

children at Risk

**Legislative Budget Board Committee
Texas Workforce Commission
September 28, 2022**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and for this committee's continued commitment to young children in Texas, their families, and the broader Texas workforce. We support the Texas Workforces Commission's exceptional items and believe Texas should invest more. The pandemic has reminded us that a strong, robust, high-quality child care system is bedrock infrastructure for the Texas economy. Every Texas industry depends on the child care workforce. Early childhood education and child care support both the workforce of today by allowing parents to work and the workforce of tomorrow by safeguarding and educating Texas children.

Today, I'm here to speak in support of the Texas Workforce Commissions Legislative Appropriations Request, and to advocate for Texas to invest state dollars in early childhood education, specifically to address issues that low-income working families need – access to affordable quality childcare in their communities and especially increased availability of quality affordable child care for infants and toddlers.

State of Child Care

As this committee is aware, the last two years have been very hard for the child care industry and working Texas parents. According to data from Child Care Regulations at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, *Texas lost 21% of child care providers* from March 2020 to September of 2021. Out of those closed programs during that time, 41% of the providers served infant and toddlers, and 79% of them were child care homes, which disproportionately affects rural communities, communities of color, and families needing non-traditional hours of care. Texas had 242 communities become child care deserts, a nearly 62% increase statewide. When we look at the actual number of possible enrollments, in 2019, Texas had 87.1 child care seats per 100 children of working

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parents, *in 2021, we have 54.9 seats available per 100 children with working parents*. Put simply, this means that out of all families who need two incomes, less than half of them have access to child care, and even fewer are able to find quality child care in rural communities and communities of color. Businesses need these workers, and these workers need high-quality, accessible child care for their youngest children.

There is a VERY positive story to tell about how the State of Texas has responded to the child care crisis. In the midst of this great need, the Texas Workforce Commission has done amazing work supporting child care business owners and educators. It is not an exaggeration to say that the men and women of the Texas Workforce Commission had a large hand in saving the Texas child care industry during the pandemic and they deserve our thanks and appreciation. The Texas Workforce Commission has overseen the administration and allocation of approximately 5.9 billion dollars in federal aid, the vast majority of which have gone directly to child care providers in the form of stabilization grants. We know that this work has had a positive effect. 98.4% of programs who received the first round of stabilization grants during the summer of 2021 remained open. Further, the Texas Workforce Commissions efforts to support quality programs through the Texas Rising Star program also paid off. Out of all the providers that closed, only 2.9% of them were Texas Rising Star programs. Parents, educators, business owners should all be grateful for the hard work and dedication of the men and women at the Texas Workforce Commission.

However, looking towards the future, we still face significant challenges. The bedrock funding that has been holding the industry together for the last two years are COVID relief dollars – all of these sources will begin to expire over the next two years, with funds needing to be spent by 2024. Meanwhile, early childhood educators are still struggling. There are still not enough providers in all communities to support the Texas Workforce. Even in communities where there are child care facilities open, most are experiencing significant staffing shortages, meaning they can't serve their full capacity of child care slots. As a reminder, the median annual wage for child care educators in Texas is approximately \$20,300 with an average hourly wage of \$10.15, resulting in 56% of

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educators qualifying themselves for at least one form of public assistance. We have asked so much of these educators, and benefitted so much from their labor, and yet we give them so little in return.

Recommendations:

- **Increase state investment in child care.** It is time for us, as Texans, to start having the conversation around how we invest in our own children, our own families to ensure they not only have a high-quality early learning experiences but their parents are able to go to work and their early childhood educators are compensated and respected for their profession and expertise.
- **Increase partnerships between private child care providers and school districts to provide pre-kindergarten in community settings.**
- **Support and strengthen the child care workforce through increased compensation and additional educational opportunities for child care educators.**
- **Allocate dedicated funds to support childcare providers operating in childcare deserts where the demand for high-quality child care far outweighs supply.**
- **Allocate funds specifically to support quality improvement efforts, including Texas Rising Star.**
- **Allocate funding to increase the supply of quality infant/toddler care for our youngest children.**

I am certain that with increased investment in state funds, we can continue to strengthen the early childhood education infrastructure that supports the Texas economy.

Thank you for your time today and I'll be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Mandi Kimball

Vice President and Director of Government Affairs

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Supporting Organizations:

- Austin/Travis County Success By Six
- Child Care Associates
- Council for a Strong America
- Early Matters Dallas
- Early Matters El Paso
- Early Matters Greater Austin
- Early Matters Waco
- North Texas Early Education Alliance
- Pre-K 4 SA
- Texans Care for Children
- Texas Association for the Education of Young Children (TXAEYC)
- TexProtects
- United Ways of Texas

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