

April 1, 2020

The Honorable Kay Ivey
Governor of Alabama
600 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Governor Ivey,

First, we want to thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented crisis. We have been fortunate to work with you in the past to ensure that Alabama's young children, families, and those that care for them are supported, healthy, and thriving.

As you know, the Alabama Workforce Council identified the need for child care as one of the top three barriers to employment – and that was before COVID-19.

During this crisis, we are learning in real time how critical child care programs are, given the need for essential personnel – health care providers, first responders, and all those who are working tirelessly every day during this surreal time in our history.

We have already begun working together as a coalition, along with the Alabama Departments of Human Resources and Early Childhood Education, to recruit and incentivize high-quality child care programs to reopen their doors to safely meet the needs of essential workers.

However, emergency action and appropriations are needed to support child care programs during and after the Coronavirus crisis.

As of March 26, 2020, the Alabama Department of Human Resources reported that only seven percent of licensed child care centers and 29 percent of day care homes in Alabama are open and operating. Without income to cover fixed costs and pay their staff, many may never re-open.

As an industry, the child care sector was already operating on shoestring margins. Extended closures over the next several weeks or months will put a substantial percentage of child care programs out of business permanently, exacerbating the widespread child care deserts that already exist across the state.

A recent survey by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has indicated that one third of child care centers and homes will not survive closing for more than two weeks, and another third do not know if they would be able to reopen after a closure without financial support.

In the central Alabama region, there is a critical shortage of child care for health care workers alone. If child care providers are to continue supporting the state's

essential workforce throughout this crisis – and remain in business to support the rest of Alabama’s parents when they return to work – the child care sector needs immediate and substantial assistance from the state and federal government.

Child care is the unsung hero of our economy. Child care closures resulting from the COVID-19 emergency will undermine the eventual economic recovery of our state. **Therefore, we ask you to place emergency child care needs and the long-term stability of the child care industry as top priorities in Alabama’s COVID-19 emergency response policies and appropriations.**

There is considerable funding available to support the child care industry through the CARES Act. With your leadership, we can not only survive this crisis, but also expand and enhance access to child care for working families, thus aiding in our state’s economic recovery.

Specifically, the Alabama Child Care Task Force requests that Governor Ivey:

- Support and collaborate with our statewide Child Care Task Force that will continue to identify critical needs of the child care industry and families, and develop specific recommendations for maintaining child care in the short term for essential workers and sustaining child care in the long term.
- Support the continuation of policies that do not reduce or eliminate salaries and grants for state funded Pre-K as well as Head Start programs. Allow waivers for existing high-quality programs to care for different ages and children, in order to help serve essential employees.
- Support the Department of Human Resources in continuing its policy of sustaining payments to child care programs for child care subsidy at least through June 30, 2020, regardless of whether the centers are open or closed.
- Ensure that the Department of Labor creates and maintains simple guidance, specific to the child care industry, which is updated and accessible so that laid off workers and self-employed providers can access the fullest benefits possible. Encourage state agencies and nonprofits that already provide technical support to child care (DHR and the Department of Early Childhood Education) to train child care providers on how to apply for new benefits and programs.
- Increase eligibility for subsidized child care to accommodate essential workers, suspend parent co-pays, and develop timely emergency and enrollment procedures. Increase subsidy payments to child care programs caring for essential employees to the maximum amount.
- Increase payment rates in the subsidy program for Relative Care to support families in providing care for essential employees.
- Establish a single point of contact for all information for the child care industry and for parents and families who need to access child care during this crisis. We recommend utilizing the existing Help Me Grow referral and

- care coordination system already in place (a statewide program currently funded by DHR, DECE, and the Department of Mental Health).
- Allocate CARES Act funding to expand the capacity and reach of Help Me Grow to reach the families, child care directors and child care staff in need during this crisis and to coordinate access, availability, and ensure connections with programs open or opening and essential workers who need child care.
 - Appropriate CARES Act funding to create a special child care stabilization grant program to help child care providers whose families are unable to pay tuition due to COVID-19-related closures or economic hardship. We can learn from other states have already created such funds to help the child care industry pay staff, cover fixed costs, avoid layoffs and remain in business.
 - Appropriate CARES Act funding to provide a hazard pay increase to child care directors and teachers that make the difficult decision to serve the children of essential personnel at the risk of their own health.

We appreciate your urgent attention to this matter. Our task force is committed to helping craft policies, bringing in support and technical assistance from national policy experts, and communicating information to parents, advocates and providers.

Sincerely,

The undersigned members of the Alabama Child Care Task Force

Melanie Bridgeforth, *President & CEO, The Women's Fund*

Mark Dixon, *President, A+ Education Partnership*

Jay Love, *Finance Chairman, Business Education Alliance*

Allison Muhendorf, *Executive Director, Alabama School Readiness Alliance*

Joe Morton, *Chair and President, Business Education Alliance*

Gail Piggott, *Executive Director, Alabama Partnership for Children*

Bob Powers, *President, The Eufaula Agency, Inc. and Co-Chair, Alabama School Readiness Alliance Pre-K Task Force*

Erin Stephenson, *President, Alabama School Readiness Alliance Board of Directors*

Jera Stribling, *Executive Director, Alabama Giving*

Stephen Woerner, *Executive Director, VOICES for Alabama's Children*