

March 19, 2016

Attention Stephanie Murray
Division of Family Development
Office of Policy Standards Development
P.O. Box 716
Trenton NJ 08625-0716

Dear Ms. Murray:

On behalf of Child Care Aware of New Jersey, I would like to thank the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development for including the Child Care Resource and Referral agencies throughout NJ's Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) plan. This acknowledgement of our work in the community is truly appreciated. Your commitment to strengthening the child care system in our state is commended, and the CCR&Rs are committed to moving child care forward along with you.

The long standing CCR&R infrastructure in NJ has championed the rights of all children to start life with the best possible foundation for learning, early care and health. The on-going and trusting relationships developed by the CCR&Rs in our communities is the backbone of these efforts, and will contribute greatly to the success of the CCDF plan in New Jersey.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments.

Child care subsidies are not only a work support; they are a vehicle to provide settings that create the healthy growth and development of children. The provision of adequate funding will allow New Jersey to set the child care subsidy reimbursement rate at the levels sufficient for low-income families to access high quality care.

As stated in the Raising of America film series:

“Science has demonstrated that a child’s earliest experiences are vital to building the foundation for life-long and individual success-in school and in life. Neural synaptic connections are occurring in a child’s brain age zero-three at a rate of 700 a second. Economists are studying the costs of high quality early care and education, and they are worried- not because were spending too much but because we are investing in too little in what matters most.”

We urge NJDHS, DFD to persuade the State and Federal government to make greater investments in community based child care programs caring for children receiving subsidies. Child care is a vital community resource that supports families, contributes to economic productivity, and nurtures children’s growth. Additional funding is imperative for programs providing this most important resource for our most vulnerable families.

As outlined in the State Plan, Child Care Aware of NJ in partnership with NJDHS, DFD, commits to identifying other potential financing and resources such as employer supports for civic investments, in an effort to support positive change and equitable outcomes for children.

Continuity of care is essential for children's learning and their healthy growth and development. The implementation of family friendly policies related to child care subsidies protects working families for job loss and search or maternity leave. It also insulates vulnerable families from unintended consequences such as losing child care benefits when they receive a raise which ultimately yields a negative impact on their employment.

Research from The Urban Institute and Zero to Three Policy Center states:

“In addition to its value to a family’s financial health, continuity is of vital importance to the healthy development of young children, particularly the most vulnerable. Research has shown that children have better educational and developmental outcomes when they have continuity in their child care arrangements. Unnecessary disruptions in services can stunt or delay socio-emotional and cognitive development because safe, stable environments allow young children the opportunity to develop the relationships and trust necessary to comfortably explore and learn from their surroundings. Since the early years are the most dramatic for brain development, constant adjustment to new surroundings and routines can have long-term negative consequences on the child’s cognitive development.”

The plan to utilize the existing CCR&R infrastructure to provide comprehensive health and safety trainings is a wise decision. Through our partnership with NJDHS, DFD and collaboration with identified state agencies, the CCR&Rs are committed to delivering community-based training for the child care workforce that is intentional, sequential, evidence based, while incorporated with coaching and the promotion of achieving higher education degrees in an effort to produce the best possible outcomes for children at the same time creating a well- trained, highly effective child care workforce.

Extensive child care reform comes with a very high price tag. Child Care Aware of NJ encourages NJDHS, DFD to urge legislators at the Federal and State level to provide the funding that is imperative carry out the long overdue provisions of the reauthorization law.

Last, we commend NJDHS, DFD for their leadership on CCDBG. Managing all the pieces is a heavy lift to say the least. Thank you again for your confidence in the long standing CCR&R infrastructure. On behalf of Child Care Aware of NJ, we look forward to working in partnership with you as the process continues, pushing ourselves to be forward thinking while implementing innovative practices to improve the well-being of NJ's most vulnerable children and families.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Perrelli
President