



March 22, 2020

The Honorable Deb Fischer  
454 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ben Sasse  
107 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry  
1514 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Don Bacon  
1024 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adrian Smith  
502 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the Nebraska Congressional Delegation:

As Congress considers an economic stimulus package and other policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to consider the impact of the national health emergency on the child care industry, both now and as providers rebuild their businesses after this crisis has subsided.

Nebraska's child care professionals are resolved to take the necessary steps to ensure the health and safety of children and their own employees, even as many face concerns about the future of their programs. Without the proper financial supports in place there is a real risk these temporary closures will become permanent, to the serious detriment of our state and its citizens.

The on-going pandemic has already put unprecedented strain on children, working parents, employers and communities as a whole. Child care is a critical element of our civic and economic infrastructure. Widespread closures and reductions of service in this industry will have profound effects on commerce, healthcare and even public safety throughout the state.

A central and urgent risk in these closures is the effect on families who are on the front lines of the pandemic response. Many of our nation's first responders and health care professionals rely on child care providers to ensure safe, quality care for their children as they work to combat COVID-19. Simply put, Nebraska's ability to respond effectively to this emergency will be seriously compromised if we lose these crucial personnel due to insufficient child care.

In addition to daily care and education services by child care providers, we must also consider the impact of closures on children's healthy development. In the near term, these closures will negatively affect the well-being of children who rely on child care services for a portion of their nutritional needs. Long-term or permanent closures of programs will substantially degrade children's chances for lifelong health and success. Nebraska is simply not in the position to

sacrifice the health and well-being of any part of its population, especially young children who will one day be responsible for our state's continued prosperity and growth.

On behalf of the allied organizations focused on policies and programs that affect the strength of Nebraska's early childhood system, we strongly encourage you consider the following for inclusion in any federal legislation that is being developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Provide direct funding that will allow child care programs, including those that close, to weather this growing public health and economic crisis, and preserve the nation's home- and center-based child care programs.
- Make sure child care providers that stay open—especially those serving health care providers, first responders, and other essential personnel—have the support they need to cover the increased risks, pay and costs of maintaining services.
- Home- and center-based child care programs are automatically enrolled in mortgage forbearance, provided rent deferrals (when applicable), and given support for utility and insurance payments, for a minimum of three months or up to six months.
- Provide funding and authorization for Child Care Development Fund State Administrators to make grants to programs at risk of closing but deliver services to working parents in critical roles such as first responder and health care professions. Provide increased funding so child care providers can waive co-payments.
- Provide increased funding to support the authorized flexibility included in the recently released guidelines from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). This includes funding to the State Lead Agency with jurisdiction over child care to waive income eligibility and what counts as income.
- All members of the child care workforce should be eligible to receive unemployment compensation, sick leave and paid family leave due to gaps in employment as a result of the pandemic.
- Allow maximum flexibility to the states for federal programs and funding that help meet the nutritional needs of young children and families throughout the ongoing crisis.
- Ensure that funding made available as a result of a disaster declaration under the Stafford Act and SBA Disaster Grants is available to all types of licensed and licensed-exempt child care providers to address immediate operational needs.

While these recommendations would be of immediate benefit to children, families and the child care community, they are also fundamentally relevant to the challenges our state will face in the longer-term as part of the recovery process. We look forward to working with you to support Nebraska children, families and businesses throughout and beyond this critical moment in our nation's history.

Sincerely,

Jessie Rasmussen, President, Buffett Early Childhood Fund

Jason Prokop, Director, First Five Nebraska

Mary Jo Pankoke, President and Chief Executive Officer, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

Samuel J. Meisels, Ed. D, Founding Executive Director, Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Shannon Cotsoradis, Chief Executive Officer, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative