



## CHILD CARE LAW CENTER

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### RECOMMENDATIONS ON CHILD CARE

CALIFORNIA WORKING FAMILIES POLICY SUMMIT  
JANUARY 18, 2007

#### INTRODUCTION

Child care is a vital support for working families, enabling parents to work, provide for their children and contribute to California's economy. Working families depend on a variety of state policies and programs ranging from transportation to paid family leave. It is critical that we foster family-friendly policies including ensuring access to nurturing, developmentally and culturally appropriate education and care for children while their parents work.

California is a phenomenally wealthy state, yet 44 percent of our young children live in low-income families and 21 percent of young children live in families below the poverty level.<sup>1</sup> Single mothers who receive help paying for child care are 40 percent more likely to remain employed after two years than those who receive no help.<sup>2</sup> Former welfare recipients with young children are 82 percent more likely to be employed after two years if they receive help with child care expenses.<sup>3</sup>

But early care and education is more than just a tool that helps low-income parents to work, it also contributes to the well-being, development and school readiness of California's children. Every child, full of promise, deserves to have his or her basic needs met and opportunities to develop to his or her full potential. Research shows that "young children are biologically primed for language development."<sup>4</sup> However, many low-income children enter kindergarten lacking the necessary language skills that wealthier children already have acquired.<sup>5</sup> From the earliest years, we must strive to end this inequity in order to close the achievement gap that plagues our elementary and secondary schools. We must focus on our youngest children birth to age five.

In December 2006, the Child Care Law Center convened more than 90 people for our annual Work Group meeting. Parents, child care teachers, family child care providers, advocates and other stakeholders reached several points of strong consensus that inform the following recommendations, including the need for systems change, methods to measure and reward quality, efforts to reduce the subsidy waiting list, and implementation of policies that strengthen access to quality subsidized care for children of all ages.

## **POLICY OBJECTIVE #1**

**Increase access to high quality child care for all low-income children birth to five, by ensuring that low-income families have real choices.**

### ***Background***

Child care is a critical service for working families, and together with the family, it contributes to children's well-being, development and school readiness. Like elementary and secondary education, high quality child care, including preschool and programs for school-age children, should be a guaranteed right and a social responsibility. In California, more than half of women with children under age six are in the workforce, which means that many children are in out-of-home care while their parents work.<sup>6</sup> Many of these families depend on state subsidy policies and programs. Unfortunately, inadequate funding means that these policies and programs often fail to help the very families they are designed to assist. The recommended actions below are focused on programs for children zero to five, but would have a positive influence on the entire system.

### ***Recommended Actions***

- A. The Budget passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor should:
1. Reduce waiting lists by 20% each year for the next five years for all non-CalWORKs child care subsidies by increasing investment in the state-contracted centers' reimbursement rates and capacity, and in subsidy vouchers to enable families to choose from a variety of child care settings.
  2. Allow flexibility in combining various types of state and local funding to ensure the broadest access to care and effective use of all local, state and federal funds.
  3. Provide continued funding to expand access for children with special needs through programs such as SB 640 which supports provider training and outreach.
  4. Maintain California's commitment to provide child care to all families currently or formerly connected to CalWORKs who continue to meet income and other eligibility requirements, with no time limits.
  5. Increase investment to develop appropriate child care capacity to meet the needs of children and families who face barriers, particularly children with disabilities, those whose parents work odd hours and English language learners.

## **POLICY OBJECTIVE #2**

**Increase focus on children from birth to three years and establish a legislative priority to integrate preschool efforts with existing child care programs for working families.**

### ***Background***

The first three years of life are a special time of dramatic growth for young children, physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively. Despite the importance of the very early years to a child's development, quality child care for infants and toddlers is even scarcer than it is for preschool children, and it is much more expensive. In 2005, 35% of the requests to Resource and Referral Agencies for child care information were for infant care, but only 6% of licensed child care center slots were available to children under age 2.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the cost is staggering: an average of \$7,400 a year in 2005, or 53 percent of the earnings of a parent who works full time at minimum wage.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Recommended Actions***

- A. The California Department of Education (CDE) should use the State Plan process (further discussed in Policy Objective # 3) as an opportunity to evaluate its infant-toddler programs.

- B. CDE and the Legislature should create a task force to develop longer-term recommendations to improve infant-toddler care. The task force should focus on expanding access to high quality care and education programs for children in low-income families and other families facing barriers, as well as comprehensive assessment and early intervention for children birth to age three.
- C. The Legislature and Governor should augment the enhanced rates for infant and toddler care so they adequately reimburse providers for maintaining the mandatory lower child/caregiver ratios and enable providers to fully meet the needs of infants and toddlers.
- D. The Legislature and the Governor should improve family leave options for families, including legislation to expand the definition of family under the existing family leave statute.
- E. The Legislature and CDE should work with providers, advocates, and parents to improve the quality of infant and toddler programs.
- F. The Legislature, the Governor and CDE should include an infant-toddler set-aside in any preschool initiatives in order to fund increased access for children 0-3.

