

To: Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response
From: Dana Hepper, Director of Policy & Advocacy, Children's Institute
Date: March 18, 2020
Re: Early care & education program actions in response to Coronavirus

Distinguished Legislators,

Thank you for stepping up to play a leadership role during this critical time in our world. We are writing to say we are with you and ready to provide what you need to best respond in this rapidly evolving situation. We are closely tracking actions in other states and monitoring recommendations from national partners on COVID-19 regarding early care and education (ECE) programs to inform a path forward in Oregon.

Now more than ever, we are reminded that early care and education programs are essential components of community infrastructure. They support the immediate safety and health of children while supporting children's development. They employ a necessary workforce of early care and education teachers and staff. And they support the economy by helping parents across our state remain in the workforce, an absolute necessity at this time for essential workers, especially in health care.

Despite the crucial role of early care and education programs for children, families, communities and our broader society, the ECE workforce is among the lowest paid and most vulnerable during times of economic insecurity. Many ECE providers make minimum wage with few or no benefits, and the average child care provider makes less than the average dog walker. Other providers are small-business owners operating with thin or no margins. The majority of the workforce is comprised of women and includes a high percentage of people of color. They have incredible value that warrants recognition and support.

Today we are sharing immediate actions you can take to support the early care and education workforce and capacity to provide child care for essential workers.

- Advocate for Congressional action, and take state action, to:
 - continue federal funding for early care and education programs during this crisis, regardless of whether they are open or closed and whether children are absent;
 - provide emergency funding for early care and education programs (small businesses, nonprofits) who rely largely on tuition during this time; and
 - include the child care workforce in those eligible for extended unemployment insurance and other wage replacement strategies during program closures or providers who can't work because they are sick with, test positive for, have been exposed to, or are at high risk for COVID-19.
- Ensure essential workers have access to the safest child care settings possible. Provide support requested from the Early Learning Division and Department of Human Services to help sustain child care providers and create additional capacity.
- Grant emergency child care assistance to parents and caregivers who are required to work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensure any actions to support workers include the ECE workforce whether they work full-time, part-time, are self-employed, or are small business owners. Debt relief options may be necessary for providers that close or experience reduced revenue during this time.

- Provide child care vouchers to parents who must continue to work while children are kept home from school. Support the financial stability of child care providers by adjusting subsidy policies so as not to cause financial harm.
- Invest in tools for essential workers—possibly through 211 and Western Oregon University—that support access to resources. Explore options for tapping into the ECE network of providers who are out of work but could provide care to smaller groups of children in settings such as in-home care.

Beyond these immediate actions, we are ready and eager to help you answer other questions that emerge. When this crisis ends, we'll be ready to work with you to rebuild a stronger and more stable early care and education system that Oregon desperately needs.