

**STATEMENT OF DR. FRANCIS MECHNER, PRESIDENT, UEC, INC.
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE, 1971**

Mr. Chairman, I consider it a great privilege to testify before this Committee on a matter which I personally regard as the single most pressing social problem facing our country today, namely child care. By way of introduction, I am Francis Mechner, President of UEC, Inc. But, I must also state that the point of view which I bring to bear on the matter before this Committee is not solely that of a corporate executive. By training, I am an educator and psychologist. I received my doctorate in psychology from Columbia University where I subsequently served on the faculty and conducted research. I have served as an educational consultant to UNESCO and am currently a member of the National Advisory Board of the Carnegie Corporation's Sesame Street project. My twenty years of work in the education field have also been reinforced by the practical rigor of being the father of four children, ages 1, 3, 5, and 7.

During the past year, I have had the privilege of working with a number of state governors and their staffs on the problem of implementing expanded child care systems that will meet the Federal Interagency Guidelines. Through these contacts, I have become familiar with the problems which states face in implementing effective child care programs on an expanded scale. Several states have generated highly competent studies in this area. Notable among these is the in-depth study performed in 1970 by the Texas Senate Interim Committee on Welfare Reform to determine the most effective ways to break the poverty cycle in Texas. Another exemplary plan is the one created by Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia. These and other studies clearly show that a sound approach to the problem of poverty must involve child care programs which meet certain essential criteria which I shall outline. In line with these findings, several fine bills, an outstanding example of which is the Federal Child Care Corporation Act introduced last year by the distinguished Chairman of this Committee, have recently been proposed. However, based upon my work with more than a dozen states, I am prepared to state that a major breakthrough in the large-scale expansion of the needed child care services would occur promptly, even under present legislation, if only the 75-25 matching provision of Title IV of the Social Security Act were changed to 90-10 along the lines which you, Mr. Chairman, outlined last week in your address to the governors in San Juan, and if a portion of

these funds could be applied against the costs of acquiring and renovating day-care facilities. The problem of the states is principally one of funding.

During the past few years, a great deal of excellent material has been written about the considerable benefits this country would derive from the widespread availability of day-care services.

Briefly, these benefits are:

1. Mothers are freed to take employment.
2. The child's intellectual and social development, his subsequent success in school, and his later productivity in adult life are enhanced as a result of the educational component of the day-care service. The likelihood that he will later contribute to the country's increasing school dropout rate, juvenile delinquency rate, and crime rate are correspondingly reduced. It has often been correctly pointed out that the poverty cycle must be broken during the early childhood years when the individual's self-image and sense of competence are still being formed.
3. Expanded day-care services can provide career opportunities directly to some individuals who are now unemployed by providing them with training and employment within the day-care system itself.

My purpose here is to point out that these benefits are not an automatic and inevitable consequence of the availability of day-care services. The benefits will accrue only if the day-care services meet certain criteria. If the day-care services do not meet such criteria, the anticipated benefits may be lost and adverse long-range consequences may even result.

First, I would like to make some comments on the subject of the educational component of day care. It is now generally agreed that a satisfactory day-care program must have an educational component to promote the child's cognitive, social and emotional development. This is important because the early years of a child's life are his formative years. During these years, his later intelligence, character, personality, and emotional makeup are formed, and he takes important steps toward formulating the adult model after which he will unconsciously fashion himself as he grows up. The kind of model the child adopts will depend on the characteristics of the adults who surround him and

bring him up. It will depend, for example, upon whether they work for a living and whether they value achievement. And the child's intellectual development during his formative years depends upon whether the learning environment in which he grows up teaches him the basic skills and concepts which he must acquire as the stepping stones towards becoming an educated and intelligent adult.

Such facts about the importance of the early years are easy to state and they have been stated often and well; what to do about them is far more difficult, and has important implications for what constitutes good day care—day care that is beneficial to the child's development.

Most day-care operations pay lip service to the importance of the educational component and many claim to provide for it; but, in fact, few actually do so adequately. For example, a day-care program is not educational merely by virtue of the fact that it provides the children with educational toys and posts the alphabet on the wall. In order to have true educational value the program must provide the child with learning experiences and educational stimulation relevant to his learning needs. It must challenge him at the frontier of his educational development and must expose him to the specific concepts and skills he needs to develop as part of his intellectual growth and as preparation for later success in school and in life. The educational programs must do this in a way that stimulates his desire to continue to learn. To accomplish all this, the educational component of a day-care program must have the following characteristics:

1. A separate preschool curriculum for each age level which provides every child with exposure to the concepts and skills, both cognitive and social, which he needs at his chronological stage of development.
2. A system for keeping track of every child's individual development, in order to provide him with the learning experiences from which he can benefit.
3. A training system to insure that every day-care staff member understands the system, uses it properly, and follows good child care and teaching practices.
4. A parent involvement system that meaningfully enlists the parent's collaboration in the child's educational development. Here again, it is not sufficient merely to establish good rapport with the parent. The parent must be given specific instructions, materials, and the

wherewithal to meaningfully partake in the child's educational development. The parent involvement program must offer specific activities involving parent and child, which are programmed and reviewed on a weekly basis.

5. A system for motivating children to learn. A preschool child cannot be regimented in classroom fashion and given assignments. The desire to learn must emanate from the success the child experiences; and the learning environment must be conducive to exploration, discovery, and excitement. This can be achieved through the use of games, puppet shows and films, and encouragement by staff members who are trained to guide children to learn through discovery.

