

CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING: ADDRESSING THE URGENT CRISIS AND INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

The strength of our nation is tied to the strength of our nation's child care and early learning programs.¹ The health of our nation is tied to the health and well-being of all families. The success of our nation is tied to the recognition of our shared responsibility to give each child a strong start in life, which includes ensuring the early educators who do this essential work as part of a 21st century caregiving and education workforce are valued and supported. A strong, equitable child care and early learning system not only benefits children, families, and early educators, but also keeps women in the workforce, increases racial equity, and strengthens our economy for everyone.

For these reasons, the undersigned 187 organizations provide the following recommendations urging the Administration to make child care and early learning a national priority by:

- Passing comprehensive COVID relief with substantial and targeted support for child care, Head Start, and preschool programs;
- Including a big, bold proposal to provide affordable high-quality child care and early learning for all in the President's Budget, and providing mandatory and discretionary funding to achieve the vision; and
- Establishing a new senior-level White House position focused on child care and early learning, supporting robust staffing in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Department of Education (ED), and creating a national grassroots advisory council for child care and early learning.

This document describes the critical actions needed to ensure that children and families in our country have access to an essential resource that supports their health, education, and economic security. Right now key child care and early learning programs—child care, Head Start, and preschool—are in crisis. Even before the pandemic, families struggled to find and afford high-quality care that nurtured their children and supported their development, and the child care sector operated on razor-thin margins. At the same time, early educators—disproportionately women of color and immigrant women—have always been paid very low wages, the result of a historic lack of public investment in a financially stable, equitable child care and early learning system. Now, child care and early learning programs have been devastated by the pandemic and are balancing on the precipice of irreparable damage that would hurt children's development, set back women's labor force participation by decades, and hold back the entire nation's economic recovery.

¹ Children are learning no matter what we call the setting—whether child care, preschool, or Head Start. We use “child care and early learning” throughout this document to refer to the various settings and programs in which children both receive care and learn and that support parents' ability to be in the workforce, school, or training.

The crisis is worse for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)² communities and communities with low incomes, which already lacked affordable, high-quality care options before the pandemic and have been hit the hardest by these losses. It is critical for our economic recovery to build back a better, more equitable system that works for children, families, educators, and employers. Doing so will require immediate, sustained, and large-scale federal investments and equitable policies implemented at multiple levels.

Investments to Meet Communities' Child Care and Early Learning Needs During the Pandemic

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis is straining our already vastly underfunded child care and early learning programs, even as these programs are serving as the bedrocks of their communities. These programs require significant additional federal resources to weather the pandemic, and the new Administration must request and work with Congress to swiftly pass a sizable, comprehensive relief and recovery package grounded in the needs of communities. Below we outline the unique needs of child care, Head Start, and preschool programs—and the federal resources required to address these needs during the pandemic.

Child Care

The child care system has been decimated by the COVID-19 crisis, which threatens to wipe out nearly half of all licensed child care slots nationwide.³ Many parents have lost work or are essential workers in industries paying low wages. They are struggling to pay already hard-to-afford child care fees and find safe, quality care that meets their work schedules and other needs. Many providers—operating with reduced enrollment—cannot pay themselves, their staff, or other operational costs like rent, or afford the facility modifications needed to comply with COVID-19 regulations, as their already-thin margins are untenably reduced. For home-based child care providers, the impact is even more dire—they are on the verge of losing the homes in which they live and operate their business, threatening their housing stability and their economic livelihood. We know the pain caused by this child care crisis is not felt equally: since women of color hold a disproportionate share of child care jobs, job losses likely impact these women and their families most of all.

The relief package must include **at least \$50 billion dedicated to a child care stabilization fund and \$7 billion in funding through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)**. This funding will help stabilize the sector for approximately 5-6 months.⁴ Such a stabilization fund should align with the structures proposed in the House-passed *Child Care is Essential Act* and *HEROES 2*, including not requiring a state match, supporting the workforce, and reducing costs for families.⁵ As the country looks to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, additional resources and funding beyond these immediate and urgent stabilization needs will be required to rebuild the supply of child care providers and educators, and lay the foundation for the long overdue transformative overhaul of our child care system described in more detail below.

