

**SHEILA MERKISON  
Kennebunk, Maine**

**Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
Hearing on  
*“Child Care: Strengthening Families and Improving the Well-being of Children”*  
Friday, March 15, 2002**

My name is Sheila Merkison. I am 26 years old and I live in Kennebunk, Maine. I have a two year old son presently in day care as I work full-time for an insurance agency.

I was married when my son was born so I finished working one week before he was due, to be a homemaker. My husband was verbally abusive and eventually became violent. In September of 2001, I decided to leave behind everything I had except for the clothes I could pack into my car. My son and I drove from our home in South Carolina to stay with my Grandmother in Maine until I could get on my feet. I found employment in October and needed child care so I enrolled my son in a good facility where he could attend nursery school.

The problem I'm facing is, although I believe my day care deserves every penny of it, my child care expenses are 48% of my weekly net income. I have been on a waiting list for child care assistance since November. This expense is mandatory for me to work. I have no other option, but because of this, there isn't enough left for any housing expense. I am perfectly capable of working and I could provide everything my son and I needed if it wasn't for the cost of child care. It is a heavy expense for any parent. When your child is sick and unable to attend, you are still required to pay for a full week. When the care center is closed due to a holiday, you are still required to pay for a full week. Parents either have to stay home with their children losing pay, or make other arrangements for those days such as paying a babysitter. It's a difficult situation for any parent.

I see no other way to fully provide for my son if this program can't help us. The only other government assistance I qualify for is the WIC Program, which I do not participate in. I have been to Social Services and I was told that I make too much money for any of their programs. I make \$18,000 per year. This is hardly enough to raise a child my son's age on my income alone.

I'm asking for help. I'm asking for the ability to work to provide for my son. For the same amount that I'm paying in child care, I could be paying for an apartment. My son and I could have our own home again, our own beds, my son could have toys again and his own room to put them in. We have been sleeping on a couch for six months. I have been on the waiting list for child care assistance for four of those months. This waiting list, I imagine, is filled with other parents like myself. We desperately need this help.