EveryChild CALIFORNIA | Association of Leaders Advancing Early Learning

Investment in Early Care and Education Programs Needed Beyond COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 crisis has impacted all corners of our economy, our communities and changed everyday life across our state, creating barriers for working families to function in even the most essential way. As California grapples with the evolving pandemic and families are adjusting to this "new normal," it is essential to recognize early education and child care services as a critical component to combat this crisis. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the desperate need for early education and child care in this state. Parents working in low-wage jobs are especially impacted - they have no choice but to continue going to work to make ends meet.

In order for early care and education programs to continue to operate in 2021-2022, EveryChild California is requesting the following:

- Hold Harmless Title 5 Subsidized Center Based Contracts (CCTR, CSPP, CFCC, CMIG, CHAN) – As programs re-open, they are being held to social distancing rules and reduced capacity. We estimate that programs are running at approximately 30-40% capacity. Capacity of programs will be down for the 2021-22 year, therefore, fully funding contracted centers with a hold harmless clause on contracts would allow programs to maintain their full contract funding while providing care to children under current guidance, and to increase enrollment during the aftermath of the outbreak.
- Group Size – As restrictions on group size are eased, new recommendations on group size should be based upon already existing developmentally appropriate ratios, and group size should be a multiplier of said ratios.
- Flexibility of Document Collection – In order to enroll students in early education programs, contractors must verify income and residency eligibility through the collection of documents that show such eligibility, including utility bills, rental agreements, and birth certificates. However, due to California's shelter-in-place order and the digital divide that exists within our communities, many families will be unable to provide this documentation digitally. Therefore, programs should have the flexibility to enroll children, and be held harmless in using copies, photos and facsimiles of documents for the duration of the phased in opening of California for subsidized center-based and Alternative Payment Programs.
- Maintain Current Service Level –With the nation's declining economy and millions of people out of work at this time, it is unlikely that family situations will improve enough to disqualify eligibility, or they will be seeking employment or have variable schedules. Because of this, contractors should be allowed to carry over the eligibility from 2020-21 into the 2021-22 fiscal year and parents should maintain their current level of service. Reports in decreases in income should be allowed in order to reduce family fees.
- 2019-2020 Expansion Funds for CSPP and CCTR Contracts – As part of the signed 2019-2020 budget, $50 million was awarded to CCTR with $31 million allocated in current year to expand access to care. CDE released a notice that the funding would be delayed until July 1, but contractors have not yet been notified if they were awarded the expansion funding. We ask that CCTR and CSPP expansion funding letters as part of the 2019-2020 budget, be released immediately.
- Grants for the Private Sector – The majority of the child care supply in California is private licensed centers, many of whom do not take any subsidy. During this pandemic, programs for families paying for their own care are equally in crisis mode, as their model of business is based on full enrollment. With reduced capacities, private providers will need either restart grants or bridge grants to keep them whole during this time, so we do not lose our critical child care infrastructure.

Early childhood education programs are essential for the millions of children and families they serve and are particularly crucial during this emergency public health and economic crises. As the State of California phases in re-opening, early learning and child care programs are going to become even more critical to our state's infrastructure. Early care and learning programs' success is contingent upon receiving the robust investment they need, to take necessary steps and precautions to re-open or continue serving children and families. We urge lawmakers to act swiftly to allocate substantial emergency flexible funding directly to the child care and early learning system in California for both subsidized and private programs.

Questions: Contact Nina Buthee, Executive Director, EveryChild California, nina@everychildca.org.