² For Indigenous communities, a critical aspect of support is fully funding programs specific to these communities, such as American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start and Early Head Start programs that provide holistic and culturally appropriate models of instruction and operate in fulfillment of the Federal Government's unique trust responsibility to Tribal Nations that flows from the government-to-government relationship between these sovereign entities.

³ Center for American Progress, "[Coronavirus Pandemic Could Lead to Permanent Loss of Nearly 4.5 Million Child Care Slots](#)," April 2020.

⁴ It is estimated that at least \$9.6 billion is needed each month for the duration of the crisis to fully fund existing providers in the child care system. See: CLASP, NWLC, and Aaron Sojourner, "[Child Care is Key to our Economic Recovery](#)," April 2020. Please note that this estimate was derived before additional strains were put on the child care system, including the impact of K-12 virtual and hybrid schooling models on caregiving. As such, it should be treated as the low bound of need.

⁵ In addition, such a fund should have clear guidelines about what states can and should use the funding for and ensure that funding is distributed equitably, and HHS should issue guidance quickly after relief is passed to provide clarity to states.

Head Start and Early Head Start

While Head Start and Early Head Start programs continued their invaluable services to children and families throughout the pandemic, compelling quick action and adaptation, the reality is that extraordinary costs are accumulating, and Head Start is now facing a devastating funding shortfall. If these needs remain unanswered, services will suffer and investments in quality will be deferred as program strain to meet COVID-19 needs. The children served by Head Start and Early Head Start—those experiencing poverty or homelessness, those in foster care, Indigenous children, and children of migrant and seasonal workers—will lose critical services, including health screenings and referrals, mental health supports and opportunities for intervention if local programs are not adequately resourced to meet the increased costs of operating amidst COVID-19.

The relief package must include **\$11.2 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start** to meet sanitation, personnel costs, and infrastructure needs to ensure that these programs are able to safely serve families during the pandemic.⁶ This funding is critical to ensuring an equitable approach to COVID-19 relief, particularly for families experiencing poverty, enabling local Head Start programs to safely support working parents' child care needs, return a focus on child well-being, and support children in receiving critical medical care, including vaccinations, mental health supports, and early screenings.⁷ We estimate that this funding will provide support for Head Start and Early Head Start programs through the end of FY 2021.

Preschool

Preschool, a critical component of the nation's early learning system, is also struggling during COVID. Programs are facing low enrollment, insufficient support to safely serve children and support staff, and closures at many school sites, alongside new demands for remote learning. On top of these new demands, strains on state and local budgets threaten to reduce already low funding for these essential programs. Therefore, we request that the relief package include **specific support for state preschool programs as part of investments in K-12 systems, as well as state and local fiscal relief.**⁸ Within this investment, it is critical that states not reduce preschool slots below the number of slots in the 2018-2019 school year.

Funding That Lays the Foundation for Bold Reform

These pandemic investments are urgently needed—but they are not the only investments necessary to build a stronger, more equitable system. While the ultimate goal is a world where policymakers pass and implement the transformative legislative vision described below, the President's Budget and appropriations bills provide an annual opportunity to additionally invest in existing child care and early learning programs so our country can have the 21st century caregiving and education workforce it needs, so parents—especially mothers—can return to work, and so all children are nurtured and cared for in high-quality settings.

The FY 2022 President's Budget and final appropriations bills should take advantage of these opportunities each year to lay the foundation for the bold, comprehensive visions. Therefore, the FY 2022 President's Budget should include significant annual increases in discretionary spending for existing programs, such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start and Early Head Start, preschool, and others, that serve as down payments to stabilize and lay the foundation for the larger visionary mandatory proposal. At a minimum, such annual increases must build on pandemic relief funding and incorporate pandemic policy changes into child care and early learning programs to avoid severe cliffs in funding when the relief investments dry up and to prevent destabilizing policy changes for families and educators and invest in structural reforms included

⁶ This estimate includes the existing, as yet unmet, \$1.7B relief ask for Head Start and Early Head Start which was based on estimated need through December 2020.

⁷ This estimate does not include expanding Head Start services to newly eligible families, additional insurance needs, or other anomalous, localized costs.

