

Dear Honorable Governor Cuomo

March 16, 2020

Childcare centers need your strong leadership immediately. We need clear directions and protections during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools are closed, and we are being told to avoid crowds to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus, but child care centers remain open, and there is no social distance when we care for babies and toddlers. We are on the front lines. Our arms are open as we receive young children each day who depend upon us to hold, feed, care and educate them, so that their parents can work in hospitals and grocery stores and pharmacies.

Although we have been a blind spot in the conversation about COVID-19, we know we are not at the bottom of the hierarchy -we are the hub of our communities and the essential infrastructure of our neighborhoods. Our care demonstrates our human connection and dependency upon one another during this dangerous health crisis. Childcare is an honorable profession and requires special skills and knowledge. In the best of times, it is demanding and challenging work, and during a crisis it requires us to strengthen our commitment and service to our youngest citizens.

We are at your service, and we ask to be acknowledged and supported in the following ways:

1. Close child care centers for several days to slow the spread of coronavirus, and to allow childcare centers to make an emergency plan which outlines procedures and obtains appropriate materials and schedules and staffing to operate under emergency conditions. During this brief pause, acknowledge the essential child care work force and speak of risks for the caregivers, and the safety and care of the babies, toddlers and young children.
2. Advise the Office of Children and Family Service to deny waivers when child care centers petition to increase capacity and suspend supervision ratios. In other states such as Ohio, this has resulted in crowded child care centers and hazardous conditions. During this highly contagious virus spike, we must encourage child care centers to reduce capacity.
3. Because public schools are closed, encourage YMCAs, churches and public schools to coordinate emergency childcare centers for school aged children to avoid overcrowding centers that are designed for children ages 0-5.
4. Advise parents across the state to make in-home arrangements if they can, and to reserve emergency group child care for single parents and essential infrastructure employees such as nurses, doctors, paramedics, police officers, grocery store clerks and managers, pharmacists, etc.
5. Allow the licensed child care providers that have chosen to be sites for emergency care to open, while following their emergency plans which include but are not limited to:
 - a. Operating below capacity. Avoiding large groups of children and find ways to disperse in smaller groups as much as possible.
 - b. Spending time outdoors every day and planning for fresh air and sunshine.
 - c. Doing a daily health check and not caring for mildly sick children.
 - d. Conducting adult led meals to minimize child to child contact during meals.
 - e. Increasing hand washing, cleaning and sanitation each day and at all transitions
6. Emergency funding is needed to sustain our vital infrastructure of child care. Family home care centers and small businesses have no margin for this financial fall out. We are working with various advocacy groups across the state to ask that child care centers can apply for emergency funding for income lost during closings required to stop the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, we must consider that those working in emergency child care centers be eligible for hazardous duty pay.

Respectfully,

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