

# ***HONOR THE ESSENTIAL EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: SOME EXAMPLES AND NEW IDEAS***

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Billowing across the tide of the spreading COVID-19 pandemic is a tidal wave of need for emergency child care, especially for essential workers and low-income and homeless families.

Child care, Head Start, Pre-K, family child care educators and other Early Care and Education leaders are acutely aware of the stresses on families now.

They are gearing up to provide emergency care, with appropriate guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics *Caring for Our Children* and from the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness, accessible online to all sectors of the early care and education community. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/physical-health/article/coronavirus-prevention-response>

## ***RECOMMENDATION TO POLICYMAKERS: PAY THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE***

Supporting essential workers, including the health care workforce who are on the frontlines, with the equally essential early care and education workforce—and keeping all in **both** workforces as healthy as possible-- drives urgent policy thinking as well as programmatic adaptations.

**Every governor needs to make one critical policy decision right now: pay the early care and education workforce right now. Keep them paid during the entire pandemic.**

California, led by an enlightened governor and state legislature, has just enacted a bill, SB 117, assuring payment to state-funded child care programs, including family child care programs, as well as schools during school closures.

California's state legislators and public servants, Giannina Perez in the Office of the Governor; Tony Thurmond and Sarah Neville-Morgan at the California Department of Education (CDE); and Kris Perry at the California Health and Human Services agency deserve widespread gratitude for their pathfinding work continuing compensation for the state-subsidized ECE workforce.

The federal Office for Head Start (OHS) has already committed to pay salaries and benefits during closures of Head Start and Early Head Start for center-based, family child care home-based and home visiting staff. Dr. Deborah Bergeron, the OHS director, is to be commended for this decision, undoubtedly advocated also by the National Head Start Association.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/physical-health/article/coronavirus-prevention-response>

The federal Office for Child Care, led by Shannon Christian, took swift action to inform states that flexibility is allowed for the use of the Child Care and Development Fund.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/im-2017-02>

The public is about to become aware of just how essential the early care and education workforce is. **The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE)**, a prophetic voice in the early child field, has called this out for decades. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/>

All of us should review and support the recommendations of CSCCE's Dr. Marcy Whitebook, Dr. Lea Austin and Ashley Williams <https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/488690-babies-dont-do-social-distancing> and those of **The National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC)** [https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/naeyc covid-19 closures and child care.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/naeyc_covid-19_closures_and_child_care.pdf), **the First Five Years Fund** <https://www.ffyf.org/child-care-sector-needs-immediate-relief-to-keep-doors-open-through-covid-19-crisis-and-through-recovery/> and the **Children's Defense Fund** <https://www.childrensdefense.org/> Other national organizations are also active such as CCAoA's [Child Care Aware Resource Website](#).

**The National Women's Law Center** recommendation for equitable federal paid leave for the ECE calls out features essential for state action as well. <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Paid-Leave-in-the-Families-First-Coronavirus-Response-Actv1.pdf>

**The National Governors Association**, <https://www.nga.org/>, **the Alliance for Early Success** <http://www.earlysuccess.org/resources/coronavirus> and the **National Institute for Early Education Research** [http://nieer.org/covid-19\\_resources](http://nieer.org/covid-19_resources) and **the National Black Child Development Institute** <https://www.nbcdi.org/coronavirus-resources-and-recommendations> are maintaining lists of state policy resources.

## ***ADVANTAGES OF A CONTINUED COMPENSATION POLICY***

Continued compensation will help limit the spread of the virus, by allowing more of this essential workforce to serve children and families from socially isolated homes or from safe early care and education facilities, in concordance with professional guidance..

It also frees the typically highly altruistic human beings who are the heart and soul of the early childhood workforce to function in other ways.

First it allows them to care for their own children and family members--a moral right. But it is good for all families in the communities they serve. Early childhood educators, in both family child care homes as well as centers, often function as trusted leaders and advisors to parents about children.

Even if they have decided to be at home during closures or are “sheltered at home” (quarantined) by public order, compensated early educators may be able to function as home-based educators and informal support to parents and children via telephone and teleconferencing.

They can use (or develop) new tech-based modes of communication with stressed parents and children. They can invent other ingenious ways to adapt to both rippling new quarantine measures and the needs of children and families.

To do that, they need to be freed from the paralyzing worry of personal financial collapse. They have already dedicated their lives to children and families--and foregone higher wages in almost every other sector to do so. Making close to poverty levels historically, they should be supported as the resourceful, resilient and altruistic workforce that they are.

## ***RECOMMENDATION FOR EXPRESS ENROLLMENT IN MEDICAID, FOOD STAMPS AND WIC***

Ann Segal, former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy Initiatives at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and we –and undoubtedly others--recommend that

during this crisis, the essential ECE workforce should have express enrollment in Medicaid, food stamps (SNAP) and the Women Infants and Children (WIC) programs. And be empowered to help parents have the same. During this emergency, states could initiate temporary fast track eligibility for these federal programs.

The benefits to the community at large? The essential ECE workforce would be kept healthier and out of the overwhelmed hospital emergency rooms and wards.

This is the workforce that supports all other workforces. Time to honor that. Finally.

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