



The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair
 Senate Budget Committee
 State Capitol Building, Room 5050
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair
 Assembly Budget Committee
 State Capitol Building, Room 6026
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Mitchell and Ting,

The Early Care and Education (ECE) Coalition is a partnership of early childhood education advocacy and service organizations working together to secure access to high quality early learning and care for low-income children and families in California.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) has affected nearly every facet of daily life for Californians. Most children and families have been staying at home to slow the COVID-19 spread and the state’s economy has been severely hit and massive layoffs have occurred as nonessential businesses have been forced to close. As California grapples with the evolving pandemic and families are adjusting to this “new normal,” it is critical to recognize child care services as an essential component to combat this crisis.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the desperate need for child care in the state. Indefinite school closures in response to the pandemic have left many parents scrambling to find safe, affordable child care to be able to go to work. Parents working in low-wage jobs are especially impacted - they have no choice but to continue going to work to make ends meet. The current ECE system, which has already been struggling to meet the child care needs of working families, has been further compounded by this crisis.

Amidst this crisis, child care providers are struggling to keep their doors open – some have already closed and most are teetering on the edge of closing. The volatility and disruptions caused by COVID-19, from fluctuating enrollment to having employees at high-risk of serious illness from the virus, have put child care providers in a precarious situation. Furthermore, because child care providers operate on razor-thin financial margins, extended closures will likely put them out of business permanently.

Now more than ever, California needs to expand and sustain access to child care services to help our most vulnerable families and child care providers through this unprecedented crisis. Child care has been and continues to be the backbone of our economy that allows parents to go to work and keep society functioning.

Recognizing the immediate relief that families and child care providers need at this time, the federal COVID-19 stimulus package that recently passed provides a substantial increase in Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds. We ask that CCDBG funds are dedicated to expanding access to child care and be distributed immediately to support our essential workforce.

The ECE Coalition budget proposals outlined below are not exclusively on behalf of the ECE community. Rather, we believe that these proposals are necessary for our communities, the economy, and the health care system to survive the COVID-19 pandemic.

We respectfully urge you to consider the following actions:

Provider Support Services:

- Extend the hold harmless provision for child development programs in SB 117 through Budget Year 2020-21. SB 117 provides a measure of stability sorely needed by the ECE system, given the amount of uncertainty during this crisis, and an extension of it will further stabilize our fragile system.
- Declare private child care providers are eligible for unemployment insurance. Most of the state's Family Child Care Home (FCCH) providers are women over the age of 65 who will need unemployment benefits to get by.
- Create a relief package to provide compensation to center-based and family child care providers who had to close their business as a result of COVID-19. Providers should be compensated for the full loss of wages for normal business operations.
- Provide a sick leave pool for FCCHs who have employees. If an employee falls ill, the provider needs to be able to provide payment for sick leave and afford to pay for a substitute.
- Give child care agencies the ability to reserve their funds to continue paying salaries for teachers who aren't able work in the classroom due to school closures.
- Provide child care providers with hazard pay on top of base hourly wages, since they are continuing to work during the COVID-19 pandemic and their health and safety are being put at risk.
- Provide funding and/or reimbursement for Head Start/Early Head Start programs that use their facilities for pop-up daycare centers and are unable to use Head Start funding to serve non-Head Start children and families.
- Provide provider access to essential supplies, such as diapers, milk, thermometers, and cleaning supplies, during this crisis.

Family Supports:

- Provide additional child care spaces with CCDBG and Prop 64 funding.
- Extend the suspension of child care parent co-pays and fees through Budget Year 2020-21 and ensure that providers are kept whole if fees are suspended.

We must work together to make immediate and significant investments in the ECE system to provide support to our California's young children, their families, and providers in this time of crisis.

Sincerely,

ECE Coalition

CC: Assemblymember Kevin McCarty
Senator Richard Roth
Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #2 on Education Finance
Members, Senate Budget Subcommittee #1 on Education