

June 3, 2020

Dear Mayors, Council Members and Assembly Members,

thread, Alaska's Child Care Resource & Referral Network, thanks you for your leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. **As Alaska reopens, thread urges you to give financial support to licensed child care, a critical community infrastructure needed to reopen safely and responsibly. Specifically, we urge you to invest a minimum of 10% of the federal CARES Act funding allocated to your City/Municipality/Borough by the Alaska State Legislature to support licensed child care programs in your community.** Prior to COVID-19, the early childhood education sector represented nearly 500 child care programs and employed 7,000 Alaskans statewide.

Licensed Child Care is Essential for Alaska

Licensed child care is an essential state infrastructure and a vital part of our economic recovery. Working families cannot continue to go to work or return to the workplace without it. A lack of licensed child care will be a significant barrier to businesses reopening successfully.

While child care has been on the frontlines of the pandemic, nearly 50% of licensed child care programs were temporarily closed. Child care businesses operate on razor-thin margins, and have fewer resources available to them than public schools. The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed many of these small businesses to the brink of permanent closure.

We must ensure child care is there to support Alaska's families and businesses. To do this safely and responsibly, it requires child care programs to:

- Implement new health and safety measures for the physical and mental health, safety, and well-being of children, staff, and their families.
- Hire and train new staff to replace those exiting the field due to health concerns and/or other employment opportunities.
- Increase staffing to cover substitutes needed for employees who are out, and accommodate for static groups and additional sanitizing and health checks.
- Provide smaller group sizes and more space per child to ensure physical distancing.
- Have access to necessary supplies (e.g., cleaning supplies, diapers, etc.).
- Be able to support parents transitioning their children back to care.

These are only a few of the *many* factors child care programs are considering to stay open or reopen. This situation is stressing an already fragile system by increasing the cost of care for programs and families.

thread estimates child care across Alaska will need \$10 million per month throughout the pandemic and recovery process. In order for child care to weather this crisis, thread has the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Ask the State of Alaska to Fulfill its Promise to Child Care

In April, the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Child Care Program Office (CCPO) announced a Capacity Funding program to support and stabilize licensed child care.

The State promised to pay child care programs for March, April, and May based on their February enrollment numbers. The March funding was paid, but **there is an approximate \$20 million funding gap for April and May**. We have heard from numerous child care programs that they are reliant on this aid to make it through the initial crisis period.

thread is urging the State of Alaska to fulfill its promise to stabilize the sector, and asks that you join us in this request. Please ask DHSS Commissioner Adam Crum to use his authority and Department CARES Act resources to fully fund the child care payments for April and May.

Recommendation 2: Prioritize Ongoing Funding for Local, Licensed Child Care

thread recognizes the support needed for child care exceeds the State of Alaska Capacity Funding program, and the Alaska State Legislature has recently allocated CARES Act funding to your local government.

thread recommends you prioritize child care by allocating a minimum of 10% of your federal CARES Act funding to support local, licensed child care through 2020. This funding would be in addition to the State Capacity Funding program (Recommendation #1). The City and Borough of Juneau recently voted to approve over \$1 million for child care sustainability grants. We urge you to follow their lead.

An investment in child care will produce one of the highest returns for generating economic recovery in your community. For every child care teacher that is supported to return to a child care program, an average of eight parents are able to return to work.

thread advocates that any local financial aid for child care is administered with no restrictions and ease of access in mind. There are several vehicles available for deploying these benefits to ensure aid reaches programs swiftly. One example would be to administer block grants by licensed child care program type. **thread** is available to assist in advising and/or deploying such assistance. We also ask you to consider how to support and provide child care with critical supplies to protect themselves, the children they serve, and their families. Access to cleaning supplies, PPE, and other safety precautions are desperately needed.

thread is gaining public support for this recommendation through an open petition calling for State and local support of \$10 million per month for child care throughout this crisis. The petition has over 600 signatures and counting. (threadalaska.salsalabs.org/promisetochildcare)

Alaska's reopening and economic recovery depends on child care being there for families. **thread** recognizes the struggle many families are facing during this pandemic. Prioritizing support for licensed child care programs means parents will have access to care as they make decisions about work and how best to support their families at this time.

As you make decisions in supporting your community during the COVID-19 pandemic, the above recommendations are intended to provide guidance for ensuring children and families are healthy and safe, and child care survives. We are happy to be a resource in your decision-making and thank you for making child care a top priority for stabilizing our economy and community infrastructure for families.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Berglund, MSW
CEO of **thread**, Alaska's Child Care Resource and Referral Network
(907) 265-3101 | sberglund@threadalaska.org



Alicia Berka
Executive Director, **thriveAlaska**
(907) 479-0900 | aberka@thrivalaska.com



Joy Lyon
Executive Director, AEYC Southeast Alaska
(907) 789-1235 | jlyon@aecy-sea.org