



American Federation of Teachers WA
Arc of King County
Archdiocese of Seattle
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound
Blue Prints for Learning
Centralia College
Child Care Action Council
Child Care Aware of WA
Child Care Resources
Children's Alliance
Children's Campaign Fund
Children's Home Society of WA & Trust
Foundation
ChildHaven
Committee for Children
Community Center for Education Results
Community Network Coalition
Denise Louie Education Center
Douglas for All Coalition
Early Learning Public Library Partnership
Economic Opportunity Institute
Edmonds School Dist.
Educare Early Learning Center
Elty Consulting
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
First 5 FUNdamentals
Foundation for Tacoma Students
KinderCare Education
League of Education Voters
League of Women Voters WA
Lutheran Community Services Northwest
Mission: Readiness
MomsRising
Neighborhood House
Nurse Family Partnership
OneAmerica
Open Arms Perinatal Services
Organization for Parenting Education Programs
(OPEP)
Parent-Child Home Program
Parent Trust for WA
Children/Parents as Teachers State Ofc.
Partners for Our Children
Pike Market Child Care & Preschool
Project Child Success
Puget Sound Educational Service Dist.
Reach Out & Read WA State
ReadyNation
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network
School's Out WA
SEIU, Local 925
SOAR
Sound Child Care Solutions
Southeast Seattle Education Coalition
Stand for Children
Statewide Poverty Action Network
Tiny Trees Preschool
United Way of King County
United Way of Pierce County
United Way of Snohomish County
United Ways of WA
Voices of Tomorrow
Volunteers of America Western WA
WA Assoc. for Infant Mental Health
WA Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics
WA Dental Service Foundation
WA Federation of Independent Schools
WA State Alliance of YMCAs
WA State Assoc. of Head Start & ECEAP
WA State Budget & Policy Center
WA State Community Action Partnership
Washington STEM
Washington Child Care Center Association
Washington Communities for Children
WA State Family Child Care Assoc
Wellspring Family Services
WithinReach
YMCA of Greater Seattle
Zeno

March 31, 2020

Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Secretary Ross Hunter
Department of Children, Youth, and Families
P.O. Box 40970
Olympia, WA 98504-0970

Dear Governor Inslee and Secretary Hunter,

Thank you for your hard work and dedication to all Washingtonians during this unprecedented time. We appreciate the recent public recognition of early care and education professionals as part of the essential workforce and the services they provide as fundamental to the COVID-19 response and recovery in our state. We have been fortunate to work with you in many ways over the years on ensuring that our children, families, and those that care for them are strong, healthy, and thriving. We must now come together again to take decisive action to hold the line on that shared commitment.

Our early learning system, already under profound strain prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, is now in crisis and requires immediate and strategic measures to (1) address the imminent financial and health and safety requirements of providers and families and (2) protect the fragile infrastructure of our early learning system for the long-term.

The Early Learning Action Alliance (ELAA) is calling on you to immediately adopt the following policies:

Protect the health, safety, and well-being of providers and those in their care.

- Ensure access for child care providers who continue to provide care during this crisis to all necessary health and safety materials, supplies, nutritious food for the children in their care, and personal protective equipment.
- Add child care providers to the priority COVID-19 testing list of essential workers.
- Guarantee paid sick leave and health care to any employee of a child care business who is diagnosed positive and becomes ill.
- Enable all center employees, family home providers, and laid off employees and providers immediate access to Apple Health for their health coverage, or coverage in the SEIU 925 health care pool.

Provide financial stability and security through the continuity of payment for providers.

- Base child care subsidy payments on March enrollment rather than attendance throughout the duration of the state of emergency.
- Continue to make payments to all providers, open or closed. These funds have already been allocated in the 2019-2021 budget and will not incur extra cost to the state.
- Allow for closure for any COVID-related reason and not limited to a direct COVID-19 exposure without jeopardizing future WCCC eligibility.
- Cover the cost of suspended or waived parent co-pays.

Give providers the financial resources and staffing support they need to either continue to operate or weather the storm and reopen when able.

- Expedite background checks within 24-hours for child care related employees and Family, Friend & Neighbor (FFN) caregivers and provide funding to cover the costs.

The Early Learning Action Alliance is convened by the Children's Alliance.
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- Authorize new hires to start work without completing pre-service requirements temporarily during this emergency.
- Provide paid substitutes if staff members are unable to work.
- Recognize and value the essential service and increased risk of providers who remain open to serve families during this crisis by offering hazard pay and enhanced subsidy rates or subsidy incentives.
- Extend unemployment insurance to family child care providers who have had to close.
- Teachers and directors who are unable to work should receive unemployment benefits to cover 100 percent of lost wages, without a repayment requirement for reimbursable employers.
- Include and prioritize every type of care provider (centers, family homes, and school age programs) in any economic recovery incentives and actions – small business grants and loan programs, mortgage forbearance, rent deferrals, utility and insurance payments, and other small business support strategies.

