CHILD CARE IS ESSENTIAL

Early learning must be part of Washington’s recovery strategy
Our state is in crisis. Prior to COVID-19, Washington’s child care infrastructure was fragile at best. Unfortunately, one of the industries hardest hit by the pandemic has been the very one needed to bring families back to work: child care.

While families do everything they can to stay safe, healthy, housed, and fed, many are also struggling to work without childcare or maintain their access to child care in hopes of returning to work soon. Further, our state’s own child care reauthorization system is penalizing families for receiving unemployment aid while temporarily out of work during a historic unemployment spike.

Our state’s child care system is on the verge of collapsing due to the economic hit by the pandemic. Many child care programs have closed while a limited number remain open risking their own health to provide child care for frontline workers. Providers earn incredibly low wages and have varying levels of access to health care. Additionally, shortages of cleaning and protective supplies have made it nearly impossible for providers to procure sufficient safety equipment for themselves and the children in their care.

Washington’s economy and workforce cannot recover without child care. We must support our families in need, protect our frontline workers, and invest in the child care system which has long been the most underfunded component of our state’s education system.

Please read the stories below from Washington MomsRising members sharing their struggles of accessing or providing child care during COVID-19. We hope that you can use these stories from your constituents to help support children, families, and our economy too.
I am a single mom and a registered nurse age 53 with
an 88 year old mother who relies on me. You bet I’m
concerned. I want to do all I can to fight this disease
while trying to stay healthy to care and support my
family and community.
– Jennie, Bellevue

If we don’t get some help, we will create an even
bigger shortage of childcare facilities, when people
return to the workplace.
– Judith, Bellevue

My daughter has to remain home with her son, since
school has been suspended, and her employer has
reduced her hours, resulting in drastically lowered
family income.
– Linda, Bellingham

I have an autoimmune disorder called Wegener’s
granulomatosis. I babysit my grandchildren because
my daughter-in-law’s business is an essential
business. She is the manager and they will not pay
her to stay at home with her kids.
My daughter-in-law and son have just purchased a
new home and have to make their payments. I risk
my health because there is no one else to fill the gap!
– Teresa, Blaine

“\textit{We don’t have child care now and it’s very difficult to
work with a preschooler and infant. I get the bare
minimum completed and struggle to stay up on
important aspects of my job that will impact my later
promotion and job security.}”
– Amy, Ellensburg

We don’t have child care now and it’s very difficult
to work with a preschooler and infant. I get the
bare minimum completed and struggle to stay up on
important aspects of my job that will impact my later
promotion and job security. My preschooler is
missing friends, and I’m worried about the impact of
this on his development.
– Amy, Ellensburg

I do have a bit of a concern. With my job, I work with
the most vulnerable communities, those who are
homeless. Living in the Seattle area, there is extreme
caution of accidental exposure, not necessarily
with the families that I serve at my job, just from
community and neighbors that travel.
I don’t like the risk of becoming sick with missing
work, not being able to take care of my son, and
putting my co-workers and our clients at risk.
– Tina, Issaquah

I am a licensed child care provider and my husband
is a substitute teacher. He just lost his job and six
weeks of pay! We live paycheck to paycheck. I am
actually now reaching out to families who cannot
stop working, hoping to make up the difference while
making a difference. Everyone is freaking out about
the loss of child care, but I AM the child care and I
feel completely left out, a micro small business with no sick leave, no paid medical leave. I am the first responder no one is talking about.

– Debra, Olympia

Coronavirus is adversely impacting our business. We are an early learning center supporting 70-80 families and 12-15 staff members. We deal with children, who are comparatively safe, but children could be carriers too. That puts staff and other related families at risk. Many of our staff have decided to stay home for reasons like being in the vulnerable population category which makes it difficult for us to offer services to our families. It has become a double-edged sword.

– Viji, Issaquah

My family has run an in-home childcare for over 20 years. This is impacting them in ways I can’t even describe. The families that trust them with their children are also being impacted. We need to support the child care system ASAP.

– Alyssa, Puyallup

I’m a single parent who works full time, and I have 2 small children (5 and 8), one of whom is special needs with an IEP from our district. I am allowed to work from home, so I am now going to be doing 40 hrs/wk of work and 40 hrs/wk of child care solo and simultaneously for at least 6 weeks, likely longer, while following social distancing guidelines. Please consider adding the ability for families with all parents in the workforce (especially single parents), to take paid leave while schools are closed without using Paid Family and Medical Leave time - which I may need later if my elderly mother, for whom I am the primary caretaker, gets sick.

– Anonymous, Seattle

I am a part-time working mom of three. I work for a private preschool as a lead facilitator. I am not getting any paid or sick leave for the mandatory shut down. I am unable to do any little offered at the preschool because I now have to stay home with my three children. I am worried we won’t be able to make our rent with just my husband’s wage as a full time metro bus operator.

– Anonymous, Seattle

I help run an early learning center. My administration team and I have had to make the difficult decision to close our center for the time being. As much as we considered staying open to families that remain needing care for their children, we simply cannot expose them and our staff to unknown levels of risk.

Living in Washington, feels at the moment as much is out of our control with improper measures in place, including testing. We’re being asked to be heroes without appropriate gear and supports. We are also extremely concerned over our staff.

