WASHINGTON WORKS ON A FOUNDATION OF CARE

But that foundation is in danger...and without a strong system of early learning, Washington can’t get back to work. Take action today to help us rebuild!

Washington’s children and economy are threatened because the COVID-19 pandemic has put our early learning infrastructure at risk. Our state’s early education ecosystem was already fragile due to decades of underinvestment and now the economic impacts of the pandemic are destabilizing programs and compounding existing issues related to access, cost, quality, equity, and funding.

Families need early learning to be available and affordable, but many providers have been forced to close and many more are at high risk of closure due to the pandemic. The result is that families will not be able to find the care they need to go back to work and thousands of members of the early learning workforce will become unemployed, with many not returning to the field by the time the economy rebounds. For Washington to recover, the early learning system must be reinforced in this difficult time. All roads to recovery in Washington must go through a strong, viable early learning system.

Your voice and your story are powerful – and together our voices and stories are even stronger. Decision makers in Olympia need to hear from you about the foundational importance of early learning. Please join the Early Learning Action Alliance to take action on behalf of children and families and the providers who serve them. We hope this toolkit will provide helpful information and resources for contacting your elected leaders. Thank you for all you do each and every day and for being a critical part of efforts to recover and rebuilt stronger than before.

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The Early Learning Action Alliance is convened by the Children’s Alliance.
For questions, please contact Hannah.lidman@childrensalliance.org.
HOW TO TAKE ACTION
Who to contact and what to say

1 Choose from the decision makers below to contact (consider contacting them all!):
   Governor Jay Inslee • (360) 902-4111 • governor.wa.gov/contact/contact/send-gov-inslee-e-message
   Senate Majority Leader Andy Billig • 509) 209-2427 • Andy.Billig@leg.wa.gov
   Senate Ways & Means Chair Christine Rolfes • (360) 786-7644 • Christine.Rolfes@leg.wa.gov
   House Appropriations Chair Timm Ormsby • (509) 458-2122 • Timm.Ormsby@leg.wa.gov
   House Speaker Laurie Jinkins • (253) 593-2033 • Laurie.Jinkins@leg.wa.gov
   Senator Minority Leader Mark Schoesler • (360) 786-7620 • Mark.Schoesler@leg.wa.gov
   House Minority Leader J.T. Wilcox • (360) 786-7912 • JT.Wilcox@leg.wa.gov

2 Decide how you’d like to reach out. Among the tools available are: Phone call, e-mail, social media, and more.

3 Think through what you’d like to say. The most powerful thing you can share with Washington leaders is your own story! Share about how you’ve seen COVID-19 impact early learning in your community. Consider sharing about these topics:

   FOR PARENTS:
   • Do you have access to child care right now? If so, how has COVID-19 impacted your ability to pay tuition?
   • Do you currently lack access to child care? If so, what is the impact on your children? On your family? On your work situation? On your family’s economic security?

   FOR PROVIDERS:
   • If your child care program is open, how have you adapted in response to COVID-19 and what challenges are you facing to stay open?
   • If your child care program is closed, do you plan to reopen? What roadblocks do you face to reopening?
   • How are families and businesses in your community dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 on early learning infrastructure?

   FOR BUSINESS LEADERS:
   • Why does child care matter to your business?
   • Do your employees have access to child care? How does access to child care impact your bottom line?
   • How does availability of child care factor into your plans to stay open or to reopen?
We ask that you pursue new sources of progressive revenue. We cannot cut our way out of this crisis – to do so would only continue to cause disproportionate harm to children and families furthest from opportunity and jeopardize the health and wellbeing of an entire generation of Washington’s youngest learners.