⁸ For example, the [Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act](#) provides \$33 billion through the Governor's Emergency Relief Fund to help support state education programs, including preK.

in the legislative vision. The budget must also invest in other critical programs that support young children and their families in the earliest years of life, including but not limited to Parts C and B (Section 619) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Child Care Access Means Parents in School, Preschool Development Grants, and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program as well as significantly increase investments in housing, health care, nutrition, and the range of assistance children and families need to thrive. We look forward to sharing specific program funding level requests with you in short order.

Bold, Funded Transformative Change for Child Care and Early Learning

In addition to providing immediate relief to the child care and early learning sector in the first relief package of a new administration and using discretionary investments to lay the foundation each year for bold change, the President's first and subsequent budgets should include the funding and policy mechanisms needed for an ambitious, transformative legislative overhaul of the existing system to achieve child care and early learning for all. This vision must increase racial equity, create a 21st century caregiving and education workforce, and provide the mandatory funding necessary to accomplish this vision. The President should also call on Congress to introduce this legislation in early 2021 and work to secure its swift passage.

Such legislation must ensure, at a minimum, that:

- All families can find and afford high-quality care at a setting of their choice.
- Mixed-delivery settings (whether in centers, family child care homes, or with family, friend, and neighbor caregivers) that meet families' diverse needs and preferences are supported and resourced.
- Resources are first invested in, and greater resources are provided for, underserved and historically marginalized communities, and the use of contracts and grants for the provision of child care services is widely encouraged to expand supply and promote stability for child care providers.
- Income and other eligibility requirements are sufficiently expansive to meet the needs of diverse communities,⁹ and to provide care for children up to age 13 as well as older children with disabilities.
- Early childhood professionals in all setting types have quality jobs, including: living wages¹⁰ and benefits with pathways to higher wages equivalent to similarly qualified K-12 educators; access to affordable, high-quality professional development, preparation, and apprenticeships, including higher education degree programs in early childhood education and other credentials, with widely available scholarship funding and other support; the opportunity to join a professional organization including a union; and industry-wide labor standards are set through wage and standards boards.
- Funding is provided through direct assistance and sufficient to guarantee services for all eligible children and families without requiring annual Congressional action.
- Funding to providers covers the cost of offering high-quality care, using a definition of quality that is equitable, inclusive, age appropriate, culturally affirming, and co-developed with practitioners, academics, families, providers and educators.¹¹

9 Including (but not limited to): student parents, families experiencing homelessness, families of children with disabilities, parents with disabilities, migrant and seasonal workers, and immigrant families

10 Or equivalent income.

11 This must include prohibiting suspensions and expulsions in early childhood settings.

- Investments are included for facilities, transportation, and other vital components of child care infrastructure and supply-building.¹²
- Simplified systems allow families to access assistance easily and conveniently, with intentional outreach to underserved communities and formalized coordination between funding streams and agencies to reflect how communities experience the system.¹³
- Stakeholder engagement of families, providers, and educators is built into the system design and implementation.

Experts have estimated the cost of such a program could range from \$140 billion to \$170 billion per year at full implementation, equivalent to one-quarter of the defense budget.¹⁴ A sustained investment of this scale would value the educators doing this essential work, provide high-quality care for all children, and make early education and care affordable and accessible for all families.

Our nation critically needs a unified early care and education system that meets childrens' and families' needs beginning at birth while also supporting a well-qualified, well-compensated early childhood workforce in diverse settings for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children. This means building a comprehensive child care and early learning system that provides equitable resources and supports to child care, Head Start, and preschool for all. Just as families do not live in silos, neither should these programs. This means, for example, that the design and implementation of a universal preschool system must complement and coordinate with programs and educators caring for infants and toddlers. Failure to thoughtfully design a comprehensive system can unintentionally harm certain segments of the system who are left behind. Such a system must also include robust mixed-delivery options in child care centers, Head Start programs, schools, family child care homes, and with family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

Key Administrative Actions to Prioritize Child Care and Early Learning

It is essential for the Administration to demonstrate child care and early learning is a high priority by using the bully pulpit to promote it. Notably, the President and Vice President should mention child care in key speeches, including the inauguration/State of the Union (SOTU), and invite a child care provider to be a guest at SOTU. The Administration should also highlight child care and early learning in events laying out the first 100-days agenda that includes pandemic relief and a vision for long-term rebuilding. While raising visibility is not a substitute for increased funding or policy change, it is critical to underscore the Administration's support for child care and early learning.

