Good morning, Madam Chairman and members of the committee. I am here to talk to you about child care in Eastern Montana-shed a little light on what occurs out in the far eastern reaches of our state. I am speaking for the families, child care facilities and the three Child Care Resource and Referral agencies who live and work in the 17 easternmost counties of Montana.

The Glasgow, Glendive and Miles City Child Care Resource and Referral regions are currently serving 249 families with Best Beginnings Scholarships. About 14% (35) of the families receive cash assistance. So that means there are a lot of folks out here who are employed, but still fall below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level. 43 families (17%) have two working parents or one working parent and the other parent attending a Post Secondary Education institution-which in eastern Montana are our community colleges-Ft. Peck Community College, Dawson Community College or Miles Community College. As you might expect, most parents are working in the health care, hospitality and retail industries. However, a few work in professional areas, like banking, insurance or legal and a couple of families are employed by a county government or the State of Montana.

Let me tell you about just one family receiving a Best Beginnings Scholarship. My name is Dylan Conley. I am a single father of four kids. I have been raising them

by myself for the last three years. Being a single parent is no easy task. Not only do you have the full workload at home, but you also have the workload of being able to provide for your family. I have worked at Montana Quality Foods for the last nine years as a meat cutter. The child care assistance program has been a great benefit to me and my family. Without it, I do not know how I would ever be able to make a living. It helps provide my children with child care so that I am able to keep working and also to be able to spend quality time with my children. If I did not receive child care assistance I would be working just to pay the my child care bill and that would not include my regular expenses just to run the household.

I would like to now turn to the child care provider side of the picture. We currently have 158 child care facilities with 373 caregivers. In FY03, the latest year for which I have figures, providers in eastern Montana accessed the Quality funds available for Merit Pay, Mentoring, Mini-grants and Provider grants. Although it was a small percentage of the total funds available, they are utilizing these funding sources to make improvements in the quality of care they provide for children.

The Child Care Resource and Referral agencies are taking advantage of the Infant and Toddler set-aside funds to offer Infant and Toddler Caregiving training which results in caregivers being certified by the State as Infant and Toddler Caregivers. In the Miles City and Glendive R&R regions, a wonderful partnership has developed which allows a large number of caregivers to receive the 60 hours of training for college credit. Our certified instructor is a Miles City community member dedicated to early childhood. Miles Community College arranges the Interactive Television system to broadcast to three additional sites. Dawson Community College grants a tuition waiver so all participants can receive 4 college credits without paying tuition. The R&R agencies handle registration and technical assistance in setting up the class. The participants pay a technology fee, purchase class materials, dedicate eight Saturdays to training and are eligible for further cash incentives from the Infant and Toddler Set-Aside funds. Infants and toddlers see improvements in the care they receive from these providers. The current class has 26 registered participants receiving instruction via ITV in 4 eastern Montana communities. A great outcome for an annual investment from the State of Montana of $2600.

In conclusion, I would like to urge this cmte to maintain the $26.9 mil. for child care funding. It is doing good work in E. Montana