Share the Early Learning Action Alliance’s requests:

- Provide immediate financial relief to child care providers: (1) Direct additional financial resources to providers who have been able to stay open to continue providing services, and (2) Enable closed programs to re-open as soon as possible with targeted financial resources.
- Extend temporary measures to increase flexibility in Working Connections Child Care, including: enrollment-based pay for providers; covering family co-payments; and removal of unemployment as an automatic disqualifier for WCCC.
- Maintain state investments in public early learning programs that deliver high-quality care and support to Washington’s children and families: Working Connections Child Care, ECEAP, and Home Visiting.
- Maintain eligibility to Working Connections Child Care during the crisis for parents and caregivers, regardless of changes in income or employment status, to ensure continuity of quality care for children.
- Make available additional financial support to providers to address impacts on revenue and expenses of any health and safety guidance, such as reduced group sizes.
- Apply an equity lens to all investments and outreach including targeting financial assistance to those disproportionately impacted by the current crisis and providing support and guidance in the state’s most commonly spoken languages.
- Ensure early learning professionals, who are essential workers on the frontlines of this pandemic, have access to the healthcare, PPE, and supplies they need to keep themselves, their families, and the children in their care safe and healthy.
INVITING OTHERS TO TAKE ACTION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The Early Learning Action Alliance created a short video to help communicate about the urgent need for investments in child care. Please share the video far and wide with an invitation to family, friends, and neighbors to take action. Sample messages are below. Please adapt them to include reference to your own story and/or reference to the local impacts of the child care crisis.

FACEBOOK:
Washington Works on a Foundation of Care but that foundation is in danger…and without a strong system of early learning, Washington can’t get back to work. Since the #COVID19 pandemic began, hundreds of child care programs have shut down. Without urgent public investment, many of them might not reopen. Washington leaders must act to make sure that care is there for children, families, and our economy. Contact the leaders below and share about why early learning matters to you and your community. We all want kids, families, businesses, and communities to emerge from this crisis stronger. https://bit.ly/foundation-of-care-video

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TWITTER:
Since the #COVID19 pandemic began, hundreds of child care programs have shut down. Washington leaders must act to make sure that care is there when parents return to work. Washington works on a foundation of care – make sure your elected leaders know it! https://bit.ly/foundation-of-care-video

@GovInslee • @andybillig • @lauriejinkins2 • @jtwilcox111
Chair Christine Rolfes: (360) 786-7644
Chair Timm Ormsby: (509) 458-2122
Senator Minority Leader Mark Schoesler: (360) 786-7620
Washington Works on a Foundation of Care

But that foundation is in danger... and without a strong system of early learning, Washington can’t get back to work.

Updated as of 8/5/2020

Overview

Washington’s children and economy are threatened because the COVID-19 pandemic has put our early learning infrastructure at risk. Our state’s early education ecosystem was already fragile due to decades of underinvestment and now the economic impacts of the pandemic are destabilizing programs and compounding existing issues related to access, cost, quality, equity, and funding. All roads to recovery in Washington must go through a strong, viable early learning system.

1. Early Learning is the Business that Powers Business

Early learning has a profound impact on the economy of Washington State. A recent economic analysis completed before the pandemic found that the pre-existing lack of affordable, accessible child care cost Washington employers over $2 billion and the overall state economy $6.5 billion annually in lost revenue and growth. Workers with children under 6 make up 15% of the state’s labor force and all parents are working in 60% of households with children under 6 in the state.[1] Workers with young children cannot return to work without safe and affordable early learning for their families.

2. The Economic Fallout of the Pandemic Is Forcing Many Providers to Close

Within the first few weeks of the pandemic, families began withdrawing their children from care, radically dropping enrollment across the state. The resulting loss of tuition revenue and the increased cost of operations have put an enormous financial strain on the early learning sector. For reasons related to enrollment, revenue loss, and concerns about exposure, over 1,000 programs have closed across the state and many have furloughed or laid off staff.

- Enrollment has gone down by 51% for centers, 28% for family child care homes, and 75% for school age programs.
- 19% of licensed child care programs, making up 25% of licensed capacity in the state, have closed.[2]

While Congress sent $58.6 million to Washington State in child care relief from the CARES Act, to date, only half the funds have been spent in direct grants to programs. The scale of the need is far greater than the resources made available.