**Policy Objective #3**

**CDE should conduct an inclusive and comprehensive evaluation to ensure that agencies, programs, funding streams and policies serving young children are adequately designed, implemented and integrated so they most effectively achieve the common goal of serving children and their families.**

***Background***

The State’s entire subsidized child care infrastructure is both fragile and under-funded. While California has many strong programs it can build upon, the system has grown and evolved without long-term comprehensive planning. The Child Care and Development Fund State Plan outlines how funds connected to the CCDF federal block grant will be expended and explains the structure of child care services in the State. Critical elements of California’s subsidy system, quality improvement investments, and licensing system are all included in the plan. Development and analysis of the State Plan offers a framework and an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive review of California’s child care system, and to set investment and policy priorities.

***Recommended Actions***

- A. CDE, working with the Legislature (including the leadership, policy and budget committees, and the Legislative Women's Caucus), the Administration, advocates and other stakeholders should facilitate broad, effective and early public participation in the development of the 2007-09 CCDF State Plan for federal child care funding.
  - 1. CDE should hold hearings to develop goals for identifying investment, needed systems reform and policies to increase access and quality.
  - 2. These hearings should be followed by an interactive drafting process and then final public review.
- B. Participants in the planning process should:
  - 1. Create a seamless system for parents so their children can receive the care they need regardless of the funding source. This means that all funding sources should enhance, not inhibit a family’s ability to receive subsidized care.
  - 2. Create a seamless system for programs so they have the flexibility to blend funding streams without compromising program integrity.
  - 3. Explore the possibility of creating one reimbursement structure with tiered rates based on regional cost differences and increases for quality of care for all subsidized programs.

- C. CDE should ensure the plan analyzes whether or not funding levels reflect the real cost of quality child care, including resources for developing infrastructure and training, adequate reimbursement rates, facilities, sufficient wages and accountability.
- D. Participants should evaluate the extent to which current licensing standards and investment are sufficient to guarantee the health and safety of children in care.

**Policy Objective #4**

**The California Legislature, Governor and advocates should advocate for federal polices and investment to maintain access to high quality child care and other supports for our lowest income families and children.**

***Background***

California policymakers have new opportunities at the federal and state level to develop policy and investment priorities to provide for the needs of low-income working families and children, including access to early care and education. The Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) passed in 2006 includes a new five-year design for federal welfare (Temporary Assistance to Need Families, TANF) and child care policies, with a focus on increasing work participation rates rather than providing opportunities for low-income parents and children. The California Department of Social Services projected that 39,000 CalWORKs families will need to increase their current work hours, and 18,000 additional families will be required to participate in work activities in order to meet the new federal rate.<sup>9</sup> We reject the approach in the Governor’s proposed budget which responds to the requirements of the DRA and to the state’s deficit by cutting benefits to the poorest children. Neither the state nor the federal budget should be balanced by reducing investment in supports for children and working families.

***Recommended Actions***

- A. The state plan process should include a review of the adequacy of federal funding levels for the CCDF Block Grant and TANF, and identify new federal investment and policy goals.
- B. The Legislature should immediately communicate to the federal Congressional delegation the need to revisit the changes to TANF. They should ask Congress to examine alternate proposals and their impact on children and working families.
- C. The Legislature and advocates should support efforts by our Congressional delegation to increase federal revenue. Recent federal tax cuts should not be made permanent.

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<sup>1</sup> National Center on Children in Poverty, California State Profile [www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org) accessed 12/29/06, for 2006 the poverty line is \$20,000 a year for a family of four.

<sup>2</sup> Heather Boushey, *Staying employed after welfare*, Economic Policy Institute, June 2002.

<sup>3</sup> National Women’s Law Center, *A Second Chance*, January 25, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The California Master Plan for Education at 20, citing Universal Preschool Task Force, *Ready To Learn: Quality Preschools for California in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Calif. Dep’t of Education (1998).

<sup>5</sup> Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (1995).

<sup>6</sup> Institute for Women’s Policy Research, *The Status of Care and Education in the States*, October 2004, p 4.

<sup>7</sup> California Resource and Referral Network, *The 2005 California Child Care Portfolio* at <http://www.rrnetwork.org/publications/2005-portfolio-california-data.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> CharLee Metsker California Department of Social Services Testimony January 24, 2006.