MEMO

To: The County of Santa Barbara and the Cities of Buellton, Carpinteria, Goleta, Guadalupe, Lompoc, Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, and Solvang

Re: Pandemic Recovery and Rebuilding of the Santa Barbara County’s Child Care Sector through the American Rescue Plan Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Funding

Child care is critical to Santa Barbara County’s economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This past year highlighted how child care is a pillar of our national and local infrastructure, and has exposed unsustainable vulnerabilities and inequities that existed pre-pandemic. Santa Barbara County’s already fragile child care system needs a stronger infrastructure to ride out and recover from this pandemic as well as to ensure preparedness for the next emergency. It is imperative to our recovery that local governments work together to shore up the child care sector so children have safe, stable, and equitable environments to learn and grow and parents can return to work.

Recommendation: Invest 5% in the First 5 Years
The organizations endorsing this memo recommend that the County and cities of Santa Barbara County each contribute 5% of their American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) allocation towards building a strong child care infrastructure that will support the current systems of care, the ability for parents to return to work, and the preparedness of county-wide systems for future emergencies.
Problem

★ Many working parents, particularly mothers, lost the ability to work due to lack of child care during this pandemic. This created a mass exodus of women from the nation’s workforce - an estimated 865,000 women (four times more than men) due to the demands of child care.[i] Our economy cannot fully recover unless women fully participate in the workforce. Without access to reliable, equitable, and quality child care, parents cannot return to work, food and housing insecurity persist, child poverty is exacerbated, and the resulting family stress increases the incidence of child maltreatment, substance abuse, and family fracture. Investment in our child care sector is an essential prevention and recovery strategy that is critical to our community’s overall recovery.

★ Children have heightened critical needs due to the pandemic, and child care can help. Extraordinary brain development occurs from birth to age 5 forming the bedrock for lifelong health, intellectual ability, emotional well-being, and social functioning. Many young children's social, emotional, and/or mental well-being has been impacted by the pandemic. Trauma faced during early child development may have long-term consequences across the lifespan.[ii] Researchers expect a tidal wave of behavioral health needs, especially from children of vulnerable and marginalized communities. High quality, inclusive, affordable child care is critical to mitigating and addressing children’s poor outcomes.

★ The pandemic exacerbated the pre-existing shortage of needed child care, which cripples parents’ ability to return to work and impedes on our local economic recovery. In Santa Barbara County, there are an estimated 33,186 children 0-5 year olds, making up roughly 7.4% of the County’s overall population.[iii] Prior to the pandemic there were more than two children needing care for every space available and almost six children needing care for every infant-toddler space available.

★ Child care programs have struggled to maintain operations with decreased revenue due to enrollment restrictions and increased costs from COVID-19 health and safety requirements and are now faced with a limited workforce as they expand. Child care businesses in financial stress need immediate funding to keep their doors open. Some programs will survive, however many may not, which will further limit access for parents and amplify the inequities among disadvantaged and higher risk populations. The greatest challenge in reopening to pre-COVID-19 enrollment levels is due to a staffing shortage - qualified teachers had to leave the field due to concerns about the virus, program closures, or to care for their own children. Without qualified staff, programs cannot reopen or return to licensed capacity.

Solution: Invest 5% in the First 5 Years

A 5% investment of ARPA funds in a sustained, coordinated county-wide emergency response system and infrastructure that includes child care is essential for COVID-19 recovery. A proactive approach will address current needs, rebuild the 0-5 child care sector and workforce, increase access to child care so parents can return to work, mitigate children’s exposure to toxic stress, and provide early identification and interventions to children and families who are struggling.

The pandemic’s effects on child care in Santa Barbara County has been crippling, however it could have been worse without the heroic efforts of child care providers and the Santa Barbara County Emergency Child Care Initiative, which was formed in April 2020 with the support of United Way of Santa Barbara County and a consortium of local philanthropic partners including The Natalie Orfalea Foundation and Lou Buglioli, Jane and Paul Orfalea/the Audacious Foundation, Linked Foundation, James S. Bower
Foundation, Ann Jackson Foundation, Zegar Family Foundation, Henry and Lola Monroe Foundation, and Santa Barbara Foundation, as well as local early childhood advocacy organizations including Children’s Resource & Referral, First 5 Santa Barbara County, and the Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council. The initiative’s aim was to offer funding for emergency child care programs in response to the urgent need to provide safe child care for health care providers and essential food distribution employees. Through the initiative’s efforts, a framework was created to begin developing and implementing a child care emergency response system.

It is now imperative to continue this work through a sustained funding effort at the city and county level. Future child care funding from the State and Federal Governments will not be enough to recover the stability of the child care sector, let alone prepare our local infrastructures adequately for future emergencies.

**Strategies**

An emergency response infrastructure that includes supports for children, families, and the child care field will include the following:

- **Create data and communication emergency response infrastructure that integrates the child care sector.**
  - Development and implementation of a unified, integrated, comprehensive communication and data system that coordinates with the Office of Emergency Management, LegacyWorks Group, Public Health Department, Community Care Licensing, Child Care Planning Council, and Children’s Resource and Referral. This will include a data/communication component with emergency response and coordination capabilities for all of the 593 private and public child care sites across the county.
- **Direct support to child care programs to help rebuild and revitalize the child care sector and promote an equitable buildup of capacity and operational stability.**
  - Flexible spending grants for up to 492 private child care sites for specific recovery and emergency preparedness needs (e.g. sustaining and growing the workforce, retrofitting for emergencies, and strengthening operational capacity). Government funded child care programs have received strong financial support through the pandemic, however private centers and family child care have not, thus amplifying disparities.
  - Funding for technical assistance and resources to private and public child care programs aimed at recovery and sustainable business operations.

If the County continues to reopen and COVID-19 child care guidelines are lifted, with these supportive strategies, it is estimated that:

- At least 5,000 closed child care spaces can be restored.
- Programs can sustain the 6,000 child care spaces that are currently open.

In sum, in order to recover from the pandemic it is imperative that 5% of the ARPA across Santa Barbara County is invested in child care for the first five years.

For more information and ways to contribute, please contact Eileen Monahan at eileen@eileenmonahanconsulting.com or Holly Goldberg, PhD at holly@hgoldberg.com.

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