



Dear Members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors:

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors is committed to a goal of ensuring that every child in Fairfax County has equitable opportunities to thrive. As we face this public health crisis together, it is crucial to ensure families can work because they have child care, and to ensure that child care means school readiness.

Voices for Virginia's Children is a non-profit, non-partisan child advocacy organization and for 25 years we have championed public policies that improve the lives of children and families. In addition to our statewide work with agencies, legislators and partners, we partner with early childhood programs and other local leaders across the northern region to connect the data and the real-life experiences to inform smart policies and investments to help families and the child care workforce to thrive.

**As you consider the revised FY21 county budget proposal, we urge your support for these recommendations from the County Manager:**

- The creation the new Fund 40045, Early Childhood Birth to 5. The fund will support a comprehensive approach to advancing and expanding the County's early childhood system by providing full and equitable access to high quality, affordable, early care and education for young children. Though the new investments in the original FY21 proposal must be deferred, setting up the Fund is a crucial step and when revenues improve this is investment that must be a priority as we recover and rebuild.
- The \$25 million referendum originally recommended in 2020 for early childhood facilities, which has been deferred to 2022. We are glad to see it is still here, even if delayed on the calendar. This will continue to be a crucial issue.
- Ensuring that no county employee's pay or positions are cut.

**As Fairfax decides how to use federal CARES Act funds and how to prioritize state and local funds to support our workforce and keep the community safe:**

- Essential workers serving on the front lines as child care providers need to be recognized and compensated for their work.
- Additional resources will be needed for testing in child care, personal protection equipment (PPE), and cleaning supplies for program sites.

Child care is crucial to the county's economy. We have to have child care programs, and we have to have people working in child care – in centers and family child care homes. The Board of Supervisors has a crucial role to play. This is about right now during the emergency, and this is also about the recovery and rebuilding.

Our friends at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) surveyed child care programs to learn more about the challenges they are facing across states and settings, and the impact a closure without significant public support would have on a program moving forward:

- Nationally, **30% say they would not survive a closure of more than two weeks** without significant public investment and support that would allow them to compensate and retain staff, pay rent or mortgages, and cover other fixed costs.
- Another **16% would not survive longer than a month**, without these supports, and, because of the uncertainty of the situation, another 25% do not know how long they could close and still re-open without supports.

**What would happen if Fairfax lost this many child care programs? Let's make sure we do not find out.**

States are using the flexibility available to them through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to support providers and families, including an additional investment from Congress through the CARES Act. On April 15, the Northam Administration announced plans to use Virginia's allocation of those new dollars (\$70 million), including:

- Child care programs remaining open to serve essential personnel are applying for grants in the amount of \$25 per child per week based on half of their licensed capacity – and this can be for centers and family child care, and for those in subsidy and not. In the first 2 days, the state received 1,000 applications.
- Child care programs that closed will still receive payments if they were a part of the subsidy program. This is generous and important. Programs that were private pay only receive nothing at this time, though. Nationally, we only reach 1 out of 6 children eligible for subsidy, and far more programs are *not* involved in subsidy but those families, providers and neighborhoods are still struggling. Centers and family child care homes may have closed for personal health or safety concerns, or because parents were not bringing their children, or because staff were unable to come to work.

These actions are important to stabilize the industry but by themselves do not do enough to provide financial security for an essential, but often low-paid workforce. They do not address how financially strapped families may afford child care in the future. Child care providers still lack access to PPE and cleaning supplies. With uncertainty about the timeline for returning to "normal" activity, planned payments through June raise questions about what happens after that time. A "one size fits all" payment based on a formula of \$25 per student does not factor in the higher costs of living in Northern Virginia to provide child care services. This appropriation of federal funds, and the loan opportunities through the CARES Act, are not sufficient, and we continue to advocate for a more robust investment from Congress. **We ask you to join us in this federal advocacy for CCDBG, too.**

We do not yet know exactly when the re-opening and recovery will happen, or what that will look like. We do know that parents cannot work without child care, and as we build toward that we must also sustain the child development and early learning opportunities in child care. **As we think about how to support Fairfax County now and in the recovery, child care must be a part of the planning and part of the investment.** We will need to prioritize compensation, professional development, and business technical assistance. Early childhood educators in centers and family child care homes will need to be recruited, trained, background checked and paid. We will need to support staff and families who will come back having lived for months in families with limited access to food, shelter, and a sense of security, and possibly grieving the loss of loved ones. All of this work will require a trauma-informed approach to staff development and work preparations.

Fairfax County has a history of stepping up for families' to access early care and education so that parents can work and children can thrive in healthy learning environments, and a history of investing in

and supporting the child care workforce. We must not lose sight of that work. The One Fairfax initiative and the county's equitable school readiness strategic plan still matter. Opening the Early Childhood Fund is an important start to forwarding the necessary investments for right now and for the recovery. This is an urgent priority for the health of our county overall.

Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

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