

October 17, 2016

Legislative Task Force on Access to Affordable Child Care  
1200 Minnesota Senate Building  
95 University Ave. W.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Legislators,

Together with the Voices and Choices for Children coalition, we provide input in response to two of your tasks being addressed tonight:

**Evaluate access to culturally appropriate child care**

The report *Recommendations for the Well-Being of Families of Color and American Indian Families in Minnesota* (Voices and Choices for Children Coalition) reveals that families show a marked preference for caregivers who share their culture and values for good reason. Research has documented the critical importance of positive identity formation and protective factors for children. As scholarships and CCAP payments are currently structured, caregivers of color and American Indian caregivers and centers will not have sufficient support to serve families in their communities. An unintended consequence will likely be the removal of children of color and American Indian children from settings rich in protective factors and the weakening of family and community bonds. Families will have to choose between getting financial help and having the full range of culturally authentic protective factors for their children.

While scholarships and Parent Aware ratings are valuable additions to an early education system, many American Indian and licensed caregivers and centers of color are pushed into an unsustainable business model. Scholarships and CCAP payments do not cover the full costs of quality care. If licensed caregivers and centers serve a high proportion of low-income children, they must continually subsidize costs out of operations, which few can afford to do, or go out of business. With insufficient scholarships and CCAP payments over time, caregivers of color and American Indian caregivers and centers will be left behind.

**Review the current preservice and in-service training requirements for family child care providers and child care center staff. Include availability, cost, delivery methods for training for the Parent Aware Rating System**

According to the 2015-2016 Parent Aware Cultural Responsiveness Report (Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota), many early child care providers expressed frustrations and concerns regarding the current Parent Aware Cultural Responsiveness curriculum, trainers and coaches. There is a common assertion that there aren't nearly enough coaches that come from communities of color or American Indian communities. The Hmong comprise the largest Asian American population in the state and there currently only exists two Hmong coaches to serve the entire state. Providers shared that the current diversity trainings and trainers are still majority white and speak about diversity and cultural responsiveness in very broad and general terms. Providers across cultural communities argued that it should be mandatory to have trainers who actually come from the communities that they're training on.

There was also a critique that many pre-existing culturally specific trainings are not currently counted towards the Parent Aware rating system, i.e. Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) trainings and that Parent Aware should begin to identify and honor pre-existing trainings that focus on cultural responsiveness.

Throughout CDF-MN's five Parent Aware indicator review public input process convenings across the state, individual participants shared that they had lost their trust or belief in the Parent Aware rating system as providers, professionals or parents. These stories ranged from feeling like Parent Aware was more focused on judging providers than supporting them, that professionals faced significant cases of implicit bias by assessors and that parents of color and American Indian parents have lost confidence that a highly rated provider doesn't always translate to ensure highly cultural competent care. There needs to ongoing significant meaningful engagement and authentic outreach work led by DHS and Parent Aware to communities of color and American Indian communities to rebuild trust and move from transactional relationships to relationships of reciprocity.

On behalf of Minnesota children,

Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota & Voices and Choices for Children Coalition

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