

Ready Louisiana Coalition Asks Lawmakers to Support Early Care and Education in Louisiana During and After COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is having devastating impacts on Louisiana's businesses and economy. The early care and education sector is no exception.

To get Louisiana back on track, we must:

- 1. Use one-time federal funds, including funds from the CARES Act and other emergency funds, to stabilize the child care industry; and**
- 2. Commit \$25.1 million in new state funds to expand access to the Child Care Assistance Program for 4,000 more children and authorize CCAP payments for parents actively looking for work.**

Louisiana loses in big ways when working parents cannot access reliable, quality child care. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, [child care breakdowns cost](#) Louisiana's economy \$1.1 billion a year. Many working parents faced [stark choices](#) when trying to afford early care and education, which costs almost as much annually as public college tuition. Before the pandemic, two-thirds of Louisiana's children had both their parents or their single parent in the workforce. Louisiana's working parents cannot go back to work without child care.

As legislators and the Governor's office work together to create a new budget in light of the devastating effects of COVID-19 on the state's economy, the Ready Louisiana Coalition urges state leaders to acknowledge the essential role early care and education plays in our economy. If our citizens are to get back to work and our economy is to recover, we must:

- 1. Support the struggling child care and education industry and**
- 2. Increase access to quality care and education for young children of working parents.**

The viability of the child care industry is at risk.

The Louisiana Policy Institute for Children's recent [report](#) indicates that the child care industry in Louisiana lost at least \$1.7 million in the first two weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 60% of centers are currently closed. Most troublingly, if this pandemic continues as it is expected to, 35% of child care businesses reported they do not expect to be able to reopen, as they face a host of financial barriers.

To address this crisis, the Ready Louisiana Coalition urges the governor and legislators to utilize one-time federal funds, including the Child Care & Development Block Grant money, to shore up the struggling child care industry. Other individualized forms of relief, including small business loans, are helpful but are not accessible to all child care businesses. To preserve the critical resource that is the child care industry, Louisiana needs to commit to industry-wide investments--and quickly. Providers that are still open need personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies, and the ability to increase pay for teachers who are risking their health to care for the children of essential workers on the front lines of the pandemic. All providers need grants to ensure they stay in business in the long-term and Louisiana does not lose child care capacity once the pandemic is over.

One-time federal money should not be used as a substitute for ongoing state investment.

By mid-March, the Louisiana Department of Education had taken emergency steps to ensure the children of essential workers would have access to child care and provide some stability to the industry by increasing CCAP reimbursements. Those steps had a cost. Policymakers should utilize one-time federal funds to replace those funds, focusing state money on creating more access to child care for working families.

Access to quality, reliable child care is even more critical now.

Currently, there are 177,000 at-risk children in our state. Fewer than 17,000 were being served by the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) before COVID-19. CCAP is currently available to parents who are working, participating in job training, or in an educational program to help them afford the high cost of child care.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic reached Louisiana, both the governor's proposed budget and HB 105 (Rep. Zeringue) included a \$25.1 million appropriation to provide access to quality child care for an additional 4,000 children. That amount is needed now, more desperately than ever.

Over 220,000 Louisianans have applied for unemployment as of the first week in April, affecting an estimated 19,500 children aged six and younger. The state needs these people back at work as soon as it is possible and safe. To facilitate this, CCAP should be expanded to cover parents actively seeking a job, a step that nearly half of states have already taken as of 2018.

To revive Louisiana's economy in the coming weeks and months, our parents must get back to work. In order for that to happen, policymakers need to ensure that quality child care spots still exist and that working parents have access to them.