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STATEMENT OF
GREGORY J. AHART, DIRECTOR
HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION
SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CHILD AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT,
→ COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND HUMAN RESOURCES
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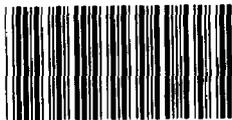
[Comments on
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ON
GAO REPORT ENTITLED
"EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES"
(HRD-79-40, FEBRUARY 6, 1979)

From our review of the literature on early childhood and family development, examination of research projects on the long term effects of children enrolled in early childhood programs, and assessment of selected demonstration projects sponsored by the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF), we found that:

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- the early years of a child's life are very important and the family is the primary factor in good child development;
- serious problems exist in this country that might be reduced through preventive-type early childhood and family development programs;



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- research has shown positive outcomes for children enrolled in early childhood and family development programs;
- only a small percentage of those needing services are served by early childhood and family development programs;
- selected Federal demonstration projects in early childhood and family development are benefiting enrolled families; and
- potential benefits can result from effective early childhood and family development programs.

THE EARLY YEARS OF LIFE ARE CRITICAL,
AND THE FAMILY IS THE KEY

Research indicates that the first 4 years of life are a critical period in a person's development and that at no other time will a person develop or learn as rapidly. These years are especially important in the development of language, curiosity, social skills, and the roots of intelligence. Furthermore, indications are that failures in these developmental areas during early childhood lead directly to under-achievement later in life.

The family is the primary influence in a young child's development. The family delivers to young children the educational and developmental stimulation and support that will critically influence their later lives.

Data indicate that a critical factor in the success of an early childhood development program is achieving active participation in the program by parents and other family members.

SERIOUS PROBLEMS EXIST IN THIS
COUNTRY WHICH ADVERSELY AFFECT
THE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

There are a number of serious problems in this country that affect the development of children. These include:

- Increasing number of single-parent families.
- Large number of women receiving inadequate prenatal care which contributes to high infant mortality rates and many cases of child mental retardation.
- Large number of children suffering from poor nutrition and lacking immunization against preventable diseases.
- Large number of children being abused and neglected.
- Increasing crime and dependency on the welfare system.

The Advisory Committee on Child Development estimated that in 1976 there were about 3.7 million children who were considered high risk. A "high risk" child was defined by the Committee as a child under age 6 who was in a family which had an income below the poverty line by Government definition or in a family with an annual income between \$5,000 and \$7,000 and the mother worked. About 3.1 million of the 3.7 million high-risk children were in families having income below the poverty line.

Not only low-income families need help and support to assure adequate development of their children; however, they need help more than any other group. The conditions that low-income families experience probably account for poor child development. These conditions include a poor diet, crowded and noisy housing, a low level of education among parents, low intellectual expectations for their children, a general lack of books and toys within the home, and little emphasis on good language development.

The number of single-parent families has increased

Because of increased rates of divorce and illegitimate births, the percentage of children under 6 years old that live in single-parent families

increased significantly from 9 percent in 1968 to 17 percent in 1975.

Although many single parents provide excellent care and shelter for their children, the level of economic deprivation in a large number of single-parent, female-headed households makes adequate child care a difficult task.

A continuous cycle is indicated by the correlation between poor school performance and single parenthood. The young female school dropout who has the greatest likelihood of becoming a single parent also has the least likelihood of obtaining prenatal care, and is least able to care for a baby.

The lack of prenatal care and poor environments for young children contribute to infant death and mental retardation

Child health experts generally agree that prenatal care should begin during the first 3 months of a pregnancy to have the greatest success in preventing infant mortality or other problems with lifelong consequences for children.

About 34,700 women who gave birth in 1975 received no prenatal care; another 54,500 did not get prenatal care until their 8th or 9th month of pregnancy. Of babies born to women who received no prenatal care, 20.1 percent were classified as low weight live births which is about 5-1/2 pounds or less. The rate of low weight live births for all women was 7.4 percent. Very small premature babies are 10 times more likely to be mentally retarded than normal weight babies.

Negative early childhood experiences are another major contributing factor to mental retardation in children. In our report to the Congress, "Preventing Mental Retardation--More Can Be Done" (HRD-77-37, Oct. 3, 1977), we stated that an estimated 75 percent of the incidence of mental retardation can be attributed to adverse environmental conditions during early childhood.

Another indication of the seriousness of inadequate prenatal care and negative early childhood environments is that in 1975 the United States ranked 16th among 42 nations in the rate of infant mortality (death during the first year of life). For poor children, the chances of dying in the first year of life are about two-thirds greater than for those living above poverty levels.

Child abuse has been termed
a "national epidemic"

The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect of HEW estimated that in 1977 there were about 1 million abused and neglected children in the United States. Best estimates indicate that some 2,000 children die each year from abuse and neglect.

Child abuse occurs in all socioeconomic classes. However, the incidence of reported child abuse and neglect is highly concentrated in the lower socioeconomic classes, and the cause is often associated with the economic and environmental stress experienced by the poor.

