

May 18, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York
The Capitol
Albany, NY

Dear Governor Cuomo:

The New York State Child Care Availability Task Force is eager to support your leadership in reopening New York safely, smartly, and with an eye to the future. Among the many vital needs of New Yorkers in this period is access to safe, affordable, quality child care.

We write to provide specific recommendations that will enable the State to safely reopen while building a stronger, more equitable future. Mindful of the extraordinary budget challenges New York is facing, we suggest funding these recommendations using remaining federal CARES Act and exploring additional federal and state resources.

IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure Sufficient Child Care Capacity to Serve Families of Essential Workers and Other Vulnerable Families. The majority of New York's 15,512 licensed or registered child care businesses (many minority- and women-owned) remain open and willing to care for the children of essential workers, often at significant personal risk. One in four programs outside of New York City (where all child care centers were required to close) closed due to concerns about health and safety, or because they did not have sufficient children present to remain financially viable. Successful statewide reopening cannot be accomplished without restoring and sustaining capacity. We recommend that New York State:

- Provide monthly emergency operating grants so that existing programs can remain financially viable with the recommended smaller group sizes, lower capacity, and other safety and quality measures in place.
- Offer training, guidance, and hands-on, personalized technical assistance on how to provide care safely; observe evolving health and safety standards, as well as offer mental health supports for providers.
- Allocate capital investments to fund social distancing measures, such as additional room separators, partitions for nap time, etc.
- Provide the essential child care workforce enhanced compensation – including increased pay, retention incentives, and prioritized child care subsidies – to retain and support those working during the pandemic.

- Improve data collection processes to obtain real-time snapshots of enrollment and vacancies that will help planning and allocation of resources.

2. Support Families of Essential Workers and Other Vulnerable Families. Now that the CARES Act emergency tuition scholarships have been in place for several weeks, it is clear that the allocation could reach more essential workers in conjunction with the increase in subsidy eligibility in many counties. We recommend that New York State:

- Expand the scholarships to reach more essential workers and those who will be returning to work under the NY Forward plan by increasing income eligibility to at least 500% FPL, allowing workers from each phase of the reopening plan to become eligible, and continuing the scholarships through at least the end of the summer.
- Ensure that counties provide child care subsidy to families involved in child welfare, foster families, and children with special needs consistently statewide.
- In light of the unprecedented unemployment, ensure that families who are seeking employment and/or participating in job training are able to consistently access subsidies or scholarships in all counties.

3. Ensure the Safety of New York's Children and the Child Care Workforce. Child care programs need expert guidance on how to effectively and realistically keep children and staff safe. We recommend that New York State:

- Provide programs the most up-to-date information about the impact of COVID-19 on children, offering direct access to public health officials, and issuing clear and consistent guidance on procedures, policies, and mandates.
- Collect data on the number of providers and children in group child care settings who become ill and how many programs are forced to close due to the spread of the virus; constantly revise safety practices as the data dictates.
- Offer public education to parents in multiple languages regarding health and safety measures in programs to increase confidence in care.

SUPPORTING NEW YORK'S REOPENING & BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

The Task Force believes that support should be directed to existing child care programs first. In areas of New York where there is not sufficient child care available, the State should use federal funds to provide start-up grants for new high-quality capacity. There are also opportunities to streamline the child care subsidy process more generally, learning from the CARES Act scholarship process.

Over the longer-term, we believe that county variations in subsidy eligibility and copays should be eliminated during this period of recovery and beyond, and that all counties should offer subsidies to families earning up to 85% of state median income, which we acknowledge requires additional funding sources than we are addressing in these immediate recommendations.

In closing, we recognize that a plan to reopen businesses requires consideration of the needs of working parents, especially with schools closed and summer camps potentially not fully operational. Child care, schools, businesses, and families are interconnected; none can function without the others. **Therefore, we also recommend that child care stakeholders be included in all regional and statewide reopening planning bodies.** We are eager to provide additional information and support as New York reopens.

Sincerely,



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