We are a not-profit facility and parents can’t justify continuing to pay tuition. We are transitioning to online learning interactions, but of course that is limited. We will continue to reach out to maintain connections and support a sense of community.

– Rita, Sammamish

WASHINGTON

Research shows that Center for American Progress: Coronavirus Pandemic Could Lead to Permanent Loss of Nearly 4.5 Million Child Care Slots
My fiance has a chronic illness and is immuno-compromised, as is her youngest daughter who is autistic. The company I work for is kind and accommodating. But I’m concerned that without extra help from the government, there will be no way for my employer to provide aid if I need to stay home.

My family has been through some really hard times lately and we finally got into a safe place to live. But if rent is required and work isn’t possible, I won’t have the ability to pay rent. If rent is cancelled, but work isn’t, I will be risking more exposure since other people I work with are continuing to see people besides their families and people in the office.

I risk bringing it back to my fiance and our girls. To help with this, we need more paid family leave as well as a rent freeze so that people can responsibly stay housed without issue.

– Erin, Spokane

My family is fortunate, both my husband and I are considered essential employees. I am able to work from home and we are still able to earn a paycheck. We are blessed and I know that is not the case for others in our community.

I am worried for all the vulnerable people. All those who are left unheard. I am mostly concerned for all the brave workers who are at risk. Especially all those working in emergency child care centers who are providing a necessary service for the first responders working in hospitals and doctors offices.

These loving and brave preschool teachers and youth workers are risking their own health to provide for themselves and their families. Many of them earning the area minimum wage or just above. These unsung heroes of this pandemic deserve recognition and for all of us to advocate that they are able to earn a fair wage, have access to health care for themselves and their children, and be able to retire without worry.

I hope that we all come out of this stronger and more compassionate. I pray that we will learn to recognize and value the worthy work that so many do behind the scenes to keep this country going.

– Suzette from Seattle

I’m a child care worker whose work is fortunately on hiatus while we do some work from home trying to support families in their home learning. I’m concerned about how long it’s taking to get tests and medical supplies to the population.

I’m really worried because I know that there will be a push to return child care workers to work sooner than many sectors of the population. It’s hard to get work done with small children under foot. Also many of our children struggle with food security. They are not getting food from us they might not be getting enough.

We’re doing our best and our program to supply them with food and resources to get food. In the meantime when we return to work I hope that there’ll be more tests in place for people who are at the front lines of community care like myself. People will be reluctant to send their children to school if they are not sure if their teachers are infected. I suggest that child care workers get regular coronavirus tests to make sure that we are staying healthy!

– Rebecca from Seattle
To comply with closing all non-essential businesses for Gov. Jay Inslee’s Stay Home, Stay Healthy order, we closed down our landscaping business. We have a 5 year old daughter and now we have no income. Where is the safety-net for folk, including families, who lose their livelihood through the COVID-19 outbreak? Other countries have implemented rescue packages to support their citizens staying home. How are people meant to stay home if they don’t have money for food and can’t cover their basic necessities?

– Anonymous, Seattle

I’m paying for preschool even though school is closed. I’d love the care provider to be supported so that we could be reimbursed. I’m not working much because there’s no one to watch them.

– Anonymous, Seattle

After being a leader and member of several efforts to support the needs of children and families, I currently serve on the board of Child Care Resources. I know the impact that our state’s recent commitments to children—especially our youngest children in the form of support for early education—have made. We cannot turn back. Especially in the wake of the pandemic, we must not stop supporting the most vulnerable in our communities.

– Evelyn, Seattle

We are already receiving warning that our beloved preschool may have to close permanently unless there’s an intervention. Please act now for working families and growing, curious, playful children.

– Erin, Seattle

I am unable to work without childcare.

– Katie, Silverdale

I am working from home and homeschooling my kid and I find it to be very frustrating and stressful, I can’t work as efficiently from home, I am an academic and all my scholarly activities apart from online teaching are on hold due to lack of childcare support. I also experience a lot of push back from my child regarding the assignments his schoolteacher gives online and it is so hard to keep him focused and motivated to learn. I feel like I cannot do as good of a job as an elementary teacher and it adds to my depression to know that I am failing my kid day by day.

– Cigdem, Richland

The economy in the state of Washington WILL suffer if the childcare industry collapses! Single mothers can’t work without childcare/after school care. Families can’t survive without two wage earners.

– Brenda, Vancouver

I work at a high school in central Washington. Per the Governor’s order, our last day with students was in March. As of right now, I am still expected to show up at work every day of the school closure. I also have four children. My children do not have childcare outside of school and school-related programs. I am not allowed to bring my children to work. There are no child care centers with availability for my children, and, even if there were, paying for full-time childcare for them would take my whole paycheck. I am being forced to choose to show up to work, where I am not needed, and neglect my children; or stay home with my children, where I am needed, and lose my job.

– Charity, Yakima
The Washington State MomsRising MomsForce represents thousands of moms, dads, and families across the Evergreen State. Over nearly 15 years of advocacy work in Washington, MomsRising members have won historic investments in early learning and affordable childcare, funding for dual language learning programs, modern pregnant worker protections, statewide paid sick days, paycheck transparency laws, and paid family and medical leave for ALL! Together, our voices are a powerful force for change.

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