3. The Next Phases Will Increase Both Demand and Financial Strain on Programs

As communities in Washington move to reopen, more parents will begin returning to work and will be coming back to a vastly different early learning system with hundreds of shuttered programs and many thousands fewer available spaces. Current and emerging state and federal recommendations for health and safety protocols will further reduce capacity of programs and increase costs – under this scenario Child Care Aware of Washington projects medium-sized centers will face revenue shortfalls of over $20,000 every month. The economics of running a child care business simply do not pencil out when overhead increases and revenue falls significantly. The child care deserts in our state are in danger of turning into child care wastelands.

4. The Crisis in Early Learning Has Inequitable Impacts on Communities

Families with low-incomes and families in rural communities are disproportionately impacted by the child care crisis. Child care subsidy rates, which are already too far below market rate, will become less desirable for providers to accept in a market with decreased supply and increased demand making it harder for low-income families to access affordable early education. Early learning, a field that employs more women of color than other professions, is also one of the sectors experiencing the largest number of job losses due to the pandemic.

A disproportionate number of children of color in Washington already lived in child care deserts prior to the pandemic. Program closures and smaller classes in the remaining open programs will result in fewer children of color having access to the early opportunities that decrease opportunity gaps. The need is stronger than ever for high-quality, culturally- and linguistically-relevant early learning to help build strong communities and dismantle barriers to opportunity.

5. Early Learning Is Essential Now and In the Future

Decades of research have proven that high-quality early learning, delivered by well-trained and well-compensated professionals, is both a smart use of public resources and gives kids what they need to thrive. Working Connections Child Care, ECEAP, and Home Visiting are each critical components of Washington’s early learning system.

Washington must prioritize these programs and take the following actions in order to make sure Washington works:

- Provide immediate financial relief to child care providers: (1) Direct additional financial resources to providers who have been able to stay open to continue providing services, and (2) Enable closed programs to re-open as soon as possible with targeted financial resources.
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- Ensure early learning professionals, who are essential workers on the frontlines of this pandemic, have access to the healthcare, PPE, and supplies they need to keep themselves, their families, and the children in their care safe and healthy.

Washington’s elected leaders must take the necessary steps to stabilize and strengthen our early learning system -- it cannot recover on its own and without it, Washington’s families and businesses cannot get back to work.
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Families need early learning to be available and affordable, but many providers have been forced to close and many more are at high risk of closure due to the pandemic. The result is that families will not be able to find the care they need to go back to work and thousands of members of the early learning workforce will become unemployed, with many not returning to the field by the time the economy rebounds. For Washington to recover, the early learning system must be reinforced in this difficult time. All roads to recovery in Washington must go through a strong, viable early learning system.

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Access to affordable early education increases labor force participation and supports state and regional economic growth. The lack of available, affordable early learning options limits family economic security and the ability of employers to fill jobs. Workers with young children cannot return to work without safe and affordable early learning for their families.

Within the first few weeks of the pandemic, families began withdrawing their children from care, radically dropping enrollment across the state. The resulting loss of tuition revenue plus increases in the cost of operations associated with pandemic response have put an enormous financial strain on the early learning sector - businesses that were already operating on exceptionally slim margins with few, if any, financial reserves.

In addition to the major drop in enrollment and thus loss of revenue, programs have also closed due to direct exposures, concerns about exposure and lack of testing, cost or lack of access to sanitation supplies and personal protective equipment, and lack of adequate public resources providing financial support. Over a thousand programs have closed and many have furloughed or laid off staff. A significant share of the programs that have remained open are reporting risk of closure.

Across Washington:
- Enrollment has gone down by 48% statewide: 51% for centers, 28% for family child care homes, and 75% for school age programs.
- 19% of licensed child care programs, making up 25% of licensed capacity in the state, have closed.
- 33% of the child care workforce has been laid off (17%) or furloughed (16%)
- 46% of open providers reported risk of closure: 49% of centers, 45% of family child care homes, and 33% of school age programs[2]

Once closed, re-opening is no simple matter when staff have dispersed or found other jobs, accumulated back expenses must be paid, and there are additional start-up or staff recruitment costs. While Congress sent $58.6 million to Washington State in child care relief from the CARES Act, to date, only half the funds have been spent in direct grants to programs. The grant funds allocated were exhausted within the first two weeks and were only available to open programs. **The scale of the need is far greater than the resources made available.**
3. The Next Phases Will Increase Both Demand and Financial Strain on Programs

