



FIX THE CHILD CARE CRISIS



The 2021 Legislature must make bold, audacious investments in child care.

The pandemic has driven home the critical role that affordable, accessible child care plays in a functioning economy. Pre-pandemic, Washington's child care system was already broken, with 63% of the state in a care desert, families burdened with yearly costs rivaling yearly tuition, and child care professionals making less than dog walkers.

The pandemic has only increased the inequities: child care workers have been classified as essential workers, but most have no access to health insurance, let alone other benefits that stabilize a workforce.

The state must make bold, audacious investments in expanding subsidy access, increasing subsidy rates to meet the cost of care, and immediate financial relief so that these essential businesses will survive the pandemic and support our economic recovery.

Washington state lawmakers should:

- **Fully cover the cost of quality child care**
– Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) helps families with low incomes in Washington state pay for child care. But the rates paid to providers for these subsidized children are well below what it actually costs to provide care. Our state can no longer expect child care providers to accept subsidy kids when it doesn't pay for the cost of care. State lawmakers must raise WCCC reimbursement rates to the market rate.
- **Pay providers a monthly rate for subsidy, structured like the private market** – Child care subsidies in Washington state are currently provided in daily units for the hours of child care needed,



rather than monthly rates, which is the predominant billing model in the private market. Monthly billing would stabilize finances for providers, improve recruitment and retention of providers who accept subsidies, reduce provider billing errors, and promote transparency and continuity of funding. Oregon, Idaho and Alaska have successfully implemented monthly rate structures for child care subsidies. In 2019, legislators passed HB 1391 urging the state to study transitioning to monthly rates. The state Department of Children, Youth & Families did so, and recommends implementing a monthly rate system.

- **Expand eligibility for middle-class families**
– Currently, a family's income must be at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level to be eligible

CONTINUED ON BACK

FIX THE CHILD CARE CRISIS

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

for WCCC child care. But for many families above that threshold, quality licensed child care is unaffordable, costing more than \$1,000 per month in many states. State lawmakers should raise that eligibility threshold so more families that are struggling to get child care can do so.

■ **Eliminate the cap on WCCC participation** – Families receive WCCC assistance on a “first-come, first-served” basis until the program reaches an enrollment cap of 33,000 households – an arbitrary relic of the Great Recession. Eligible families are then put on a wait list. That enrollment cap should be eliminated.

■ **Expand subsidies for providers to purchase health care** – Unfortunately, many child care providers can’t afford health insurance, which makes it hard to recruit and retain quality providers. This is a problem not just for providers’ families, but for everyone struggling to find child care amid the current shortage. The state can improve access to child care by expand subsidies that will help keep health care coverage within reach for providers.

■ **Incentivize specialized and non-standard hours of care** – When specialized care is required for children whose families qualify for WCCC, those subsidies should be higher to reflect those added costs. WCCC should provide subsidy enhancements for trauma-informed care, dual language skills, and non-standard hours so all families can access care, including essential workers who often do shift work.



Union members comprise 18.8 percent of Washington’s workforce, making it the third most unionized state in the nation,¹ and a national study ranked Washington #1 in its 2019 edition of its “States With the Strongest Unions.”² Widely considered to be the “voice of labor” in our state, the **Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO** (WSLC) is the state’s largest labor organization, representing and providing services for hundreds of local unions throughout Washington. Currently, there are more than 600 local unions affiliated with the WSLC, representing some 550,000 rank-and-file union members.

One of the services the WSLC provides its affiliated unions is legislative education and advocacy. As with collective bargaining, WSLC unions join forces and speak with a united voice on public policy issues affecting working families.

Please contact the WSLC’s officers and staff if you have questions about the council’s positions on workers’ issues:

In addition to fixing the child care crisis, the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO is supporting a range of issues that address economic opportunity and justice. Learn more at www.wslc.org or www.TheStand.org.

906 Columbia St. SW, Olympia, WA, 98501 — 360-943-0608

WSLC Government Affairs Director **Joe Kendo** at jkendo@wslc.org or 206-747-8279
WSLC Legislative Director **Sybill Hyppolite** at shyppolite@wslc.org or 206-475-5783
WSLC Infrastructure & Climate Advisor **Vlad Gutman-Britten** at vgutman@wslc.org or 206-886-4616
WSLC Communication Director **David Groves** at dgroves@wslc.org or 206-434-1301
WSLC President **Larry Brown** and WSLC Secretary Treasurer **April Sims** at 206-281-8901