The child's cognitive educational development is only a part of the problem. Equally important is his social and emotional development. This phase of a child's development, too, can be defeated by a day-care service that does not provide an appropriate learning environment. The day-care environment must stimulate human contact and social relationships between the children and other individuals. Here again, merely putting a child together with many other children, even under competent supervision, does not create the conditions necessary for learning the social roles essential for effective family life and work relationships. If children are reared in a too restrictive institutional atmosphere, their interpersonal relationships become distorted and their emotional development suffers. The day-care environment, in order to be beneficial for the child's social and emotional development, must foster stable and long-term interpersonal relationships between children and staff members. It must approximate a family environment both physically and socially. For example, there must be a place the child calls his own, and to which he returns regularly. Also, there must be at least one individual with whom the child has a continuing relationship. This can be accomplished by organizing the children into small groups rather than large ones, and providing child-to-adult ratios of not more than 6 to 1. The composition of the day-care staff should enable the child to learn to interact with both men and women, with both elderly people and teenagers, and with people representing varied social and educational backgrounds. I strongly endorse the comment made earlier by Senator Nelson regarding the use of teenagers, both high school and college involvement in this area, both from the benefits that result from this and because of the psychological and sociological soundness of this kind of approach.

In short, the day-care center should function like the extended family of earlier times, which is still the most successful and time-tested social structure known to man.

The composition of the day-care staff ties in directly with another important requirement of an expanded day-care system, namely that it provide employment to individuals who are now on welfare or public assistance by training and employing them within the day-care system itself. A sociologically wholesome day-care environment requires the involvement of elderly people, young people, and parents from the child's own community and social environment, on a continuing basis. These are precisely the people who are likely to be on welfare or public assistance. The fact that many of these people may lack work skills for such standard occupations as typing or clerical work would not be a handicap. Skill in relating to children and the ability to establish healthy emotional and interpersonal relationships may exist to a high degree in individuals who have relatively little formal education or work experience. With suitable training, many of these individuals can become highly effective day-care workers. Three to six weeks of training can transform people who are now a burden on the taxpayer into productive, satisfied and self-respecting workers.

Finally, there are administrative requirements and criteria related to implementation that are as important in providing the needed services and benefits as all the other criteria I have so far discussed. The more obvious ones are quality control on a continuing basis, management, and adherence to timetables and budgets.

These are areas where great pitfalls exist. Even a well-conceived program can founder on the shoals of mismanagement, time delays, and budgetary overruns. In the day-care field in particular, budgetary overruns of several hundred percent can result from a variety of circumstances such as community dissension or site acquisition problems. Such circumstances, which are really management and planning failures, can easily be put forward as extenuating circumstances in a field as sensitive and complex as day-care. And even when these problems are overcome on a small scale in one or two locations, there is still no assurance that they can be solved by the same managerial methods when the system is expanded to dozens of communities. Large-scale implementation

requires a completely different management and administrative approach than small-scale operations, if quality and cost controls are to be maintained.

I submit that the most promising solution for this group of problems is provided by the mechanism of government agencies contracting with private industry. Here are some of the reasons why private industry provides the best hope for governmental agencies to secure the expected benefits of day-care services:

1. Private industry's stock-in-trade is competence in management, organization, planning and control. Because these functions are particularly difficult in connection with the implementation of day-care systems on a large scale, private industry's capabilities become especially attractive and may in the long run prove essential.
2. Private industry acting as contractor to a governmental agency can be held accountable by the agency. Accountability is the key to insuring performance and obtaining the desired result. A governmental agency can write a contract with a private organization as contractor, specifying the desired timetable, outcomes, and budgets. The reason why accountability can be achieved in contracts with private industry is, of course, that private contractors can be hired and fired.
3. In carrying out a complex, difficult, and sometimes innovative task, the best available talent must be assembled. Private industry can attract and assemble the best managerial and technical talent far more quickly and easily than most governmental agencies.
4. Private industry, in performing the functions of day-care contractor, must be particularly responsive to the parents and communities it is serving. A private corporation must continuously strive to be retained and accepted and can accomplish this only by generating customer satisfaction. It is hired, not legally chartered.
5. Private industry, in order to expand its services and remain ahead of its competition, must continuously strive to improve its products, services and delivery systems.

As evidence that private industry is capable of marshaling the country's best professional and technical talent as well as the necessary capital for the task of producing child care systems that meet all the criteria discussed above, I would

like to cite the Educational Day-Care System developed by my own company, UEC. My intention here is not to advertise this system, but rather to use it as an example which is familiar to me. UEC has spent close to four years, and in excess of six million dollars, on the development of a comprehensive educational day-care system. The system's various components, including preschool education, infant and toddler development, parent development, staff training, health services, family social services, and various physical components, have been tested over a two-year period in diverse settings involving thousands of children and parents. During these field trials the system has been extensively refined and revised in the light of experience and results, and has been favorably reviewed, analyzed, and evaluated by various independent authorities. In short, here is a system which is ready for immediate large-scale implementation, and the need for the benefits that such a system could deliver is great. Professor Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University, who was the architect of Headstart and one of the many distinguished educators who participated in the development of UEC's system, said very eloquently in his opening remarks on one of the numerous occasions on which he testified before congressional committees, that he feels about our society the way an astronomer might feel if he had a clear indication that the solar system is coming apart. Professor Bronfenbrenner's sense of urgency regarding the need for prompt action by our society regarding child care has been echoed in various forms by many other concerned individuals ranging from Dr. Spock to President Nixon.

To summarize, a change from the 75-25 matching ratio of Title IV of the Social Security Act to 90-10 in accordance with your suggestion, Mr. Chairman, would enable the states to move forward promptly, in response to the urgent need for expanded child care services. However, if our country is to achieve the anticipated benefits from such expansion, the criteria I have outlined will require realistic implementation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having given me the opportunity to make this statement.