Early learning has always been an essential infrastructure for children, families, communities, and our economy. Unfortunately, after years of underinvestment, that infrastructure has been cobbled together on the backs of working families and early learning providers.

COVID-19 is making apparent what parents, caregivers, and providers have long-known: Parents and caregivers can’t work when early learning isn’t working for them. The truth is that Washington’s early learning infrastructure is crumbling and we’re all counting on our leaders to #SaveChildCare.

We can #RecoverTogether when our leaders raise progressive revenue and invest in the early learning infrastructure that is essential for well being and economic growth.

WHAT DO WE WANT?

**Emergency response to COVID-19:** Stabilize the child care industry through direct cash assistance to providers and implement a COVID grace period for families receiving Working Connections Child Care, including:

- Waiving copayments
- Ensuring eligibility for families who are not currently employed due to a COVID-19 related reason, including families receiving unemployment insurance
- Ensuring temporary surplus income, through unemployment insurance or COVID-related hazard pay, isn’t counted in the application process

**Investments in families:** Expand Working Connections Child Care so child care assistance is available to more families, including:

- Smoothing the co-payment cliff
- Increasing income eligibility, while prioritizing families with low-incomes
- Capping child care expenses at no more than 7% of a family's income

**Investments in providers:** Reimburse providers for the true cost of high-quality early learning, including increased wages and benefits, through Working Connections Child Care - including Family, Friend, and Neighbor caregivers - and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

**Investments in communities:** Prioritize resources for communities disproportionately impacted by systemic underinvestment and institutional racism, starting with communities of color and communities with low-incomes.

**WHEN DO WE WANT IT?**

Yesterday, today, and tomorrow too! Washington can’t afford to wait any longer.
WHY DO WE WANT IT?

We want emergency COVID relief because child care programs are being forced to close their doors and many of them won’t be able to reopen. Margins were already laser thin, with many providers sacrificing their own family economic security to serve their communities. What’s more, many providers have been unable to access assistance through state and federal programs since they do not often work with traditional lenders, and consequently have limited access to cash reserves or credit lines. In Washington State, COVID has caused:

- 54 percent decrease in enrollment in child care programs and proportionate losses in revenue
- 27% percent decrease in the supply of child care between February and June

And that’s a problem because there are 236,000 essential, frontline workers in Washington State and 50,000 of them need child care for their children. Without direct cash assistance to help providers keep their doors open, essential workers will struggle to get to work.

We want investments in families because we struggle to find and afford child care and it impacts our financial security and well being. In Washington State, 118,000 families live in child care deserts where there simply aren't enough child care slots for each child in need. For families that can find child care, it’s frequently unaffordable. Families in Washington pay more on average for an infant than all but two other states in the nation. A typical single parent in Washington spends over half their income on infant care.

Child care expenses push approximately 9 percent of working families with children under age six out of the middle class. The economic impacts are disproportionately harmful to families of color, who are more likely than white families to experience child care related job disruptions.

We want investments in providers because, without them, there is no early learning. Based on the measured child care preferences of families, Washington State would need to add 38,640 slots for children 0 to 5 in child care centers and 9,680 slots in family child care homes to eliminate child care deserts and accommodate parent choice. To retain and grow the workforce to meet this scale of need, we must pay a living wage and provide comprehensive benefits. The early learning workforce - made up of 94% women - is one of the lowest paid workforces in the country. In Washington State dog groomers are paid more than early learning providers.

We want investments in communities because a great start for children promises healthy child development, resilient families and communities, and a more robust and stable economy for all. And yet, the impacts of systemic opportunity gaps are evident as early as kindergarten, if not earlier. Long-standing racial disparities in access to child care for families and in earnings for providers are exacerbated by COVID-19 and cause compounding harm.

We can’t afford not to! Even before COVID-19, the child care crisis cost employers over $2 billion and the overall state economy $6.5 billion annually in lost revenue and growth.