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**Testimony Before the House Committee on State Government
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A Better Balance is a non-profit advocacy organization that uses the power of the law to advance justice for workers, so they can care for themselves and their loved ones without jeopardizing their economic security. We have years of experience and vast legal expertise working to craft and implement policies in states and cities across the country that support working families. State lawmakers play a critical role in protecting the health and economic security of Tennesseans, and as we have recommended in our policy recommendations, policymakers should consider taking steps to ensure that essential personnel have access to needed child care services. Through our regional Southern Office, which serves states across the South, including Tennessee, we have heard from countless workers through our free and confidential legal helpline who lack access to quality childcare and are faced with an impossible choice between caring for their loved ones and maintaining their economic security.

We write to express A Better Balance’s support for HB 1114, which requires the Department of Human Services to approve, administer, and coordinate child care services for the children of state officers and employees, as a strong first step for state employees and their families to overcome the vast challenges in providing childcare.

House Bill 1114

House Bill 1114 would improve the availability of childcare services for Tennessee state employees. The bill would require the Department of Human Services to coordinate and administer childcare services, including assistance with startup and operations, selecting service providers, and all duties regarding the placement, design, or other structural needs of the facility. These childcare programs may be located in state office buildings. Additionally, the bill provides for competitive bids from childcare service vendors.

Improving Childcare Access is Crucial to Tennessee Families

Expanding childcare is essential to Tennessee families. Across the United States, childcare providers have closed their doors due to the pandemic.¹ Women, particularly women of color, make up a majority of the essential workforce during the pandemic, and as essential workers they are less likely to have the flexibility to adjust their schedules to fit increasing child care needs.² As children and their parents have been required to spend more time at home, women have been responsible for the majority of increased demand for childcare, including homeschooling their children.³

Improving access to childcare would have a profound impact for Tennessee families. Prior to the pandemic, a recent study found by Tennesseans for Quality Early Education found that nearly half of all Tennesseans lived in a “child care desert” (an area with three times as many children than it has childcare slots).⁴ Also, before the current childcare crisis, Tennessee parents were struggling to advance their careers and opportunities due to their difficulties accessing childcare. In 2019, 35% of Tennessee parents with a child under age 5 had their pay or hours reduced, 18% were fired, demoted, or transferred to a less desirable position, 39% turned down a job offer or promotion, 33% turned down further education or training, and 24% quit their jobs, all due to childcare problems.⁵ The study also found that due to inaccessible and unaffordable childcare, Tennessee’s working parents and their families lose \$850 million per year.⁶ Providing state employees with equitable access to childcare programs would be a smart investment for Tennessee. This benefit would boost productivity, and give the state a competitive edge in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel.

¹ *Nationwide Survey: Child Care in the Time of Coronavirus*, Bipartisan Policy Center (2020), <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/nationwide-survey-child-care-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>.

² *Valuing Women’s Caregiving During and After the Coronavirus Crisis*, Center for American Progress (2020), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/06/03/485855/valuing-womens-caregiving-coronavirus-crisis/>.

³ *Valuing Women’s Caregiving During and After the Coronavirus Crisis*, Center for American Progress (2020), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/06/03/485855/valuing-womens-caregiving-coronavirus-crisis/>.

⁴ *Want to Grow Tennessee’s Economy? Fix the Child Care Crisis*, Tennesseans for Quality Early Education (2019), https://www.tqee.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/TQEE_TN_Final.pdf, page 5.

⁵ *Id.* at 6.

⁶ *Id.*

Conclusion

Sixty-five percent of Tennessee parents with a child under five years old named access as the greatest barrier to finding childcare, followed closely by affordability and quality.⁷ House Bill 1114 is one step to address the problem of access, but much more is needed to address concerns for Tennesseans such as affordability and quality of childcare for state employees. No one should have to sacrifice their economic security or career advancement in order to care for their child. Providing childcare is not just a smart investment for the state of Tennessee that will lead to increased retention and productivity, but it will provide opportunities for Tennessee employees, particularly working mothers and especially working mothers of color. House Bill 1114 is a major step toward expanding access to childcare and improving the lives of Tennessee families.

⁷ Id. at 3.