To demonstrate this commitment, the Administration should create a **new senior-level position in the Domestic Policy Council (DPC)** by the end of January 2021 **with full responsibility for child care and early learning issues**. This individual would lead the Administration's cross-sector and cross-agency efforts to advance a bold administrative and legislative agenda on child care and early learning. To ensure this position is able to focus on child care and early learning, the person's portfolio should only include child care and early learning and not other income supports, K-12, or higher education. This position, however, will be responsible for working with other DPC and White House staff on related issues that affect child care and early learning.

¹² Including in rural communities, for care outside of traditional hours, and in child care deserts.

¹³ Including through Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) and other community-based organizations.

¹⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine [Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education](#) (2018) and Mark Zandi and Sophia Koropecjy, Moody's Analytics, [Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act: Helping Families and the Economy](#) (February 2019).

Moreover, the Administration should prioritize robustly staffing the offices of Child Care (OCC) and Head Start (OHS) at HHS and rebuild the Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) at HHS to coordinate with the Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labor, and other relevant agencies.

The core structural and funding issues facing the child care and early learning system require legislative action. But, the White House has other ways, working with HHS, to use its administrative authority to ensure child care programs are implemented more equitably in states now and to develop and evaluate best practices to inform the development and implementation of a future system grounded in equity. To ensure that agencies are considering the full suite of policies and practices they can use prior to additional Congressional action, the White House should issue **an executive order (EO) on child care and early learning** within the first month to task all relevant agencies with identifying administrative changes or new administrative actions within 90 days of the EO's announcement. This will signal a commitment to stabilizing child care programs, improving job quality for educators, and supporting families' diverse child care and early learning needs—while simultaneously working to secure funding through Congress to achieve these goals. Agencies should propose concrete administrative actions and changes in response to this EO that meet the following goals:

- Help build the research base, gather important data, and identify best practices;
- Advance gender and racial equity;
- Provide meaningful engagement and consultation of people directly impacted; and
- Prioritize the needs of historically marginalized and under-resourced communities.

In addition, one of the key learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic is that our child care and early learning system was neither designed to be responsive to, nor driven by, provider and family needs. While legislative fixes and significant additional federal funding are the chief solutions to these issues, we must reckon with the lack of governmental structures—at national, regional or state levels—that intentionally center communities in the design and implementation of systems they lead. Instead, existing structures totally ignore or otherwise prevent meaningful feedback and input from families, providers, and educators who are the foundation and architects of a high-quality child care and early learning system.

Therefore, we propose the creation of a **new national child care and early learning grassroots advisory body**¹⁵ within OECD co-chaired by the OECD Deputy Assistant Secretary, or their designee, and a grassroots leader. The OECD, OCC, and OHS should consult with, and create a new process for input from, this new body in developing and revising policies and regulations, monitoring, issuing guidance, and working with regional offices and states on implementation. The newly created advisory body should include a diverse range of families, providers, educators, and other stakeholders who are directly impacted by the child care and early learning system. This representation should, at a minimum, ensure representation from diverse regional geographies, settings (home-based, center-based, and family, friend, and neighbor care providers and educators), as well as families who qualify for child care assistance, families of children with disabilities, parents with disabilities, BIPOC families, immigrant and mixed-status families, justice-impacted parents or caregivers, children in foster care, indigenous communities, LGBTQIA families and caregivers, and families and providers in rural areas.

¹⁵ Without an exemption, this council will need to comply with the Federal Advisory Committee Act's notice, diversity, public comment, and other requirements.

9to5

A Better Balance

Advocates for Children of NJ

Alabama Institute for Social Justice

All Our Kin

American Federation of Teachers

Arizona Association for the Education of Young Children

Association Provedoras Unidas

California Alternative Payment Program Association (CAPPA)

California Association for the Education of Young Children

California Child Care Resource & Referral Network

Caring Across Generations

Center for Economic and Policy Research

Center for Parental Leave Leadership

Central Valley Children's Services Network

Chicano Federation of San Diego County

Child Action, Inc.

Child Care Aware® of America

CHILD CARE LAW CENTER

Child Care Resource Center

Child Care Services Association

Child Development Resources of Ventura County, Inc.

