

Child Care Supply Improvement Act

Senator Tina Smith

Nationally, 42 percent of children under 5 live in child care deserts, and the problem is severe in rural communities—84% of people living in rural Minnesota live in a place with a child care shortage. Some families have to drive 50 miles to take their kids to child care, or are paying almost one-third of their income toward the cost of child care, for one child.

Low pay makes recruitment and retention for the child care workforce difficult and the high start-up costs create a significant barrier to entry for the average child care provider. Further, the array of regulations needed to start and maintain a child care business are difficult to find, read through and understand—and there is often little in the way of help. To help address these challenges, the Child Care Supply Improvement Act would:

Support for child care facilities – the bill would establish a program to provide grants, low-cost loans, or forgivable loans to purchase, construct, or renovate child care facilities. This would include residences for family child care providers if modifications are needed to meet health and safety standards, access for people with disabilities, or hazards reduction.

Support for child care providers – the bill would establish a program to support child care providers in areas of quality, compliance, and business activities.

Quality and compliance support: the bill would include activities to: support paths to licensure, accreditation, entry into or improvement in a state’s quality rating system, professional development (including coaching, mentoring, peer support, or cohort-based models). These activities would be accessible to family child care providers and culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate, and could include cross-sector training and partnerships.

Business support: the bill would also provide assistance for business start-up activities, including: business planning, orientations to child care and related programs, such as the child and adult care food program, technical assistance, help in getting equipment or supplies, and support for shared service models related to business activities such as accounting and marketing. These activities may include support for innovative models for child care, such as co-located or employer-sponsored child care programs.

Support for administration and implementation – the bill would support states and tribes in improving administration and implementation, including activities to improve: data collection, coordination between states and tribes, coordination between state and local licensing requirements and the quality improvement system. It would also include activities to: increase interrater reliability for licensing inspections, provide licensing inspectors with professional development, identify and eliminate barriers to licensure (such as through lower fees for background checks or translating licensing regulations), and generally improve the functionality of licensing activities through outreach, technology, and streamlining paperwork requirements.

Community needs assessment – the bill would require a community needs assessment, and to the greatest extent possible, the results of the needs assessment would be used to determine how to use the funds within a state or tribe.