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Supporting Immigrant Providers and Families Through Child Care Relief Funds

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Background

On March 11, 2021, President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) into law. The Act was the most recent and most significant package for child care, following the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in March 2020 and the Coronavirus Response Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) in December 2020. ARPA included historic investments for child care through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and creation of a stabilization grant program that lead child care agencies in each state will administer. States have begun planning how to implement their ARPA allocations based on the Act as well as Administration for Children and Families (ACF) guidance on the stabilization grants¹ and CCDBG subsidy funds.²

The previous four years, which included the COVID-19 pandemic, an ensuing economic crisis, and a series of anti-immigrant policies, led the country to an inflection point. Child care is a critical support for all children and families—including immigrant families who comprise a significant share of our nation's families with young children. Members of the child care workforce who have their own families also depend on child care. ARPA extended important relief for families—notably for immigrant providers and families who were left out of previous relief packages—and presents opportunities to support immigrant

communities. Because an estimated 24 percent of all children under age 6 have at least one immigrant parent, policymakers must include immigrants in their planning for child care relief funds. U.S. citizen children living in families with low incomes are eligible for child care subsidies even if their noncitizen parents are not eligible for public benefits.³ As states continue to plan, state administrators and policymakers must consider the large percentage of children in immigrant families who can benefit from these investments. As of 2015, 321,000 child care workers were immigrants, making up over 18 percent of the early care and education workforce.⁴ Since 1990, the population of immigrant child care workers has more than tripled.⁵

Some 6 million immigrant workers are employed in a broad range of industries including child care, agriculture, health care, and construction.⁶ Immigrants have been working on the frontline of the pandemic to keep Americans safe and healthy, yet many have been deprived of the same necessary supports for themselves and their families that they have been providing to others. Access to child care for immigrant families and to workforce supports for immigrant child care providers will help address the harm and trauma caused by more than a year of health crises, job losses, and educational changes.⁷ Policymakers should pair child care benefits with other priorities to interrupt historical barriers and promote overall well-being, helping immigrant families and providers to thrive.⁸ Policymakers must also prioritize addressing health and mental health issues that have arisen from over a year of a pandemic and four years of anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric.

ARPA provides two distinct opportunities to **support immigrant families with young children seeking child care** and to **support immigrant child care workers**. In determining how to distribute funds, decisionmakers must do so equitably to ensure immigrant providers and families have access to the benefits they need since these providers are critical to rebuilding and improving the child care system.

About this Brief

This brief will focus on the two child care funding streams included in ARPA: **stabilization grants of \$24 billion** and **\$15 billion for child care assistance through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)**. States are allowed to use up to 10 percent of the stabilization grants for administrative and technical assistance costs, while the remaining funds can be awarded as subgrants to providers who were open or available to provide child care services and to those who were closed due to COVID-19. The amount of subgrants are based on the provider's current costs.⁹

States can use CCDBG child care assistance funds to support families, including essential workers, regardless of income and for other programmatic purposes, similar to the CARES and CRRSA child care funds.¹⁰

Immigrant children and families' access to child care benefits

Immigrant families with young children must have adequate information and opportunities to access child care benefits. Child care is a necessary resource that supports both children and parents so that adults can return to work and provide for the family while the children are in a safe, quality environment. For many

immigrant families, particularly those who were previously excluded from economic impact payments (stimulus checks) and unemployment benefits, child care can be critical for family economic stability.

The majority of children living in immigrant households are U.S. citizens. According to federal rules, eligibility for child care benefits is based on the child's status and not that of the adults in the household.¹¹ However, mixed-status immigrant families have traditionally had less access to the child care subsidy system due to obstacles including language barriers, confusion regarding eligibility rules, fear of accessing public benefits, and lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach about eligibility and access. ARPA's funding and guidance provide the opportunity to acknowledge this paradigm and disrupt these barriers.

Immigrant providers' access to child care benefits

Child care providers have long been committed to the children, families, and communities they serve. The pandemic made this commitment even more apparent to the nation at large. Over the past year, providers have even used their own resources to provide care. Immigrant providers, who make up nearly one in five people in the child care workforce, are integral to our nation's child care system. These providers add to the diversity of the early childhood workforce, ensuring that providers reflect the rich racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the children and families they serve. To best reach immigrant communities, administrators and others involved in the child care system should use trusted community messengers to share information with families and providers about the relief available through ARPA.

Throughout the pandemic, providers—many of whom are also parents of children needing care—faced obstacles such as closings or under-enrollment, lack of supplies and resources, and financial difficulties. Using ARPA's stabilization grants, providers can offer bonuses and pay increases to their staff. Providers can also use these grants to be reimbursed for costs incurred during the pandemic, for supply-building, and for improving their facilities.¹² The guidance on stabilization grants from ACF mentions that "strategic supply-building activities will be particularly important for addressing community needs."¹³ States should consider supply-building as a means to recruit providers into the child care subsidy system and retain a diverse workforce, including immigrant providers. States should use ARPA funds to support immigrant child care providers through hiring and offering start-up grants for new child care facilities and home-based settings.

