

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 25, 2020

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## **Close Child Care and Provide Emergency Relief Immediately, Child Care Advocates Ask Governor Cooper**

RALEIGH – The North Carolina Early Education Coalition, NC Child, and the North Carolina Association for the Education of Young Children are calling on Governor Cooper and NC DHHS Secretary Mandy Cohen to order all child care centers closed and put emergency relief into place, effective immediately. These organizations are asking that the Governor order all child care centers closed, designate an emergency child care category for the children of essential personnel only, and put a relief package into place to keep the child care sector safe in this crisis.

“Child care plays a critical role in the immediate response to this crisis and in the coming recovery. Right now, we are asking programs to make excruciating decisions that affect their business, their employees, and the families they serve,” said Michele Rivest, director of the NC Early Education Coalition. “Social distancing is not possible or even safe when caring for young children and babies. We need to act now to ensure that child care programs and their employees get the supports they need to stay healthy and safe both during and after this crisis.”

“More than a fifth of early childhood teachers have no health insurance whatsoever, and yet we are asking them to risk their own health and safety as front-line emergency responders in a national health crisis,” said Michelle Hughes, executive director of NC Child. “The workers in child care centers are overwhelmingly women of color earning very low wages. We need health coverage, emergency pay, and paid leave for every child care worker now.”

NC DHHS has provided guidance to child care centers who decide to remain open and asked them to fill out an application by March 30<sup>th</sup> to be able to serve as emergency child care operators. Thousands of private child care centers in the state have already closed, but many are remaining open because they serve the families of health care workers and other essential personnel. DHHS has also put an emergency hotline into place to help families find urgent child care. While these steps are important, they do not go nearly far enough, say child care advocates.

"There is panic in every family and employee," said Melissa Mathis, Director of Footsteps Childcare Center in Hickory. "Families are concerned about how they will work without child care if their business is not closed. Staff worry how will we get paid if we have to close. We live paycheck to paycheck because no one wants to pay child care workers what their true value is.

We're in a pandemic and everyone is now relying on centers to stay open during this crisis. I feel we need just as much help financially during this crisis as any other business."

Data from a survey by the National Association for the Education of Young Children indicates that for without emergency funding, a temporary closure will be a permanent one without emergency funding for many child care centers. Approximately one third of programs in North Carolina reported that they won't survive a closure of more than two weeks without financial assistance.

"I don't want to put my employees out of work," said Cassandra Brooks, who operates two private child care centers in Wake and Johnston counties. "They are the ones holding their families together. But I also cannot put them or the children we care for in harm's way. So many of them are uninsured. I have seen what happens to a low-income family when they are hit with a health crisis. We need health coverage and full paid leave for child care workers right now," said Mrs. Brooks.

Signatories will also ask the state legislature for additional steps to ensure that the child care sector survives this health care and economic crisis. Read the full letter and list of recommendations at <https://www.ncearlyeducationcoalition.org/covid19-child-care-closure/>

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The North Carolina Early Education Coalition works to ensure that all children have access to high quality early care and learning experiences. Since 1990, the organization has highlighted the proven power of quality early childhood education by sharing information and resources with parents, professionals and policymakers.

NC Child is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to build a strong North Carolina by advancing public policies to ensure all children – regardless of race, ethnicity, or place of birth – have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.