More providers would have closed if Congress did not act significantly and swiftly. But systemic challenges persist. For example, I am fully enrolled in VA's Child Care Subsidy program, but I have vacant slots I cannot fill without an additional staff person. I recently interviewed a young woman who was well qualified, but as soon as I shared the pay, she declined. Virginia recently piloted a new solution to address the child care staffing crisis. VA will attract and train new people to work in child care programs if we agree to pay \$17/hour for one year. This is a great step, but I currently pay \$12/hour and cannot afford this increase. Good policy solutions without additional, sustained funding will not work. I want to pay more since they deserve more, but I want to underscore that I will go out of business without additional, sustained funding.

Furthermore, as the President of the VA FCC Alliance, I hear from many FCC providers in VA that they are close to closing and leaving child care altogether. According to a recent report by NAFCC and NAEYC, 40.2% of respondents from FCC homes reported that they are considering leaving their program or closing their FCC home.

We can't charge the true cost of care because, without additional funding, parents can't afford the rate. We know FCC is disproportionately relied on by families of color, families

working non-traditional hours, low-income families, and families with infants & toddlers. So as more FCC programs close, we should be concerned about what will happen to the most vulnerable children.

When I look at children enjoying free play in my classroom, I see a room where stars are born, and professions are made. Skills are being developed to handle rejection, disappointment, discomfort, unfairness, empathy, love, kindness, respect, gentleness, and self-control. I see conflict resolution, compromise, negotiations, and the power to agree to disagree and walk away. Is this an area you want to make cuts in?

We must invest in laying a firm foundation for ALL children, not just the ones from wealthy families. Our future depends on it. The children we have in our programs won't be children forever. Families need different options, and these options are not available without additional, sustained funding.

Thank you for this opportunity.

## **Cheryl Morman Testimony One-Pager**

### **COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS**

#### **Hearing – Solving the Crisis: Meeting the Needs of Working Families and Child Care Workers**

**May 31, 2023**

I am Cheryl Morman, President of the Virginia Alliance of Family Child Care Associations (VAFCCA). We are the only state association in Virginia focusing on family child care, which refers to small child care programs operated from someone's home. I have been a licensed Family Child Care Business Owner and Educator since 2002. I am a wife, mother, grandmother, and an educator. I am licensed to care for 12 children between 6 weeks to 5 years of age. I employ one assistant teacher. As you examine the Child Care crisis across the nation, I urge you to keep my story in mind:

- Before Covid-19, running my business as a family child care provider was challenging but the demand was so great that I often had a waiting list. Some parents would struggle to pay for child care, yet they made too much to qualify for child care assistance.
- When Covid-19 hit, family child care providers did their best to keep their doors open and the environment safe.
- The federal covid relief funding was crucial for my state of VA to help providers and families.
- To help families with the cost of child care, the state increased income eligibility, meaning families could afford child care.
- I could avail myself of CARES grants for a total of \$25,000, a small PPP loan, and an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), and I secured a Small Business Administration Loan for \$46,000.
- My life during Covid was all about survival; in many ways, it is still about that.
- We cannot charge the true cost of care because, without additional funding, parents cannot afford the rate.
- Policy solutions without resources will not work and will perpetuate the crisis. We need public funding in a mixed delivery child care system so that all available options are available for families.

## **Cheryl Morman Biography**

Cheryl Brooks Morman is the current president of the Virginia Alliance for Family Child Care Associations (VAFCCA), the only statewide association in Virginia solely focused on home-based family child care and an affiliate of the National Association for Family Child Care. She has owned and operated a family child care program in Richmond, VA, for the last 20 years.

The oldest of 3 siblings, Mrs. Morman, was born and raised in Callao, VA. Her grandmother, who played a formative role in raising her and her siblings, guided her to pray and trust God, work hard, and do unto others as you would have them do unto you. She has been married for 28 years and is a proud mother to 2 sons and grandmother to 4 grandchildren.

Mrs. Morman began her career working for Travelers Medicare in Richmond, VA. She has an associate degree in early childhood development. She represents publicly funded family child care providers on the VA Early Childhood Advisory Committee. She works with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), in collaboration with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) to develop a unified set of early learning and development (ELD) standards for children ages birth to five. She is a member of a working group convened by the Virginia Department of Social Services to build childcare supply in underserved areas using A Toolkit for Community Success. She aims to empower other family child care educators through education, tools, and resources and unify providers to be a stronger voice for families, children, and communities, as they work together with a spirit of excellence.