



# MEMORANDUM

**To: Governor Asa Hutchinson  
Nate Smith, Director ADH**

**From: Gregg Cooper, President Arkansas Early Childhood Association &  
Arkansas Early Childhood Association Board of Directors**

**CC: Senator Trent Garner  
Representative Denise Garner  
Deputy Director Keesa Smith  
Phyllis Bell, Child Welfare Senior Advisor**

**Date: Friday, March 20, 2020**

**Re: The Critical Child Care Sector**

The [Arkansas Early Childhood Association](#) (AECA) is a non-profit organization, comprised of 1,500 early childhood professionals and parents who share a common concern about the well-being of young children and their families. AECA has worked for more than 50 years to promote quality care and education for the children of Arkansas. The AECA Board of Directors hope to provide **guidance to the state's leaders in supporting Arkansas families and protecting existing child care capacity during and after this health emergency.**

The two largest national organizations representing early childhood education, National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and Child Care Aware of America (CCAoA), have released complementary [statements](#). They recommend that "as a public health matter; and in order to meet the goals of flattening the curve to save lives, NAEYC believes that **if states and districts are closing schools, then they also must close the child care system.** Simultaneously, however, select licensed child care centers and family child care homes should be allowed to and/or instructed to reopen or remain open on a limited basis in order to serve the children of emergency responders and other essential personnel (as defined by the state or locality) for whom remote work is not an option" These recommendations HAVE been implemented in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and [Vermont](#).

While AECA agrees that the health and safety of young children is paramount and we agree with the national recommendations, we acknowledge the challenges associated with this guidance. If the state of Arkansas is not going to mandate closure of child care facilities, this memorandum seeks to provide support in problem solving for the **essential services of child care** during the COVID-19 outbreak. As the state faces weeks or months of uncertainty, the **strain being placed on our child care providers, who are already operating on razor thin margins, could force many of them out of business permanently.**

## **Supports for Child Care Programs**

Child care programs employ the *Essential Personnel* that supports all other *Essential Personnel*.



Child care is not like the K-12 system in which schools will be able to reopen and educators will be compensated regardless of the closure time. According to [findings](#) from the University of Arkansas Medical Science (UAMS), “58% of Arkansas’s Early Care and Education Workforce had trouble paying for basic needs--medical bills, rent, utilities, and transportation--in the last year.” If we are to have a child care sector that can support all other sectors, after the health crisis has ended, child care must be treated as the invaluable component of the infrastructure that supports the entire Arkansas economy that it is.

We recognize the support shown for child care through the incentives announced on March 18, 2020 by DHS Director, Cindy Gillespie, adding an additional allocation per child being served through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDF) voucher. Programs that are fee-based need relief as well. Almost 75% of fees are paid directly by families. While SBA loans may be an option for some industries, most child care programs would be unable to repay those loans after the material loss experienced due to lower enrollment in this time.

The following are recommendations from the AECA Board of Directors. All recommendations would be temporary measures, subject to other state directives and budgetary constraints.

**Recommendation 1: Continue supporting the existing child care industry during this time as opposed to encouraging adding more services through “pop-up” child care in the private industry. THANK YOU!**

1.a Child care programs are having difficulty complying with the [Health Department Guidance for Child Care Facilities issued March 18, 2020](#) due to the lack of access to necessary supplies (cleaning supplies, paper products, thermometers, etc.) **Please include child care in the important work of the Department of Emergency Management in accessing necessary supplies** and distribution to locations caring for Arkansas’s vulnerable population, children under the age of 5. [New Mexico](#) and [Wisconsin](#) have created online request options for child care.

**Recommendation 2: Authorize federal child care subsidy (CCDF) payments for child care facilities and family child care homes based on current enrollment of participating children rather than attendance.**

**Recommendation 3: Allow licensed centers and family child care homes participating in federal child care subsidy (CCDF) to continue to bill for services in the event of mandatory closings as recommended by the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#).**

**These recommendations do NOT address the lost income when private-paying families stop paying their weekly tuition due to their own layoffs or business closures.** Data from a current NAEYC [survey](#) of child care programs across the country indicates that many child care centers and homes will not be able to survive a closure. A temporary closure is, for many, a permanent one. AECA is asking our state leaders to ensure that child care providers, who are often self-employed and/or not-for-profit providers are eligible for unemployment insurance, paid leave, mortgage-rent supports, grants and no-interest loans through state and federal programs.

**Recommendation 4: Include child care centers and family child care homes in the sectors being supported through the \$12M Community Block Grant Funds and access to the [Disaster Unemployment Assistance](#).**



## **Supports for Child Care Workforce**

We applaud the Governor's announcement on March 17, 2020 to remove barriers to Arkansans' displaced workforce during these unprecedented times. Arkansas must ensure that any child care reduction in workforce due to low enrollment is accompanied by necessary policies and funding that allow for access to unemployment compensation.

### **Recommendation 5: Provide access to paid leave or unemployment insurance to the early childhood education workforce who have lost jobs due to COVID-19.**

The Governors of [Colorado](#) and [Rhode Island](#) have taken similar actions, including directing the state's Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) to engage in emergency rulemaking to ensure child care workers receive paid sick leave and adding child care employees to those who may apply for Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI), Temporary Caregiver Insurance (TCI), or Unemployment Insurance (UI). States have waived the seven-day minimum amount of time that claimants must be out of work to qualify for these benefits as a result of COVID-19.

### **Recommendation 6: Tell Arkansas's Congressional delegation and the President that Congress must move quickly on an economic stimulus package that goes further to shore up health, child care, nutrition, and income support for workers who earn low wages. Both for the Arkansas child care workforce AND for the families that we serve.**

For [specific recommendations](#) please refer to the letter from the nation's leading child advocacy organizations making requests for the child care sector in COVID-19 Economic Stimulus Package.

#### *Related State Decisions and Resources*

*The Center for Law and Social Policies (CLASP) provides [Policy Making Principles for Supporting Child Care and Early Education Through the Coronavirus Crisis](#) AECA believes this to be an exceptional resource for state leaders*

[New Mexico](#) Children Youth & Families Department has created a slate of temporary family and child care supports. New Mexico's strategies align closely with our recommendations.

[Pennsylvania's](#) Department of Human Services has created a platform to share all related COVID-19 information including the most recent recommendations. The ECE strategies put forth in Pennsylvania align closely with our recommendations.

[Wisconsin](#) Department of Children and Families has developed a central location to share all related information. Many of Wisconsin's ECE strategies align closely with our recommendations

Due to the (very) fluid nature of this situation, we have been unable to identify every regulatory decision that has been made to support local or statewide "Critical Child Care" sites. Therefore, AECA will continue to monitor for changes, new developments and helpful examples in other states and share those findings as they develop. Thank you for taking the time to consider these recommendations that will assist our state's child care industry and workforce during this unprecedented time. Please contact [info@arkansasearlychildhood.org](mailto:info@arkansasearlychildhood.org) with any questions or requests for clarification.