As communities in Washington move to reopen, more parents will begin returning to work and will need care for their children. However, those families will be coming back to a vastly different early learning system with hundreds of shuttered programs and many thousands fewer available spaces. Prior to the pandemic, Washington State ranked 6th in the country for the number of people who lived in a child care desert – in fact, 63% of people in Washington lived in a community where child care capacity does not meet demand.[4]

Current and emerging state and federal recommendations for health and safety protocols will further reduce capacity of programs and increase costs. Potential reduced group size and ratio guidance may mean open programs will only be able to serve half as many children as before and many will be forced to either substantially raise tuition, lay off staff, or both. More stringent cleaning and sanitation requirements increase supply and staffing expenses. Some programs housed in K-12 school buildings, such as many Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) classrooms, are even at risk of losing their space under different scenarios for the re-opening of schools in the fall.

A recent economic analysis done by Child Care Aware of Washington projects that under reduced group size and social distancing guidance a medium-sized child care center receiving the highest child care subsidy reimbursement rates in the state will face a revenue shortfall of $26,000 every month. The economics of running a child care business simply do not pencil out when overhead increases and revenue falls significantly. **The child care deserts in our state are in danger of turning into child care wastelands.**

4. The Crisis in Early Learning Has Inequitable Impacts on Communities

Families with low-incomes and families in rural areas are disproportionately impacted by the child care crisis. Child care subsidy rates, which are already too far below market rate, will become less desirable for providers to accept in a market with decreased supply and increased demand making it harder for low-income families to access affordable early education. Child care closures will hit these communities especially hard because financial barriers and geography allow for few alternative options.

Women of color make up a larger share of the early learning profession, as compared to other professions and the state workforce, placing them on the frontlines of the pandemic caring for the children of essential workers and those who cannot stay home.[5] While compensation is low across the sector, white women in the early education field are often paid more on average than women of color educators.[6] Early learning is also one of the fields experiencing the largest job losses due to the pandemic and as more programs close, more women of color will join the ranks of the unemployed.[7]

By kindergarten entry and even before, the opportunity gap between children of color and their white classmates is already evident and left unaddressed these gaps persist and grow over time. However, research has shown quality early education can help close these gaps. Two-thirds of Hispanic/Latino children and 63% of Black children in Washington already lived in child care deserts before COVID-19 hit.[8] Early learning program closures and decreases in the number of children being served means many fewer children of color will have access to the kind of early opportunities that decrease racial opportunity gaps. **The need is stronger than ever for quality, culturally- and linguistically-relevant early learning to help build strong communities and dismantle barriers to opportunity.**

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- Ensure early learning professionals, who are essential workers on the frontlines of this pandemic, have access to the healthcare, PPE, and supplies they need to keep themselves, their families, and the children in their care safe and healthy.

Washington cannot cut its way out of this crisis. Every cut to Working Connections Child Care, ECEAP, and Home Visiting means: fewer children will have access to safe, high-quality early education; fewer parents will be able to return to work; fewer families will have access to the critical resources and supports they need in this challenging time; fewer employers will be able to resume normal business operations; and more early education businesses will be forced to close their doors.

*Washington’s elected leaders must take the necessary steps to stabilize and strengthen our early learning system -- it cannot recover on its own and without it, Washington’s families and businesses cannot get back to work.*
Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) Spotlight

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) is a subsidy program that makes it possible for families with low-incomes to access affordable, quality child care while they work or participate in approved work-related activities. WCCC covers a portion of a family’s child care expenses based on a sliding scale and parents may have a monthly co-pay depending on income. WCCC is an essential support for Washington’s working families and promotes healthy child development, family economic security, and economic growth.