Support families in accessing the care they need and managing economic hardship.

- Ensure parents and caregivers designated as part of the essential workforce and those who continue to need care have access to safe and affordable care options.
- Suspend or waive all co-pays.
- Expand eligibility for subsidies to anyone determined to be a member of the essential workforce for the duration of the public health emergency.
- Provide resources and support for the resource and referral agencies to rapidly deploy technical assistance to providers and accurate information to families about their options.
- Cover tuition for private pay families if parents or caregivers are unable to pay due to job loss or work closure.
- Provide additional support and resources to home visitors who are adapting to help families access basic needs including diapers and formula.
- Increase subsidy rate for FFN caregivers to be more closely aligned with family child care during the pandemic.

Strategically waive regulations and creatively use existing and forthcoming federal and state funding to shield and reinforce the child care infrastructure.

- Investigate the allowable use of FEMA disaster relief funds for child care which has been approved as an allowable use in past.
- Explore using the MERIT system as a way to provide direct funding to child care programs and providers outside of the subsidy system.
- Suspend redetermination of family eligibility for support services such as Working Connections Child Care, TANF, SNAP, and WIC, to ensure continuity of benefits.
- Suspend all Early Achievers mandates, ratings, and requirements through the duration of the public health emergency.
- Adopt flexibility in timelines and expectations for required reporting and compliance matters.
- Waive first quarter 2020 L&I and ESD employment taxes for all child care providers.

Communicate culturally-informed guidance clearly and frequently.

- Provide timely, regular, accessible, and translated updates created by/with the targeted cultural communities to ensure the specific needs and questions in those communities are being addressed.
- Engage stakeholders in consultation regarding any emergency changes to regulations.
- Share information with families and providers about access to food including that children under 5 are eligible to receive meals from the Summer Meal program being distributed by schools and nonprofit organizations even if they do not have a school-age sibling

There is a disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on low-income families, children and people of color, and the programs and individuals that serve them. We want to call your attention to how the actions or inactions of current policies can lead to inequitable impacts. While other programs less reliant on subsidy can make the best decision for themselves, providers primarily serving families receiving subsidy may be forced to stay open for purely economic reasons. Remaining open and providing care for the essential workforce should be incentivized rather than economically enforced. For example, requiring a confirmed exposure to continue subsidy payment during a closure strips autonomy from providers to make decisions in the

best interests of their families, employees, and communities. Secondary exposure, lack of access to supplies or staffing, loss of private pay income, and closing out of an abundance of caution are all valid reasons for closure.

Without immediate state intervention, providers are headed for economic disaster. Lack of assistance potentially results in systemic collapse creating significant barriers to overall economic recovery. A survey of providers across the nation conducted two weeks ago by NAEYC found that 17% said their business could not survive a closure of any length without significant public support, 30% said they would not survive a closure of more than two weeks and 16% would not survive longer than a month. Only 11% of providers were confident they could survive a lengthy closure without support. Half of respondents said they are losing income from private pay families who can no longer afford to pay and another quarter are losing income from families on subsidies who are no longer attending. Simply put, families will not be able to go back to work if there is no one left to care for their children.

As of Tuesday, March 31, Child Care Aware of Washington reports that 954 programs with the capacity to serve over 45,000 children have closed representing 18% of licensed providers and 24% of licensed capacity in the state. And these figures do not include the anecdotally large number of license-exempt half day preschools that have also closed. While these numbers illustrate a stark reality here in Washington, the issues at hand are (1) how many of the closed programs will be able to reopen and (2) how long those who remain in business will be able to do so without sufficient public and private income and access to necessary health and safety supplies.

We thank you for the actions you have taken so far to protect and support the early learning system in Washington, including designating providers as essential workers and allowing home visiting to migrate to virtual services. In addition to the recommendations presented here, the Early Learning Action Alliance is staunch in our belief that the policies and investments passed during the 2020 legislative session are an essential component to the strong recovery of the early care and education sector in Washington and we ask that enacting them remains a priority.

The decisions made and actions taken now will impact the family economic security and the child care ecosystem for a long time to come and play a large role in determining the strength and pace of our entire state's economic recovery. We stand ready to collaborate with you as you take action to support Washington's children, families, and the providers who care for them throughout and beyond this challenging time in our history.

For reference: as of March 27, 2020, the following states have taken the following actions that are consistent with the recommendations made here:

- Waive copayment (NJ, PA, RI, VT)
- Cover co-payment (KY, LA, NC, TX, VT)
- Covering private pay tuition (VT)
- Enrollment not attendance (CT, DC, GA, KY, LA, MA, MS, NC, PA, RI, UT)
- Relaxing policies re: child absences (PA, RI)
- Increased rates for emergency/open child care providers (AR, NJ, NM, NC, WV, VT)
- Grant programs for impacted providers (IN)

Sincerely,

Members of the Early Learning Action Alliance