

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Chris Sununu  
Governor  
State of New Hampshire  
107 North Main Street  
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Governor Sununu,

First, we want to thank you for your strong leadership during this time of great uncertainty and stress. As partners in the early care and education sector, we have been fortunate to work with you to ensure New Hampshire's children, families, and those that care for them are supported, healthy, and thriving. Now more than ever, we must continue to work together to respond to this unprecedented threat to our communities, ensuring the viability of the early care and education sector and support for providers and parents in this time of crisis.

This is a crisis for childcare and for our state's frontline workers. We need to use all the tools available to us for a comprehensive response to support this vital sector - including providers and families. These new investments must come with specific policy changes to support the provision of care as providers face significant disruptions in child enrollment; parents face uncertain work futures; and local and state governments look to ensure care for workers providing essential services during this time of crisis. Below, we have outlined some critical steps we can take immediately within the current structure.

**We must ensure childcare providers that are closed have access to funding that will allow them to pay staff and cover fixed costs.** We should immediately look to expand eligibility and reimbursement rates in our state's Child Care & Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program. We must support hazardous duty pay for childcare workers, and support business interruption grants for centers. Childcare providers vary widely in their current structures and funding streams. No single financial tool will work for all providers, thus it is essential that childcare be included in all available recovery programs.

**Second, we need to make sure that providers that are staying open during the crisis can operate safely and support the families they serve.** Childcare centers must have the support necessary to operate safely and serve the children attending their programs comprehensively – particularly children of first responders, health care providers, and other essential personnel. Childcare centers need immediate access to additional staff for screenings, personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies, consistent public health communications, and other practical supports to ensure safe and effective operations.

**Third, we must provide assistance to childcare – just like any other small business receiving relief – to sustain the market today and into the future.** In the face of this crisis, we need to increase pay and other protections and benefits for those providing emergency care. As federal funding from the economic stimulus package becomes available to the states, please ensure the childcare sector receives some of these much-needed financial resources.

In order to achieve the immediate goals outlined about, specific actions need to be taken.

- **Support for Centers that Stay Open:** Ensure that center that stay open to help support frontline workers have access to safety materials, staff, and services needed to fully support the community.
- **Childcare Subsidy:** Permanently shift to pay providers utilizing childcare scholarships based on **enrollment**, not attendance. Open the CCDBG state plan to expand eligibility and income levels to meet the needs of the current workforce.
- **Immediate Investment in Statewide Coordination of Childcare for Frontline and Essential Workers:** Fund and leverage Childcare Aware of New Hampshire to coordinate childcare services with essential frontline workers who desperately need safe care for their children. This needs to include public health guidance regarding safe practices and emergency action steps for childcare center COVID-19 outbreaks.
- **Waive Cost Share for Parents:** Federal guidance for CCDBG allows for a waiver of cost share for parents. We need to offer clear directions to centers to waive cost share for parents.
- **Support Operational Expenses:** Childcare centers rely heavily on full pay parents who may not be utilizing childcare due to COVID-19. Provide a comprehensive stimulus package to relieve the burden placed on full pay parents who are not able to continue to pay for childcare slots in closed centers and parents who are no longer using childcare because of COVID-19 based changes in circumstance.
- **Include Childcare Workers in all Employee Benefit Programs.** As we expand access to unemployment compensation for non-profits and the self-employed, childcare workers must be eligible for “hazardous duty” pay and other benefits. We need to support childcare workers with resources in order to keep environments safe and healthy, help centers adjust to new hours that might be needed for 24-hour care, and assurance paid family and sick leave for those that have to take time off to maintain their own health or care for family members and to limit the spread of the virus.
- **Engage Stakeholders in All Actions Suspending Licensing Rules or Creating Emergency Childcare Hubs:** We cannot compromise the health and safety of children, families, and the community at large based on desperation. We must leverage the expertise and experience of the early care community to find a way to serve children in safe places. Give center and home-based childcare programs that typically serve young children the ability to serve older children of the emergency responders and other essential personnel who cannot work remotely.
- **Ensure Programs have Access Public Funds for Paid Family and Sick Leave:** We need to ensure that programs have information and access to paid family and sick leave to cover staff who have to take time off to limit the spread of the virus or care for themselves or family members. Some of this will be covered in the federal aid package, but we must be sure that childcare providers are able to access any new benefits or are covered by New Hampshire’s own plan.

According to preliminary survey data collected in recent days by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), “many child care centers and homes are not going to be able to survive a closure; up to a third in some states indicate they won't survive a closure of any period—another third won't survive a closure of more than two weeks. In other words, a temporary closure is, for many, a permanent one.”

Given the level of concern and crisis already facing the early childhood and education sector prior to this outbreak, your choices in the days and weeks ahead on the above topics will create “make or break” scenarios for many providers. We ask you to work quickly and thoughtfully, in conjunction with parents and providers and those that support them to adopt and communicate the needed changes as soon as possible.

Without action, our childcare system in New Hampshire will collapse, leaving countless families and children vulnerable and exposed. To help keep families and childcare programs economically stable and healthy through this challenging time, our state must ensure our childcare assistance policies are responding to the realities and needs of families, providers, and staff. We urge you to support the state and federal changes outlines above.

We appreciate your urgent attention to this matter and are available to help communicate information, updates, and the implementation of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Woitkowski, New Futures Kids Count

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Christina D’Allesandro, MomsRising Together & MomsRising Education Fund

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