- 79% percent of licensed centers and 60% of licensed family child care homes accept WCCC subsidies.
- 30% of centers and 24% of family child care homes limit the number of subsidized children accepted, many with a limit of ten percent or less of enrolled children.[9]
- 80,955 children were served in Washington’s subsidized child care program in FY 2018.
- Of the children under age 5 served by WCCC in 2018, at least 50% were children of color and 10% spoke a language other than English at home.[10]

The federal Administration of Children and Families recommends setting subsidy rates at the 75th percentile of private tuition (market rates) in order to ensure equal access for families receiving child care assistance. However, due to limited public investment, WCCC reimbursements are well below market rates. Accepting subsidized families presents an economic hardship for providers resulting in revenue loss being recouped through increases in tuition for other families, slim operating margins, and/or poor wages and benefits for employees. A recent appropriation for WCCC in the FY21 budget increases rates to the 65th percentile for licensed providers participating in Early Achievers, the state’s quality rating and improvement system.

Access to high-quality child care benefits children, families, and our economy – it promotes healthy child development, makes it possible for parents and caregivers to work, results in long-term positive outcomes for children and society, and boosts businesses. The relationship between educators and children is the cornerstone for development and learning, yet low-subsidy rates make it increasingly challenging for early learning providers to make ends meet and attract and retain staff. Increased subsidy rates help preserve Washington’s high-quality and diverse community-based workforce while making it easier for families to find care options.

ECEAP Spotlight

Washington’s Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) focuses on the whole child by combining strong early education with comprehensive services including individualized, trauma-informed health and family support to the most vulnerable of Washington’s three- and four-year olds – those living in extreme poverty, experiencing complex trauma, furthest from opportunity, or all three. ECEAP is also recognized as one of the highest quality prekindergarten programs in the nation by the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) in which children who attend ECEAP are more likely to have greater success in school and life.

ECEAP currently serves 14,000 children across Washington State. Between ECEAP and Head Start, only 53% of the most vulnerable and lowest income children in the state are reached, leaving over 20,000 children unserved.

Of ECEAP children and families:
- 95.5% are under 200% of the federal poverty level
- 66% are families of color
- 32.5% of children are dual language learners
- 9.1% are experiencing homelessness
- 30% throughout the school year are involved in the child welfare system
- 11.5% are children with disabilities[11]

Research has proven the benefits of ECEAP, including:
- Strong gains in age-level achievement
- Improved kindergarten readiness
- Lasting benefits in academic performance
- Improved access to health and dental care
- Strengthened and supported families[12]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ECEAP transformed to a hybrid model - providing virtual education and support to children and families while also providing on-site child care to a small number of essential workers and priority populations such as homeless families, children with special needs, and children engaged with the child welfare system.

ECEAP is a critical lifeline and touchpoint for supporting families in navigating this challenging time. As the economy re-opens and Washington rebuilds, ECEAP is an essential part of ensuring that parents with low-incomes have access to high-quality early learning for their children.

Home Visiting Spotlight

Home Visiting is a proven, voluntary program where trained home visitors and parents work together to strengthen and support families in the child's first years of life. In Washington State, 10 home visiting models provide services in 33 counties to 7,329 families with federal, state, local, and private funding. Less than 6% of eligible families receive home visiting services leaving over 118,000 unserved.

Research has proven the benefits of home visiting, including:
- Improved birth outcomes
- Early detection of health issues and developmental delays
- Improved coordination and referral for other community services
- Improved parenting practices
- Improved kindergarten readiness
- Improved family self-sufficiency
- Reduced child abuse and neglect
- Reduced crime and domestic violence[13]

In response to the pandemic, home visitors quickly pivoted to provide telehealth/virtual visits. Most recent data show strong retention of participation families after the shift to virtual visits as well as continued enrollment of new families. As families navigate the many stresses of parenting during a public health pandemic, home visitors continue to serve as a valuable and trusted resource and support.

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

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

“\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

PRE-COVID, 63 PERCENT OF WASHINGTONIANS LIVED IN A CHILD CARE DESERT

Center for American Progress: Child Care Deserts, https://childcaredeserts.org/index.html
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 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

 research shows thatWASHINGTON COULD PERMANENTLY LOSE NEARLY 30% OF THE CHILD CARE SUPPLY WITH OVER 42,000 SLOTS LOST

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 immunocompromised, 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
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

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

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- Charity, Yakima

“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
The Washington State MomsRising MomsForce represents thousands of moms, dads, and families across the Evergreen State. Over 10+ years of advocacy, MomsRising members have won historic investments in early learning and affordable childcare, funding for dual language learning programs, 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.

