

August 10, 2021



Dear Members of the Frontline Worker Pay Working Group,

I write on behalf of the Minnesota Child Care Association. Our mission is to promote the success of licensed child care centers as an integral part of Minnesota's early education system. We serve as a voice for professional, high-quality child care that is affordable, accessible, and able to meet the diverse needs of Minnesota families. On behalf of our members across the state I urge you to ensure that frontline child care providers receive their share of Frontline Worker Pay resources.

The early care and education ("child care") profession of nearly all women and high proportions of people of color stepped up when Gov. Walz explicitly asked child care to remain open in the spring of 2020. As everything else was shutting down, it took courage to do so in the face of much health and financial uncertainty. Our providers knew that without child care there wouldn't be workers – grocery clerks, custodians, emergency responders, utility workers, doctors and nurses, bus drivers – anywhere else. Child care answered the call.

There is NO social distancing in child care. Providers have been holding, feeding, rocking, changing, dressing, and hugging young children this whole time, often for 10+ hours a day, because that's how you teach and support and care for them. There is no substitute. Early in the pandemic there was no vaccine. There was little known about how COVID-19 spread, how risky various situations were, how the disease would affect different populations. It would've been easy for child care providers to say no thank you. But child care answered the call.

Child care continues to endure wave after wave of economic disruption every time a COVID case occurs in a child or staff member. Due to the close and social nature of child care, one case might close a single classroom, multiple rooms, and even entire programs, for two weeks at time. A grocery store doesn't shut down if a customer tests positive for COVID – not so for child care. Imagine this roller coaster happening with your livelihood over and over again (and it's still happening, as 0% of our customers are eligible for vaccination). Yet child care answered the call.

Child care is the lowest paid job in our state requiring at least a high school diploma. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development's 2020 data put the median wage of child care providers at \$11.61/hour. With a bachelor's degree early educators make an average of only \$14/hour in the child care field. First Children's Finance found that some family child care providers take home less than minimum wage. Even pre-COVID-19 1/3 of providers in Minnesota earned little enough to rely on public assistance, costing the state \$43 million/year in those benefits alone. We pay parking lot attendants more to supervise cars than we do those who oversee the education and safety of young children.

These vulnerable members of Minnesota's workforce have shouldered a disproportionate burden. Yes, the child care sector has received dedicated federal relief funds, but those are intended to simply save the industry from collapse, not reward those that have risked a lot for little in return. Last November Gov. Walz said, "When this is all said and done, and the stories of this 100-year pandemic are written, there will be heroic stories written about child care providers." Please see and support these providers – if equity in distribution of these funds is a legitimate concern, I cannot imagine the argument for leaving child care out of the equation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Clare Sanford".

Clare Sanford
MCCA Government Relations Chair