

As Submitted to Federal Register

June 25, 2020

To the members of the White House American Workforce Policy Advisory Board:

As this Board continues its efforts to promote education and training, and to better support the American workforce, we write to ask that you convene a working group or dedicate a future meeting on early learning and care, and consider the integral role that quality child care plays in the workforce of today—and tomorrow. In the near term, however, we request that the Board immediately weigh in on the overwhelming need to stabilize the child care industry, which is on the brink of collapse as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Child Care is Essential

We recognize the Workforce Policy Advisory Board has a very important task of ensuring America's education and job training bolsters our economy, and we posit that addressing the nation's child care challenges is integral to this mission.

If the U.S. is to be the best place in the world to conduct business, work, and raise a family, we must ensure that our workforce has access to quality early learning and care options for their children. According to a new study conducted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation examining the impact of child care issues on working parents, business, and the state economies in Idaho, Iowa, Mississippi, and Pennsylvania, these four states alone each lose an average of \$1 billion annually due to breakdowns in child care that result in working parents voluntarily leaving the workforce and postponing continuing educational opportunities. Meanwhile, more than half of Americans live in child care deserts—neighborhoods with 3 or more children for every 1 licensed child care space. What's more, extensive research shows that the benefits of quality early learning extend far beyond better job stability and overall economic security for parents. Children who receive a high-quality early childhood education are more likely to graduate from high school and college, earn higher wages, and live healthier lives. These opportunities can also help break the cycle of poverty, according to [research](#) from Nobel Laureate James Heckman, which found that the effects of high-quality early childhood education not only improved outcomes for program participants, but also for the children of participants, who also had positive education, employment, and health outcomes.

Without question, economic development starts with early childhood development—and the best investment we can make as a society is to ensure all children and families have access to high-quality child care. Early learning and care offers a clear opportunity for this Board, and each of your individual organizations or businesses, to bolster the American workforce in the short- and long-term—helping parents work or continue their education while their children build strong foundations for the future.

Child Care Relief and Recovery

Child care is an essential pillar of the American economy--no sector can thrive if the child care industry fails. Unfortunately, the nationwide Coronavirus crisis has hit the child care industry especially hard, causing widespread layoffs and closures as a result of catastrophic drops in enrollment. Extended closures during this time could put a substantial percentage of them out of business permanently, exacerbating the existing realities of child care deserts. Child care closures will hit families of color, rural areas, and low-income neighborhoods especially hard, as these communities already had an undersupply of quality, affordable child care. At the same time, over the coming weeks and months, a majority of the nation's child care businesses will be forced to operate in the red, given the increases in their operating expenses associated with new and important health and safety measures paired with ongoing decreased enrollment. For businesses that typically operate with less than a 1 percent profit margin, the devastating impact of these inevitable financial realities cannot be sustained without direct federal investments that ensure child care providers, both center-based and home-based, can keep their doors open to meet the needs of children and families. As our country moves through the various phases of recovery and reopening the economy, no industry will be able to restart if the child care industry collapses and a big portion of the labor force no longer has access to the reliable, high-quality child care they depend on to be able to go to work.

The reality will be dire if dedicated federal support is not directed at stabilizing the child care industry by:

- Guaranteeing providers have the security needed to provide safe, high quality early care and education for the children attending their programs – particularly children of first responders, health care workers, and other essential personnel. This includes financial support to compensate for revenue loss, protective equipment, sanitation supplies, and premium pay.
- Ensuring that the child care industry has resources to survive the pandemic and support economic recovery, including direct grants, that will allow them to pay staff, cover fixed costs, reopen safely, and sustain their businesses as families return to work over an extended period of time.
- Building safeguards that promote the health and safety of children in care while accounting for the ongoing challenges that stem from a climate of uncertainty and instability in the child care market, as well as the economy at large, and resource the services and supports that make up the child care system as a whole.

Our nation's long-term well-being depends on a child care infrastructure that works for every family. An abundance of quality, affordable, child care is fundamental to our economic recovery

from the pandemic and beyond. As you move forward with the Workforce Policy Advisory Board, we again ask that you dedicate a future meeting of this Board to the issue. We would be happy to share more information on the benefits of early learning and care and how comprehensive, bipartisan solutions can ensure a better future for America's economy and our children.

Sincerely,

Bank Street College
Bipartisan Policy Center
Child Care Aware of America
Council for a Strong America
Early Care and Education Consortium
First Five Years Fund
KinderCare Learning Centers
National Association for the Education of Young Children
Ounce of Prevention Fund

CC:

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