Poor school performance results
in crime and welfare dependency

There is a pattern linking poverty with poor school performance which sometimes results in a child becoming a school dropout and turning to juvenile delinquency and eventually, adult crime.

Also, data show that if a person performs poorly in school, he or she is more likely to be dependent on the welfare system.

RESEARCH CLEARLY SHOWS EARLY CHILDHOOD
PROGRAMS ARE EFFECTIVE AND PARENTS
ARE RECEPTIVE TO SUCH PROGRAMS

The Administration for Children, Youth, and Families has supported research on early childhood and family development. Currently, emphasis is being placed on studying child development within the context of the family. Much of this research shows that early childhood and family development programs for children from birth to 4 years are effective. Furthermore, indications are that the most effective programs are those where the child participates at a very young age and parents are closely involved in the program.

Longitudinal research results show that children who participated in an early development program were placed in remedial special education classes less often during their years in school than control group children who did not participate. Similarly, program children were found to be held back in grade less often during their school years and demonstrate superior social, emotional, cognitive, and language development after entering school compared to similar groups of control children. Intelligence tests given to children who participated in early development programs show that they received higher scores compared to control groups of children who did not participate. We believe that significant factors in these results were the high degree of parental involvement and programs reaching children at or before age 3.

CHILD AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
ARE SERVING ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE
OF THOSE NEEDING SERVICES

Of the 3.7 million children under the age of 6 identified as "high risk" in terms of their opportunities for development, only a small percentage were enrolled in comprehensive programs designed to enhance their total development. The only major Federal program providing comprehensive child development services to "high risk" families is the Head Start program. In fiscal year 1978 the Head Start program served about 402,000 children with a funding level of \$625 million.

Federal efforts in child development

A review of Head Start research since 1969 shows that Head Start has improved the cognitive, health, and social development of children and has had a positive effect on families and the community. However, many early childhood development proponents believe that programs need to begin at an earlier age than 4 years, which is when Head Start usually enrolls a child. Research in child development indicates that important developmental patterns are identifiable in children as early as age 2, and by age 3 these patterns are quite deeply ingrained. Unfortunately, even at this early age developmental patterns for low-income children are negative.

In response to data on successful early childhood development programs and the strong views held by some on the importance of the first 4 years of life in a child's development, the Head Start research, demonstration, and pilot efforts have funded some relatively small-scale early childhood and family development programs designed to provide comprehensive services in health, education, social services, and

parental involvement to low-income disadvantaged children and their families.

These programs include the following:

--The Child and Family Resource Program provides services to the entire family from the prenatal period to age 8.

I will discuss this program in more detail later.

--The Parent-Child Centers (PCCs) provide services to families and children under age 3. In 1970, three Centers were selected as research sites to evaluate the results of the program. Research findings have been positive. As of February 1978, 33 Centers were serving about 4,000 children.

--The Home Start Program provides Head Start-type services in the home. At the end of 1977, about 400 home-based programs were serving about 20,000 children.

These programs recognize that parents are the first and most important educators of their children and, therefore, work closely with the parents and provide services to the children. These programs emphasize the importance of the early years in a child's development and the family's role in providing an environment for a young child conducive to child growth and development. In addition to education efforts, the programs stress the importance of good health care and nutrition and acquaint families with a variety of community resources they could use to meet family needs.

Other Federal programs, particularly within HEW, provide services to children of all ages. Based on the latest available information, during fiscal year 1975 support for children's services within HEW

reached about \$6.7 billion. Of this amount, \$3 billion was spent by the Office of Education. The former Social and Rehabilitation Service spent \$2.6 billion primarily through the Medicaid and social services programs. The Public Health Service and the Office of Human Development Services together spent about \$1.1 billion of the \$6.7 billion for services to children, including Head Start.

Federal day care expenditures amounted to \$675 million in fiscal year 1977, mostly funded under title XX of the Social Security Act. Day care is defined as the care any child receives from someone other than his or her own parents or guardians during part of any day. The term day care applies to a wide variety of services. The duration of care may range from a few hours a week to 12 hours or more a day, 5 or 6 days a week. Some day care programs are regulated by government agencies, but many are not. Some programs aim at keeping the child safe from harm, while others seek to stimulate the physical, emotional, and intellectual development of the child.

Most Federal programs are geared to one aspect of a child's development, or a certain type of child, e.g., the handicapped. Among the services these programs provide are health, education, social, child care, child welfare, adoption, foster care, and protective services. Nutrition services are provided through programs from the Department of Agriculture.

States are interested in early
childhood and family development,
but few programs have been started

State and local programs providing comprehensive early childhood and family development services are limited. However, there are a

large number of small child development projects around the country, but no State is sponsoring a statewide comprehensive program for the development of children from birth through age 4. Also, many States have task forces or planning efforts concerned with child and family development.

We found that Minnesota has a significant pilot program in early childhood and family development. The program's stated principles are that:

- Learning is a process that begins at or before birth, and the first 3 years after birth are critical to total development,
- Early learning in the home is crucial,
- Parents are important teachers, and
- Investment in early childhood and family education is a good economic and social policy.

