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**Oklahoma Child Care Laws Nearly Fail to Protect Children
Child Care Aware® of America Releases *We Can Do Better: 2013 Update*,
Ranking of State Child Care Center Regulations and Oversight**

Arlington, VA - Most states do little to protect the health and safety of children in child care, according to a report released today by Child Care Aware® of America (formerly NACCRRRA, the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies) at their annual policy Symposium. In *We Can Do Better: 2013 Update*, Child Care Aware® of America scored and ranked state laws governing child care centers in the 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense (DoD) on 11 program requirements and four oversight benchmarks. State rankings show modest improvements since 2011.

The average score was 92 out of 150 points – the equivalent of 61 percent, a “D” in most classrooms in America. There were no “A”s and only DoD scored a “B.” The remaining top 10 states (*New York, Washington, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, Wisconsin, Delaware, Illinois, Minnesota and Tennessee*) earned a “C.” Twenty-one states earned a “D” and the remaining 20 states earned a score of 60 or less, a failing grade. Oklahoma scored 112 out of 150 an overall rank is 4th in the nation, which sounds great but still equates to a 75 percent, or a “C” grade.

“Parents want their children to be safe in child care. They want their children to be learning and they don’t want to worry about their children while they are at work,” said Karen Smith, Director of Child Care Resource Center, a program of Community Service Council. “However, the report released today shows that most state licensing requirements are weak and oversight is weaker.

Oklahoma’s strengths are in our oversight scoring a 92%. Child care centers are inspected on a regular basis for basic health, fire safety and licensing standards, child care licensing staff all have Bachelor’s degrees in early childhood or a related field and parents can find inspection and complaint reports on-line at <http://childcarefind.okdhs.org/childcarefind/>.

However, Oklahoma ranks 21 in program standards or a 68% “D” grade. Improvements have been made in background checks as all employees working in child care will be required to have a fingerprint background check starting in November. Oklahoma also follows all 20 specific health and safety practices and requires strong parent involvement all of which are important and necessary to children’s growth and development. Oklahoma is weak in background training requirements for lead teachers and directors, staff child ratio and group size requirements, all of which would come with a high price tag that families cannot afford.

“The key to quality child care is a strong child care workforce,” said Ms. Smith “But, in our state, only a high school diploma is required. It’s time for state policymakers to understand the connection between quality programs and the training of those individuals working in child care programs.”

The report found:

- Only 16 states address each of 10 basic health requirements and 10 basic safety requirements recommended by pediatric experts. Oklahoma is one of these states.
- Only 21 states require training in child development. Oklahoma is one of these states.
- Only 9 states plus DoD require initial training in CPR for all staff. Oklahoma does not require all staff to have CPR training, but does require someone with the CPR training always be on-site.

- Only 21 states call for a head count when children leave child care vans.
- Five states do not check the child abuse registry before allowing an individual to work in a center. At this time, Oklahoma does not check the child abuse registry before hiring staff.
- Five states do not have policies for infants with regard to safe sleep practices. Oklahoma is strong in their requirements for safe sleep practices.

“Quality programs make a real difference for children,” said Ms. Smith, “However, it’s hard to have a quality program with little training for staff and infrequent oversight. The result is what we have today: a large gap between what parents logically assume and the reality of state policies.”

About \$10 billion in federal funds is spent on child care every year. To ensure that children are in settings that are safe and promote their healthy development, Child Care Aware® of America recommends that Congress reauthorize and strengthen the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to:

- Require background checks based on fingerprints and a check of the child abuse registry and sex offender registry for all child care providers paid to care for unrelated children.
- Require states to establish minimum health and safety requirements and enforce them through regular unannounced inspections of all licensed child care programs.
- Require states to post inspection findings on the internet so that parents can make informed choices.
- Require all child care workers to have at least 40 hours of initial training (including CPR, first-aid and other basic health and safety training in addition to child development) and complete 24 hours of annual training.
- Authorize the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to withhold funding from states that do not require minimum protections for children and that do not conduct regular unannounced inspections of child care settings.
- Require emergency plans so that children are safe during times of natural disaster or crises.
- Increase the quality set-aside under CCDBG to 12 percent, gradually increasing to 25 percent, on par with Head Start.

For a full copy of *We Can Do Better: 2013 Update* and a complete set of the report’s recommendations, visit: http://www.naccrra.org/publications/storefront-publications?type=publications_naccrra_pubs&title=&field_news_posted_date_value

Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) is a member of Child Care Aware® of America, part of the state and national Child Care Resource and Referral system serving Tulsa, Creek Wagoner and Rogers counties. CCRC provides families with children referrals to safe, quality, affordable child care that meet their immediate child care needs, while offering tools that allow families to gain the information and knowledge necessary to demand quality care for their children. Information and referrals can be received by phone, fax, email, mail, or in person. CCRC’s Mission is Quality Care for Every Child. To take advantage of CCRC’s free service, call 918-834-2273 or visit our website at www.ccrctulsa.org