



March 13, 2020

Dear Mayor Bowser,

Under 3 DC, associated organizations and advocates signed below are writing to request immediate and clear guidance and action from the Executive Office of the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the DC Council, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and related agencies regarding policy choices that can help child care providers and the families they serve remain operable, financially stable and, to the degree possible, open during and after the ongoing COVID-19/coronavirus emergency.

While we join our national partners in urging Congress and the federal administration to invest additional, significant, emergency, and flexible funds to support child care and early learning programs at this time, we believe child care centers, family child care providers and parents must hear clearly and directly from leaders in the District of Columbia that within existing local child care policies, regulations, and agreements, District agencies and providers can make practical program decisions that help protect the staff, their families, and the families they serve from economic crisis and closure.

As you develop emergency guidance and legislation, we ask that you explicitly:

- Adjust child care reimbursement payment policies so they are based on enrollment of children rather than actual attendance. This will allow children and parents to stay home as necessary, without disrupting revenue for providers who already operate with precarious budgets.
- Waive any policies that terminate child eligibility for child care subsidy based on a specific number of absent days, within their 12-month eligibility period. Given the unpredictable nature of this public health situation, we feel it is reasonable to give families and providers as much flexibility as possible without terminating eligibility. This will allow parents to make the important decision to keep sick or exposed children home, curtailing the spread of the virus without jeopardizing their eligibility for child care assistance.
- Temporarily suspend redetermination of family eligibility for child care services, WIC, SNAP, Medicaid, and TANF to ensure that temporary changes in family workforce participation, earnings, or other factors due to COVID-19 do not impact family eligibility.
- Consider establishing an emergency/relief fund to help child care providers and community-based organizations cover the costs of maintaining their operations safely

during this time, including necessary sanitation equipment, supplies, and services; substitute caregivers; paid leave for affected staff; copayments for coronavirus tests; grants to cover operational costs in the event of closure; and other expenses providers and educators will incur as the result of coronavirus spread and the city's health emergency. Given that many providers are small businesses, they should also be eligible for any funds being made available through the city's economic development agencies to businesses.

- Provide uninterrupted payment for closures that may be deemed necessary by providers and/or in consultation with the Mayor or associated agencies.
- Provide clear guidance to child development centers located in school buildings to address school closures.
- Provide access to health consultation for providers so they are able to respond quickly to emergencies that may occur while children are under their care.
- Allow providers to waive co-pays for families impacted by changes to their own work schedule and income and adjust reimbursement rates accordingly.
- Work with partner agencies to implement "express lane eligibility" for Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP, and other programs.
- Provide necessary resources to coordinate ongoing access to food and nutrition as schools and child development centers temporarily suspend services, including safety precautions to minimize exposure to the virus of those preparing, delivering, and consuming meals.
- Ensure that the mental health safety net is supported and not disrupted by increasing availability to crisis and respite services, ensuring financial sustainability of community mental health providers during this time of potential disruption and decreasing barriers to providing telehealth services.
- Establish emergency communication protocols to share up-to-date and accurate information about COVID-19 with providers and the families they serve and ensure these resources are available in all relevant languages.
- Ensure that licensing staff are well-trained on best practices for safety and hygiene and can help providers meet those requirements.
- Consider providing proactive support to families as they make decisions about staying home, such as distributing books, developmentally appropriate toys, or diapers.

As you know, working families and the effective functioning of our community benefit from the predictable availability of affordable child care, and children benefit from continuity of care. Child care providers and staff need reliable employment and supports to meet their needs as well. To help keep families and providers economically stable and healthy through this challenging time, the city must ensure its child care assistance policies are responding to the realities and needs of families, providers, and staff.

We appreciate your urgent attention to this matter and are available to help spread the word and support these recommendations in any way that is helpful to you.

Sincerely,
Advocates for Justice and Education
Apple Tree Institute
Bright Beginnings
Centro Nia
Children's Law Center
Community of Hope
Community Educational Research Group
DC Abortion Fund
DC Action for Children
DC American Academy of Pediatrics
DC Appleseed
DC Association for the Education of Young Children
DC Early Learning Collaborative
DC Family Child Care Association
DC Fiscal Policy Institute
DC Hunger Solutions
DC Jobs With Justice
DC Working Families Party
Educare
Fair Budget Coalition
Faith Strategies LLC
Food Research and Action Center
Jews United for Justice
Many Languages One Voice
Martha's Table
Mary's Center
Mamatoto Village
MomsRising
National Children's Center
National Women's Law Center
NOVA Birth Partners
Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE)
Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington
Raise DC
SPACeS in Action
The Early Childhood Innovation Network (ECIN)
United Planning Organization