

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 25, 2021

## **VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY**

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, Northwest  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

We write to request that the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a study on the barriers parents and children with disabilities face in accessing child care, including the physical facilities and the services provided. Although numerous Federal laws prohibit discrimination based on disability, families with disabilities continue to face barriers when attempting to secure child care that is accessible to both parents and children and meets the developmental needs of young children with disabilities. Parents in low-income communities, those who are Black or Latinx, and those who have their own disabilities, may experience these barriers at higher rates than other families.

Research indicates that there are between 4 and 9 million parents with disabilities in the United States. In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics estimates there are approximately 10.5 percent of children ages 3-5 with a developmental disability. It is imperative that we address any issues with access to child care in order to achieve equitable care for this group of children and their families. Further, child care is a critical cornerstone for families to allow for parents to work outside of the home and for children to engage in social-emotional activities for their growth and development. Families with children with disabilities face an uphill battle securing child care that meets the developmental needs of their children. Similarly, parents with disabilities face challenges accessing or effectively communicating with child care providers and services.

Under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), private providers are prohibited from discriminating against individuals with disabilities, including providing care to disabled children and interacting with and providing services to parents who have disabilities. Similarly, early care and education services provided by government agencies, such as Head Start programs, must comply with Title II of the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. For example, child care providers cannot exclude children with disabilities from their programs unless their presence poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others, and providers must make reasonable accommodations to their policies and practices to serve children, parents and guardians with disabilities in programs unless doing so would constitute an undue burden to the provider.

While these rules are in place, there is little known about how Federal agencies oversee these requirements or the extent to which families face limited, or are completely denied, access to

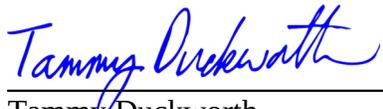
child care because they or their children have disabilities. For example, ADA prohibits the segregation of individuals based on a disability, and child care providers must take reasonable steps to integrate children with disabilities into all activities provided to non-disabled children.

However, little to no information is available regarding to what extent such practices occur. We respectfully request that GAO conduct a study on the accessibility to child care services and facilities for children and families with disabilities from providers receiving Federal funding. Given the nature of these concerns, we urge you to include parent and family focus groups to help identify barriers for particular groups of families and to provide perspective on any recommendations. Specifically, we request GAO assess:

1. What is known about the barriers to accessible child care facilities and services when a child has a disability or the child's parent or guardian has a disability? How are these barriers impacting families differently? Does income, race, ethnicity, language or disability status raise additional barriers to participation?
2. What steps are child care facilities taking to overcome barriers to accessible child care to access their facilities and services for children with disabilities and parents or guardians with disabilities? For example, do child care providers receive training on how to work with parents with disabilities and children with disabilities?
3. What Federal oversight and technical assistance are conducted to support child care providers to serve children with disabilities and parents or guardians with disabilities to meet the Federal statutes and regulations to ensure child care is accessible? What does interagency coordination to support these efforts look like as implemented at the Federal and State levels? How has it helped or hindered the inclusion of children and families with disabilities in child care settings?
4. What are the costs and necessary steps to fund implementation of child care facilities upgrades to support accessibility for children and parents with disabilities? What are the accessibility features that would most likely cause a child care facility to claim a request to serve a child is an unreasonable accommodation?

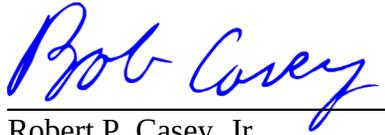
Thank you very much for considering this important request. We strongly urge GAO to accept this engagement and look forward to consulting with your team of experts on implementing our requested review.

Sincerely,



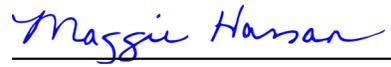
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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



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Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator