

March 19, 2020

Dear Members of the Texas Congressional Delegation,

We, the undersigned Texas organizations, write to request significant attention to and investment in the child care and early learning sector as Congress works to craft a third COVID-19 economic relief package.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a longstanding truth: child care is one of the most critical institutions for our state's employers, families, and children's health and education. However, if Congress fails to support our child care providers and educators throughout this crisis and beyond, temporary closures may become permanent.

The rapid spread of the coronavirus is threatening to put this already vulnerable industry into a tailspin that could end Texas child care as we know it. In order to help Texas families, support small business owners, and respond effectively to this crisis, lawmakers must ensure there is sufficient funding to maintain our nation's quality child care supply today and into the future.

In Texas, 45 percent of families live in a child care desert, meaning they have little or no access to safe and quality child care. Child care providers across the country are already operating on very thin margins; extended closures over the next several weeks or months without significant funding will put a substantial percentage of them out of business permanently, exacerbating the realities of the widespread child care deserts as they exist today.

Many families affected by COVID-19 will be unable to pay child care tuition due to loss of income, unforeseen health care expenses, inability to leave home, or other COVID-related reasons. This lost revenue could prove disastrous for Texas child care.

According to a recent survey of child care providers conducted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC):

- 28% of Texas respondents say they would not survive closing for more than two weeks without significant public investment and support that would allow them to compensate and retain staff, pay rent, and cover other fixed costs.
- 26% of Texas respondents would not survive a closure of any length of time without these supports.
- Approximately 1 in 4 Texas respondents (59% of whom are in community-based child care centers and 26% of whom are family child care homes) are losing income because they are paid by attendance rather than enrollment and 56% are losing income based on families' own inability to pay.

While a lack of access to child care during this crisis will be a challenge for all Texans, it will be especially difficult for parents who work in jobs that aren't conducive to telework. These workers are largely in the service sector and typically earn lower wages. It's critical that Congress take steps to ensure stability among child care providers during and after the coronavirus pandemic.

In the third COVID-19 federal relief bill, we request the following:

- Provide flexible emergency funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start, and Early Head Start to ensure minimal disruptions in these critical services for low-income families.
- Ensure child care providers who are closed have access to federal funding that will allow them to pay staff and cover fixed costs.
- Ensure that child care providers who are staying open during the crisis have the support and supplies necessary to do so and that the children attending their programs – particularly children of first responders, health care providers, and other essential personnel – are receiving quality assistance.
- Provide federal assistance to establish and provide paid sick and family leave for child care workers during this public health emergency.
- Accompany all child care system closures with additional, necessary policies and funding that allows for access to unemployment compensation for all staff who work in center-based child care or own/operate/are staff of family child care homes.
- Provide funding to cover the increased risks, pay, and costs of maintaining services to support child care programs that are being asked to remain open to serve essential and front-line workers
- Ensure emergency, disaster funding under the Stafford Act has the flexibility to provide direct funding assistance to all types of child care providers (including, home-based, center-based, non-profit and for-profit) to address immediate needs such as emergency staffing, costs associated with cleaning and sanitizing facilities, and providing training and support to staff.

Texas child care programs are essential for the more than 1.1 million children and families they serve and are particularly crucial during this public health and economic crisis. Their success is contingent upon receiving the robust investment they need to take necessary steps and precautions. We urge lawmakers to act swiftly to allocate substantial emergency flexible funding directly to the child care and early learning system in this country. Thank you for doing all you can to ensure Texas child care endures through this crisis and beyond.

Sincerely,

Camp Fire First Texas
Child Care Associates
Children at Risk
Dallas Early Education Alliance
Early Learning Alliance
Early Matters Dallas
Early Matters Greater Austin
First3Years

Texans Care for Children
Texas Association for the Education of Young Children
Texas Licensed Child Care Association
Texas Pediatric Society, the Texas Chapter of the AAP
United Way for Greater Austin
United Ways of Texas