Child Welfare League of America

Children's Resource & Referral Santa Barbara County

Children's Council of San Francisco

Children's Forum

Children's HealthWatch

Children's Home Society of California

Children's Institute

Children's Resource & Referral of Santa Barbara County

Citizen Action of New York

CLASP

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

Coalition for Social Justice

Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)

Common Good Iowa

Community Change Action

Community Child Care Council (4Cs) of Alameda County

Community Child Care Council of Sonoma County

Connecticut Voices for Children

Council for Professional Recognition

CQEL - Californians for Quality Early Learning

Crystal Stairs, Inc.

CT Association for the Education of Young Children

Del Norte Child Care Council

Early Care & Learning Council

Early Childhood Funders Collaborative

Early Edge California

ECE on the Move

Economic Opportunity Institute

Educare Learning Network

Educare New Orleans

Empire State Campaign for Child Care

EveryChild California

Excellence and Equity in Early Childhood Education

Family & Childcare Resources of N.E.W.

Family Child Care Association of Maine

Family Forward Oregon

Family Resource & Referral Center

Family Values at Work

Fight Crime: Invest In Kids & ReadyNation

First 5 Association of CA

First 5 California
First Focus Campaign for Children
Florida Association for the Education of Young Children
Florida Family Child Care Home Association
Florida Head Start Association
Florida Policy Institute
Forum for Youth Investment
Futures Without Violence
GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students
Georgia Association for the Education of Young Children
GoAEYC- Golden corridor Association for the Education of Young Children
Harlem Children's Zone
Hawai'i Children's Action Network
Hively
Hollaback!
HomeGrown
IDEA Infant & Toddler Coodinators Association
Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children (Illinois AEYC)
Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children
Institute for Childhood Preparedness
Institute for Women's Policy Research
Jumpstart
Kansas Action for Children
Kids Kare Schools Inc.
Kingsley House, Inc.
Let's Grow Kids
Louisiana Policy Institute for Children
MAAEYC
Main Street Alliance
Main Street Alliance of Vermont
Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

Maine Head Start Directors Association

Maine Women's Lobby

Many Languages One Voice

Maryland Association for the Education of Young Children

Maryland Family Network

Merced County Office of Education

Michigan League for Public Policy

Mid-Day Women's Alliance of Appleton WI

Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative

MomsRising/MamásConPoder

Mothering Justice

National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)

National Association for the Education of Young Children

National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education

National Black Child Development Institute

National Child Care Association

National Children's Facilities Network (NCFN)

National Council of Jewish Women

National Employment Law Project

National Head Start Association

National Indian Head Start Directors Association

National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association

National Organization for Women

National Partnership for Women & Families

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

National Women's Law Center

NC Child

New America Education Policy Program

New America, Better Life Lab

New Georgia Project

New York Association for the Education of Young Children

North Carolina Early Education Coalition
North Coast Opportunities
Northern Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children
Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children
Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association
OLÉ Education Fund
Options for Learning
Oregon Association for the Education of Young Children
Oregon Community Foundation
Our Future WV
Oxfam America
Parent Voices CA
ParentChild+
Parents as Teachers
Partnership for America's Children
Pathways LA
PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union
PEACH Early Childhood Higher Education Collaborative
Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children
Pennsylvania Child Care Association
Planned Parenthood South Atlantic
PRE4CLE
Primrose School at The Denver Tech Center
Professional Family Child Care Alliance of Georgia
Ramsey Educational Development Institute (REDI)
Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children
San Diego for Every Child
Service Employees International Union
Solano Family & Children's Services
Southern Early Childhood Association
Southern Maine Workers' Center

SPACeS In Action
Start Early
Strategies for Children
Supporting Families Together Association
Teaching Strategies
Tennessee Association for Children's Early Education
The Children's Agenda
The Council for Professional Recognition
The Davis Street Community Center, Inc.
The Division of Early Childhood of the Council of Exceptional Children
The Imagine Institute
The Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF)
The Resource Connection
The Wisconsin Partnership
Think Small
Trying Together
Union for Reform Judaism
United Parent Leaders Action Network (UPLAN)
Utah Association for the Education of Young Children
Valley Oak Children's Services
Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children
Voices for Virginia's Children
Washington Area Women's Foundation
West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
WNY Women's Foundation
Women Employed
Women of Reform Judaism
Women's Law Project
YWCA USA
ZERO TO THREE