

March 24, 2020

Governor Roy Cooper
Secretary Mandy Cohen

Close North Carolina Child Care Programs Now AND Create an Emergency Child Care System During the COVID-19 Pandemic

We are calling for strong measures to fully sustain North Carolina's early childhood system for children, families and the economy. This extraordinary health crisis demonstrates, in the most compelling way, the importance of affordable, accessible and safe child care for children and families.

National and state leaders have made it clear that child care is an "essential service" without which we will not be able to effectively respond to this pandemic. However, our first priority must be to ensure the health and well-being of children and all who care for them in child care settings. Young children cannot do social distancing or practice the healthy behaviors necessary to stop the spread of the virus in child care programs. Continuing to allow child care programs to make their own decisions to remain open or closed is a dangerous public health position exposing children, families and early educators to the Coronavirus.

That is why we believe that child care programs must be mandated to close, just as schools and restaurants have been closed, as a public health matter.

However, we understand that children of emergency first responders, healthcare professionals and other essential personnel must have access to child care during this uncertain time. This must – and can – be done in a way that fully protects children and child care programs.

Strong measures must be taken to protect the fragile infrastructure of our child care ecosystem. The decisions we make now will have a longstanding impact on the future of the early childhood education system and the ability of the system to rebound once this crisis has passed. Many child care programs have already closed, and it is estimated that one-third of these programs will go out of business permanently. Very few will be able to reopen without emergency financial assistance.

We call on Governor Roy Cooper and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to adopt the following policies:

- Mandate child care programs to close immediately, consistent with the mandatory closure of schools and restaurants.
- Create and fund an emergency child care system for first responders and essential workers that includes immediate funding assistance for child care programs that are able to stay open and serve as essential child care sites. Financial support must include: incentive funding to establish and maintain these programs, bonus pay for teaching staff, free parent fees for all low- and



middle-income families, and funding for fixed operating costs and additional health and sanitation costs. To participate, child care programs must meet at least 3-star licensing requirements during operations and take part in additional training and technical assistance on health care practices.

- Establish an Emergency Child Care Assistance Fund to sustain the child care industry now, during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

Without taking these actions, our state's children, families, child care system and economy will continue to be at risk both during and after this public health crisis.

Respectfully,

North Carolina Early Education Coalition
NC Child
North Carolina Association for the Education of Young Children