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**Finding Affordable, Quality Child Care Remains a Challenge for California Families**

*The struggle is far greater for families with infants and toddlers*

OAKLAND, Calif., December 12, 2007 - The demand for affordable, quality child care continues to surpass the supply, according to the *2007 Child Care Portfolio* released today by the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network. The situation is especially dire for California's babies, for whom a disproportionately small number of child care slots are available in licensed child care facilities. Compounding the problem is the high cost of child care, which is out of reach for many working families.

The *2007 Portfolio*, the 6<sup>th</sup> in a biennial series of statewide and county-by-county statistical reports, reflects child care costs, supply, and demand. Data for the *2007 Portfolio* was prepared by the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, a statewide organization, and the 61 locally-based, state-funded resource and referral agencies that work to improve the quality, availability, and affordability of child care. The R&Rs talk with parents daily as they counsel them in their search for quality child care. This year marks the 10-year anniversary since the publication of the first *Child Care Portfolio*, issued in 1997.

“Ten years ago both TIME and Newsweek magazines had cover stories about breakthroughs in early brain development and the importance of quality care for infants. Those of us in the field hoped that would spur real change in policy, funding, and attention to the needs of very young children and their families. But real change did not happen, and sadly a decade later we see that the needs are as great and that parents struggle to find quality, affordable, accessible care, while

providers struggle to do their job well and to support their own families. Infant care is expensive and difficult to find.”

With average child care costs in California running at \$10,745 for an infant in a licensed center, care is unaffordable for many, if not most, California families. But the challenge of finding quality, licensed infant care is not limited to cost. Supply is also a serious issue, especially for infants. Statewide, licensed child care is available for only 27% of children with parents in the labor force. Only 5% of child care slots in licensed care centers are for infants and toddlers.

Assemblymember Sandré Swanson, 16th District, Chair of the Assembly Labor and Employment Committee says, “As a state, we know that to be economically viable we need to lead the way to meet the needs of working families – and one of the key ways to do that is to put child care, and especially the needs of the youngest children, to the top of our to-do list. Not just because it is good for families, but because it’s good for the economy and it’s good for communities. It’s embarrassing that we’ve made such little headway in 10 years. We know the issues; now we need to address them. How can it be that so many families – hard-working families – can’t find and can’t afford care. As I looked at the report, I was staggered to learn that the combined cost of housing and child care is more than the salary of a minimum wage earner in all 10 Bay Area counties. For me, as a parent and a grandparent, I see this as an urgent issue.”

The report indicates that:

- The demand for infant care is high. Forty-one percent of child care referral requests at California’s resource and referral agencies (R&Rs) are from families looking for infant care.
- Parents need full-time care. Seventy-eight percent of employed residents work full time and thus, a majority of child care requests (74%) to R&Rs are for full time care.
- The supply of child care falls far short of demand. Licensed care in California is available for only 27% of children with parents in the labor force. For infants and toddlers, the situation is even more grim, with only 5% of total slots in licensed centers available to infants and toddlers.
- Child care availability varies by county, with licensed care available for 43% of children in San Francisco County with parents in the labor force but is available for only 18% of children in Riverside County.
- Child care costs are out of reach for California families. The average annual cost for full time care for an infant in a licensed center is \$10,745, consuming 69% of earnings for a single parent making minimum wage. In 34 counties, the combined cost of infant care and housing exceeds the income of a minimum wage earner. In 11 counties, the combined cost of housing and center-based infant care exceeds 80% of an entry level

teacher's before-tax income.

Early childhood education and school readiness have dominated the child care policy discussion in recent years, but there has been minimal focus on care for infants and toddlers. “In the push for school readiness, babies have been left behind. But, the irony is that infancy is the most critical time for brain development, and for setting the groundwork for success in the later years. Yet we devote the least amount of resources to those who need the most – our babies. We need to create a better overall child care infrastructure that recognizes the entire spectrum of ages and needs from birth to five,” explains J. Ronald Lally, PhD, co-director of WestEd Center for child and Family Studies.

Kayce Rayne, a parent of both a three-year-old and an infant from Lafayette, sums it up: “I can tell you this much about the child care situation: A. It’s not out there for infants. B. If you *can* find it for infants, you’re lucky if you can find a quality program. So *if* you can find it AND it’s quality AND it’s accessible AND they have an opening -- probably it’s not affordable. I know because I’ve been looking. I need quality care that’s affordable, close to either work or home, and that has availability. I cannot find anything that fits that bill because so few providers take infants. And licensed centers that do, are charging \$2,000 a month. Add that to the \$1,200 I’m paying for my preschooler and that’s nearly \$40,000 a year for child care! My husband and I are both well educated and we have good jobs. If we can’t afford that, who can?”

*To access full report and county-by-county data: [www.rrnetwork.org](http://www.rrnetwork.org).*

The 27-year-old California Child Care Resource & Referral Network is a nonprofit association of state-funded member agencies in counties across California. Resource and referral programs (R&Rs) are a unique hub in the world of child care, connecting parents, providers, and policymakers in each community. R&Rs help parents find child care by providing referrals to licensed programs and by offering important information on how to recognize and choose quality care. R&Rs help child care providers by offering training in child development, safety, and business skills, and they help policymakers by gathering standardized data, identifying key areas of local need, and participating in policy discussions.