



Service Employee International Union (SEIU) Agenda for the Early Care and Learning Programs

Quality early childhood programs provide our children with a strong social and educational foundation, give parents peace of mind, ensure a more dependable workforce for business and help make our communities strong. As early childhood providers and as parents, who depend on early childhood programs to work and support their families, SEIU members have a strong stake in these policies and would like to see our next President implement an agenda that invests in America's children and families.

Economic Recovery and Job Creation

According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projections, child care is one of top 15 fastest growing industries in the U.S. Still, there is a shortage of affordable and accessible early care and learning services available to working parents. Funding shortfalls over the last 8 years have forced states to cut back on their child care and Head Start programs, waiting lists for services have grown. Only one in seven children eligible for child care assistance receives the help that they need; Head Start serves only about half of all eligible preschool children; and, Early Head Start serves only three percent of eligible infants and toddlers.

Investing in early childhood programs is not only the right thing to do for our children and families, but it also makes good economic sense and is critical to successful economic recovery. Each dollar spent on child care stimulates as much as a \$1.49 in regional economic activity. If the child care reimbursement rates are increased the return is even higher¹. An immediate and substantial investment in early childhood programs is essential to getting families back to work and must be included in any economic recovery package.

Recommendations:

- Ensure access to affordable, early care and learning services through an immediate and substantial increase in federal funding for existing early care and learning programs – CCDBG, Head Start, and Early Head Start to eliminate waiting lists, increase subsidy rates, and broaden parental eligibility so that all low-income children are served. This increase should be included in the recovery package to ensure that families are able to access the jobs created under the recovery program. President Obama should request a new investment of \$10 billion for these early childhood programs.
- Ensure that jobs created under the Economic Recovery Plan include child care jobs. Funds should be made available to expand child care services for eligible parents who are employed or seeking employment. Funding for child care will help keep providers operating through the economic downturn, preserving the more than two million jobs¹ in the early childhood workforce.
- Ensure that early care and learning services are accessible to the children of immigrants without regard for the immigration status of the eligible child's parent. Five million U.S. children, most of them citizens and under the age of 10, live with at least one undocumented parent. Head Start, Early Head Start, and CCDBG are all benefits accorded to any qualified immigrant child, regardless of their parent's immigration status. Parents should have access to bi-lingual staff and materials in their own language; and eligibility re-determination should occur on an annual basis.

Integrated System to Promote Early Care and Learning

There is no integrated, widely available and accessible system to provide community-based early care and learning programs and ensure that young children get a quality start in life that prepares them for school and beyond. As the state emphasis on pre-school increases, state governments may increase funding for school readiness programs at the expense of child care. Part-day state preschool programs

¹ <http://www.ccw.org/pubs/workforceestimatereport.pdf>



must be coordinated with adequately-funded child care services to address the full-day care needs of children and their working parents.

Recommendations:

- Establish an Office of Early Care and Learning in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Administration for Children and Families. This Office would house the Child Care Bureau and the Office of Head Start. This Office of Early Care and Learning would promote greater coordination between these two programs thereby improving their effectiveness in building integrated and expanded early childhood services and greater blending of funding streams for young children to access services.
- The new Office of Early Care and Learning should ensure greater coordination amongst Federal agencies that provide children of low income families have access to a variety of services (health, nutrition, and other social services). Only through access to comprehensive services can our most vulnerable children succeed.
- New investments in early care and learning services should continue to be delivered through a mixed delivery system of community-based providers – home-based, center and school based programs—and should be carefully designed in order to strengthen rather than weaken existing services in all types of programs for all age groups.

Workforce Development

The early care and education workforce is among the most poorly compensated in the country and often lacks affordable health insurance, leading to serious challenges in recruiting and retaining the stable, high-quality teachers and providers that children and families need. Research shows that quality early care and education is directly linked to training, retention, and adequate compensation for this, almost exclusively female, early care workforce. Yet, on average, family child care providers earn only about \$10,500 annually and child care center-providers earn \$15,000 per year. It is widely accepted that children need stable, consistent care to grow and learn, but nationwide, more than one-third of early childhood providers leave the industry every year because of low wages and lack of health insurance.

Recommendations:

- Federal programs should be expanded to recruit and retain a stable workforce of qualified early care and learning providers by creating incentive-based training programs that encourage providers to seek training and professional development. Incentives could include improved compensation and access to affordable health insurance. Supports such as mentoring programs, apprenticeships and wage supplements will help providers access training. Any incentive-based improvements in rates should be above the federally recommended 75th percentile market rate, from the most recent biannual market rate survey.
- ACF should expand the quality improvement set aside to 30% to increase training and education, raise compensation, and improve retention in the early childhood workforce.
- ACF should provide guidance to states that early care and learning organizing is consistent with and has been proven to further the goals of federal child care programs of creating affordable and accessible childhood programs. SEIU has a strong track record of working with state advocates to incentivize provider participation in training by linking training and professional development to improved compensation. We look forward to working with the Obama Administration to develop an integrated system of early care and learning with effective training programs that raise the qualifications of early childhood providers and address their low wages to keep well trained professionals in the field.

ⁱ Morrissey, TW and Warner, ME. (2007) *Applied Development Science*, 2007, Vol. 11, No.2, pp 57-70.