Recommendations

Supporting immigrant children and their families, along with immigrant providers, is critical in providing relief and recovery to the overall child care system and rebuilding an economy in which immigrants are an integral part.

To best meet the needs of immigrant families and providers, state agencies should focus on:

- Conducting outreach and education about eligibility and enrollment processes in immigrant communities to lessen fear and misunderstanding in accessing child care benefits. Trusted community members are the best messengers for working with immigrant communities.

States should fund immigrant-serving organizations and other community-based organizations to conduct outreach in immigrant communities and develop accessible information about child care and early education. ACF guidance on the stabilization grant program urges state decisionmakers to partner with trusted messengers and provide information about the benefits in multiple languages.¹⁴

- In addition to conducting outreach and education on eligibility and enrollment, agencies should simplify these processes to ease the burden on families. By doing so, they can also address fears that families have in applying for and accessing a range of public benefits.
- Supporting mental health services for immigrant workers and families by utilizing the ability for state to reserve funds for specific purposes, including mental health supports, or directly through stabilization grants to providers. The pandemic has brought stress, fear, and loss to many workers and families. States and programs have the flexibility to use stabilization grants to establish mental health services for providers and to host trainings on trauma-informed care as children and families return to care settings. More broadly, states can support overall mental health in immigrant communities by using child care funding to support child care providers as they meet the needs of immigrant families with young children. This includes:
 - Actively enrolling and retaining immigrant providers in the child care subsidy system.
 - Prioritizing families with low incomes when establishing the state's definition of 'essential worker' with respect to child care funding. Explicitly including immigrant families with young children in that definition will support this community of workers and reduce perceived barriers in accessing child care benefits.
 - Targeting stabilization grant funds to family and home-based child care settings in immigrant communities.
 - Providing immigrant providers with linguistically appropriate professional development opportunities, licensing support, and start-up grants.
- Understanding the data. To begin targeting resources, states will need to assess the total number of immigrant families in states and communities and those currently not being served. ARPA's 10 percent set-aside for technical assistance is an opportunity to create, improve, and/or coordinate state data systems.
- Ensuring that the voices of immigrant communities are reflected in decision-making. Consider listening sessions, surveys, and other methods of eliciting input from immigrant providers and families to design programming and understand community need in allocating grants and funding.

Concluding Thoughts

States have the ability through CRRSA and ARPA funding to implement strategies to support immigrants and immigrant families with young children who both use and provide child care. These families and providers—who comprise large percentages of the child care sector and contribute exponentially to the growth and health of their communities—urgently need support. In order to stabilize the child care industry and build a more equitable system, state policymakers should use this historic federal funding to support immigrant communities with investments in child care, nutrition, and other reliefs such as housing. Renewing a focus on immigrant communities serves children and families and builds our country back better, equitably, and toward a stronger tomorrow.

Endnotes

¹ Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care. Information Memorandum ARP Act Child Care Stabilization Funds. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/occ/CCDF-ACF-IM-2021-02.pdf>

² Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care. Information Memorandum ARP Act Child Care Stabilization Funds.

³ Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, Pamela K. Joshi, Emily Ruskin, Abigail N. Walters, and Nomi Sofer. Health Affairs. Restoring An Inclusionary Safety Net for Children In Immigrant Families: A Review Of Three Social Policies <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.00206>

⁴ Maki Park, Margie McHugh, Jie Zong, and Jeanne Batalova. Migration Policy Institute. Immigrant and Refugee Workers in the Early Childhood Field. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/ECEC-Workforce-Report.pdf>

⁵ Park, et.al., Immigrant and Refugee Workers in the Early Childhood Field.

⁶ Madison Allen. Center for Law and Social Policy. States and Localities Step Up to Support Immigrant Families When Congress Fails. <https://www.clasp.org/blog/states-and-localities-step-support-immigrant-families-when-congress-fails>

⁷ Rocio Perez and Adewale Maye. Center for Law and Social Policy. Essential and Invisible: The Urgent Case for Immigrant Essential Workers. <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/essential-and-invisible-urgent-case-supporting-immigrant-essential-workers>

⁸ Hannah Matthews and Wendy Cervantes. Center for Law and Social Policy. Stop the Harm and Start Healing for Children in Immigrant Families. <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/stop-harm-and-start-healing-children-immigrant-families>

⁹ States must obligate, or commit, their ARPA stabilization grant funds by September 30, 2022 and spend them by September 30, 2024.

¹⁰ Agencies must obligate their ARPA supplemental CCDBG funds by September 30, 2023 and spend them by September 30, 2024.

¹¹ Hannah Matthews. Center for Law and Social Policy. Immigrant Eligibility for Federal Child Care and Early Education Programs. <https://www.clasp.org/publications/fact-sheet/immigrant-eligibility-federal-child-care-and-early-education-programs>

¹² Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care. ARP Act Child Care Stabilization Grants. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/policy-guidance/ccdf-acf-im-2021-02>

¹³ Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care. ARP Act Child Care Stabilization Grants.

¹⁴ Matthews, et.al., Stop the Harm and Start Healing for Children in Immigrant Families.