THE CHILD AND FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAM
HAS BENEFITTED ENROLLED FAMILIES

The Child and Family Resource Program referred to as CFRP, began in 1973 and represents an attempt to incorporate the positive program aspects of Head Start, Parent-Child Centers, Home Start, and other child development programs into a single program. This program, funded by the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, is designed to focus on the entire family, reaching families and children at an earlier period than Head Start, and providing continuous services to meet the needs of low-income families and children from the prenatal period to age 8.

CFRP conducts a needs assessment of families' strengths and weaknesses, and provides or arranges for services to meet the specific needs of families and their children. Services are provided to families under four major components: Family Social Services, Early Childhood Education, Parental Involvement, and Health and Nutritional Services. There are 11 CFRPs across the country serving about 1,058 families.

CFRP provides family services, including crisis intervention, referrals to other community organizations, and family counseling and assistance. The CFRP design recognizes that the development of children in families could be strengthened if appropriate services were provided to family members.

Early childhood education services are provided for children from infancy through the early elementary school years. Infant programs are conducted at the centers, in the families' homes, or a combination of both. Entry into the Head Start program usually occurs between ages 3 and 5 for all CFRP children. A school linkage program aids children through an easier transition from Head Start to an elementary school environment.

Parent involvement activities were designed to enhance the parent's role as the principal influence in their child's education and development. Parents were involved in child development activities, program planning and policymaking, and educational and social activities. Also, parents were encouraged to resume or continue their formal education. Through parent education activities, efforts have been made to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Health and nutritional services are designed to prevent problems and educate families in all areas of health, including medical, dental, nutritional, and mental. CFRP tries to fit families into a comprehensive health service system by ensuring that health problems are identified and services are provided by CFRP or community agencies.

We reviewed the operations of 4 of the 11 CFRPs, and found that the programs are benefiting young children and their families in many ways. We believe that the CFRPs, as designed, contain the components necessary for a successful early childhood and family development program.

We assessed changes in home environments of 82 randomly selected families enrolled for at least 1 year in CFRP by rating each family's physical and emotional environment on 21 specific factors. The quality of the child's living environment was assessed in terms of books and other learning experiences, safety, adequacy of space, housekeeping, health care, etc. The social environment was also assessed as it relates to a child's emotional stability. We found that the home environments improved significantly during the families' participation in the program.

We interviewed parents of 64 of the 82 families. They expressed highly favorable comments about the program's quality in helping their children's development as well as improving their own lives.

During interviews with the parents, we also discussed whether they considered CFRP an invasion of their privacy in any way. Parents stated that they did not consider CFRP an invasion of their privacy.

COSTS OF CFRP

We determined that CFRPs incurred costs of about \$1,890 per family in 1977. This consists of the basic and supplemental CFRP grant of \$1,326 plus the portion of each Head Start grant, or \$563, that applies to CFRP families. We included a portion of the Head Start grant because families enrolled in CFRP participate in Head Start when the child is 3 or 4 years of age.

In addition, outside agencies that provided services to families referred by the program incurred costs of up to \$1,154 per family in 1977. This amount may not be typical in other communities because of a number of variables affecting costs, including

- the needs of families in a specific community.
- the extent to which inkind services are obtained from private sources.
- the extent to which outside agencies are operating below capacity and could absorb new referrals at little or no extra costs.

PROBABLE BENEFITS FROM EFFECTIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Based on our work at CFRPs and our review of research on early childhood and family development programs, we believe that effective programs can offer many benefits that will improve the quality of life for families.

These improvements in quality of life factors might lead to a break from the negative cycles of poverty, child abuse, and school failure that are present in many families and have persisted for generations.

Therefore, effective programs might produce long-term positive outcomes extending to following generations of participating families.

We believe the direct benefits to children and families from early childhood and family development programs could benefit society in general. We believe that financial benefits, increased human potential, and reduced human suffering would probably be realized from effective early childhood and family development programs.

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND
FAMILIES POSITION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD
AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Officials of the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families believe that more programs in early childhood and family development are needed, and that an adequate knowledge base exists about ways to provide services to young children and families. The primary reason that the Administration's efforts in early childhood and family development programs are so limited is that funds to initiate new programs are lacking. Administration officials told us that they could readily plan for implementing such programs if additional funding was made available for early childhood and family development programs.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION
BY THE CONGRESS

Our report shows that early childhood and family development programs are needed and can be effective in improving the quality of life for children and families.

If the Congress enacts comprehensive child care legislation, we believe that the legislation should require that the programs provide or secure, emphasizing the use of existing community resources, compre-

hensive services for young children and their families who wish to participate. These comprehensive services are:

- Preventive and continual health care and nutrition services.
- Family services based on a need and goals assessment for each family.
- Developmental/educational programs for children from birth through preschool years, recognizing that parents are the first and most important educators of their children.
- Preschool/elementary school-linkage efforts to enhance the continuity of development.
- Programs that involve parents in program activities and give them an influential role in program planning and management.

If enacted, funding of comprehensive child care programs should be increased gradually, and evaluations of the program should be made while they are operating. The programs should be revised and improved when effective new and innovative techniques on the development of young children and families are discovered and refined.