MomsRising Washington Team
wainfo@momsrising.org
June 22, 2020

Dear Governor Inslee, OFM Director Schumacher, Majority Leader Billig, Speaker Jinkins, Minority Leaders Schoesler and Wilcox, and Fiscal Chairs Rolfes and Ormsby,

As you are well aware, COVID-19 has decimated our early learning system to the brink of collapse. We are grateful for the actions taken to begin to stabilize Washington’s early learning system and the children, families, and businesses it serves. We are expected to lose more than half of all child care capacity nationwide and have already lost approximately a third of all licensed capacity in Washington State. Washington’s economic recovery depends on greater investments in early learning; it is essential for children to thrive on consistent and predictable relationships with their caregivers; essential for parents who serve on the frontlines of our public health crisis and for parents to return to work; and essential for businesses to have employees they depend on to reopen. On the heels of last week’s updated revenue forecast, it’s clearer than ever that urgent action is needed to make recovery possible for children, families, and our economy.

Among the numerous policies and investments needed to sustain early learning in Washington State, we ask that you prioritize these most immediate needs:

- **Provide immediate financial relief to child care providers**: Through the CARES Act, Congress directed $58.6 million in relief funding for child care to Washington State and more in relief funding for education. Only $29 million has been released to providers directly. Within four hours of the launch of DCYF’s COVID child care grant program, 1,800 applications were submitted. Open programs need more financial assistance to stay open in the face of increased costs, decreased enrollment, and smaller group size recommendations. Closed providers need assistance to reopen their doors. We must direct more relief resources to the field now and work in partnership with providers to ensure resources are distributed equitably.

- **Extend temporary measures by DCYF to increase flexibility in Working Connections Child Care**, including: Continuing enrollment-based pay for providers; coverage of co-payments for families; and removal of unemployment benefits as an automatic disqualification for Working Connections Child Care eligibility. These changes are essential to make child care available for families who are most impacted by COVID-19.

- **Extend Working Connections Child Care authorizations throughout the duration of the emergency period.** No family should lose access to child care when they need it most simply because their temporary unemployment benefits are higher than their usual wages or because they’re working overtime and/or earning hazard pay and temporarily over-income. Access to child care is essential to get temporarily unemployed parents back to work and to keep employed parents on the frontlines of the pandemic.

We understand that last week’s revenue forecast confirms that the fiscal challenges we face together are enormous. While so much remains unknown, we do know that investing in child care has a profound economic impact. Even before COVID-19, the Association for Washington Business found that a lack of affordable, accessible child care cost Washington employers over $2 billion and the overall state economy $6.5 billion annually in lost revenue and growth. The compounding economic impacts of a collapsed child care industry are hard to fathom. Over $1 billion has been released to providers directly. Within four hours of the launch of DCYF’s COVID child care grant program, 1,800 applications were submitted. Open programs need more financial assistance to stay open in the face of increased costs, decreased enrollment, and smaller group size recommendations. Closed providers need assistance to reopen their doors. We must direct more relief resources to the field now and work in partnership with providers to ensure resources are distributed equitably.

As you well know, the scale of the crisis is enormous and requires bold leadership. In addition to directing relief funds to the field now, we ask that you pursue new sources of progressive revenue. We cannot cut our way out of this crisis – to do so would only continue to cause disproportionate harm to children and families furthest from opportunity and jeopardize the health and wellbeing of an entire generation of Washington’s youngest learners.

The Early Learning Action Alliance stands in partnership with you and is eager to provide support in any way possible. We are in this together. Thank you again for your leadership.

Sincerely,

Members of the Early Learning Action Alliance

The Early Learning Action Alliance is convened by the Children’s Alliance.
For more information contact cosbornhinman@gmail.com or 206.931.5717