



September 13, 2022

Director Charles Brereton
Department of Public Health and Human Services
111 North Sanders
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Director Brereton:

We appreciate the Department's continued work to improve access to child care for families across the state. **As members of the Montana Advocates for Children and organizations that support families accessing child care, we write today to urge the Department to maintain critical COVID-relief provisions to stave off further disruptions for families and employers who rely on Montana's child care system.**

In 2020, Congress passed the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), providing supplemental funding to states to stabilize the child care sector. Montana expanded eligibility for the Best Beginnings Scholarship program, lowered copay requirements for families, and provided more stable reimbursement payments to providers. Under these provisions, roughly 2,000 families have already benefited from the higher eligibility or lower copay amounts, and more than 600 child care small businesses have received stable reimbursement payments based on enrollment.

Failure to extend these provisions will result in thousands of Montana families facing significantly higher copays and a steeper eligibility cliff if their income rises. We estimate that more than 14,000 children could be eligible to access assistance under the expanded eligibility level, including many two-parent households that have previously been ineligible for assistance. If the state ends the current \$10 copay limit, families that fall just below the current eligibility guidelines will pay nearly one-fifth of their income on copays. Failure to extend the reimbursement payments based on enrollment will create additional burdens for both child care businesses and families. Without stable reimbursement payments, child care providers face uncertain funding for their slots used by a Best Beginning family or must pass that cost onto families to cover more than a few absences each month.

We, the undersigned, urge the Department to utilize ARPA funds, other federal funds, or state surplus funds to maintain all three of these critical policies to help parents access child care. Accessible and affordable child care is essential for parents to return to and stay in the workforce.

Businesses across all sectors need workers who have a safe and reliable place for their children during the day. Now is the time to invest in a child care system that ensures families can find high-quality care when and where they need it, and child care businesses can pay workers for the value of the care they provide without passing that cost on to parents.

Sincerely,



Xanna Burg, Director
Montana KIDS COUNT

Montana Advocates for Children:

Montana Association for the Education of Young Children
Montana Budget & Policy Center
Montana Family Childcare Network
Montana Head Start Association
Montana Women Vote
Raise Montana
Zero to Five Montana

Other supporting organizations:

Butte 4-C's
Child Care Resources, Inc.
Community Food and Agricultural Coalition
Early Childhood Coalition of Flathead Valley
Family Strong
Missoula Parent Co-Op
Montana Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
Montana Food Bank Network
Montana National Organization for Women
National Association of Social Workers, Montana Chapter
Sanders County Coalition for Families
Zero to Five Butte-Silver Bow
Zero to Five Missoula County

Montana child care providers and other direct service providers for families:

Abbie Shelter
Alison Gappmayer Daycare
Amanda's RugRats Childcare
Babies and Beyond
CougarCubsChildCare
Country Lovin Childcare
Crystal's House Daycare
Debby's Daycare
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

First Class Child Care
First Congregational United Church of Christ, Billings
Got Griz Kids
Kid Kountry CDC
JoDean's Daycare
Lil Bears Childcare
Lil' Bobcats Early Learning II
Lil Buckaroo's Day Care LLC
Lil' Cupcakes Childcare
Little Birds Daycare
Little Ducklings
Little Mae's Early Education
Little Squirts Childcare
Magic Forest Preschool
Mending Minds Therapy, LLC
My Sister's Keeper Childcare
Natural Beginnings Childcare
Roots Nature School
Small Wonders Childcare and Preschool
Sunflower Academy Childcare
Teddy Bear Day Care
Teton County Food Pantry
The Creative Playhouse
The Kids Zoo
The Learning Garden LLC
The Learning Grove
The Magic Forest: Little Sprites
Tiny Toes Childcare LLC
Veronica's Lullabies and Laughter/Little Learners
Wiggles to Waddles Childcare and Preschool
Wild Wonders Early Learning Program
Wonder Years
YCA Human Trafficking Task Force
YWCA Great Falls
YWCA Helena - Caterpillars Clubhouse
YWCA Missoula