



First Five Nebraska Statement on Executive Order 20-08: Coronavirus—Expanding Access to Child Care Options

March 27, 2020

As the COVID-19 emergency continues to put increasing strain on our state's civic and economic structures, the need for child care services for parents working in infrastructure-critical roles continues to grow in urgency as well. This is particularly true for health care professionals, emergency response personnel, workers in transport and distribution of food and supplies, among other related areas.

Executive Order No. 20-08 from the Nebraska's Governor's Office was formulated in an attempt to increase access to child care for these families by temporarily easing or suspending certain licensing and regulatory procedures governing child care. This includes allowing unlicensed personnel to begin providing child care services in non-residential environments before clearing their national fingerprint criminal history checks, provided they have met Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services clearances for criminal history, as well as checks of the sexual offender and child abuse and neglect registries. These alternative child care environments are also expected to adhere to social distancing and group size protocols established by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

First Five Nebraska recognizes the intent of the Executive Order to meet a pressing need throughout the state. Nevertheless, we question the solution this directive offers on two main points.

First, we believe it overlooks the availability of Nebraska's existing child care professionals who, due to declining attendance during the public health emergency, may have the capacity to offer services to parents working in infrastructure-critical roles throughout the state. Creating an under-regulated pathway to providing child care through persons who may not be qualified to do so needlessly overlooks the professional child care workforce already available to us in communities statewide.

Secondly, we must recognize that the current public health emergency is likely to seriously affect the physical, psychological and emotional health of young children during the most vulnerable stage in their development. In the midst of this national crisis, it is more important than ever that children be entrusted to the care of professionals who are trained and prepared to address their developmental needs.

Moving forward, we strongly encourage state agencies to focus their efforts on the following:

1. Refer parents and employers in infrastructure-critical roles to existing, licensed child care providers in their vicinity who have the ability to offer child care services while observing the guidelines for group sizes and management.
2. Draw upon the expertise of licensed and trained early childhood professionals to administer, supervise and, wherever possible, staff emergency child care programs in alternative environments.

The Coronavirus pandemic has dealt a serious blow to our state's child care professionals, but they remain a vitally important resource to our civic and economic infrastructure. We should be looking for opportunities to leverage our existing, experienced and well-trained early childhood workforce to its best effect before resorting to alternative options that may not offer the best outcomes for our children, families, communities and state.