



December 8, 2020

**President-Elect Biden's HHS and ED Transition Team Leaders**

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**Re: Recommendations to Improve Child Care & Early Learning Program Administration**

Dear HHS and ED Leaders of President-Elect Biden's Transition Team:

We write to you as the Steering Committee for Rhode Island's Right from the Start Campaign, a legislative and budget campaign to advance state policies for young children and their families in Rhode Island. We are working hard to increase state and federal funding and to improve policies so that ALL Rhode Island kids and families, regardless of zip code, race, ethnicity, or family income, get off to the right start in life.

Our advocacy focuses on high-quality child care, paid family leave, Pre-K, Early Head Start/Head Start, family home visiting, community-based doula services, two-generation mental health services, and Early Intervention (Part C of IDEA) and Preschool Special Education (Part B Section 619 of IDEA). We recognize that the federal government provides much of the funding and oversight for these services and serves as a key catalyst for innovation and systemic change.

We offer the following suggestions for the Biden/Harris transition team, including strategies to better engage state advocates in improving state systems to better respond to the needs of families with young children:

- **Prioritize robust funding for core early childhood programs** in any COVID relief package and in President-Elect Biden's budgets, particularly his first budget. The biggest challenge facing all of our non-public school programs is a staffing crisis that was present before COVID-19 and has only gotten worse during the pandemic. Staffing challenges are due to low funding levels (from government and families who generally cannot afford to pay any more than they are currently paying), inadequate wages and benefits (including inadequate paid sick time and health insurance for educators), low education/training levels of staff, inadequate supervision/coaching practices, and little to no resources to staff programs when educators are out sick or on quarantine.
- Reconstruct an office of **Early Childhood Learning and Development at USED** to partner with the Office of Early Childhood Learning and Development at USHHS that oversees Child Care and Head Start. The USED office Early Childhood office could be responsible for policy and funding of public education for children ages 3 to Grade 3, IDEA Part C, and IDEA Part B, Section 619. It could also promote coordination and planning with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center funding and CCDBG.
- Create/restore a **leadership position that has cross-departmental oversight for early learning and development across USHHS and USED**. Modeling effective cross-departmental goal setting, planning and implementation, cooperation, funding, oversight, and data sharing is very important to move the



field forward, particularly during a crisis.

- Consider **moving the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program into the Office of Early Childhood Development at USHHS** and promote coordination with Early Head Start and Early Intervention (Part C of IDEA).
- **Re-engage State Advisory Councils** on Early Care and Education, required under the 2007 Head Start Act, in state and federal processes to fund and oversee early learning and development programs. Provide more clear guidance and support to states on why and how to operate an effective Advisory Council which needs to include strong leadership and participation from non-governmental agencies. Require and provide adequate time for State Advisory Councils to review and sign off on state plans, reports, and grant applications for early childhood funding. Consider providing funding to support basic Council operations to include basic staffing inside and outside government, public websites with Council recommendations, providing stipends for non-salaried stakeholders to participate, providing simultaneous interpretation, and other planning expenses that could include conducting periodic workforce surveys, etc.
- **Require states hold public hearings** on all major federal grant applications with adequate time to collect and incorporate public input before submission.
- **Post copies of all state grant applications and annual performance reports**, including budget information and financial reporting, on websites accessible to the public.
- **Require federal agencies to post up-to-date compliance and non-compliance information about state early childhood programs**, including federal letters written to state agency leaders about compliance and corrective actions required, on websites accessible to the public. Post state corrective action plans submitted to federal agencies.

High-quality early learning and development programs are essential to our rebound from this terrible pandemic. Please continue to do all that you can to develop strong federal infrastructure and oversight and to model coordination and cooperation across funding streams. We appreciate all that you do.

Thank you for your consideration. Please reach out to Leanne Barrett at [lbarrett@rikidscount.org](mailto:lbarrett@rikidscount.org) and/or Mary Varr at [mvarr@whscda.org](mailto:mvarr@whscda.org) if you have questions or would like to discuss any of these suggestions.

Sincerely,

**The Right from the Start Campaign Steering Committee**

*Leanne Barrett, Rhode Island Kids Count; Marcela Betancur, Latino Policy Institute; Susan Dickstein, RI Association for Infant Mental Health; Rachel Flum, Economic Progress Institute; Lisa Hildebrand, RI Association for the Education of Young Children; Khadija Lewis Khan, Beautiful Beginnings; Mary Varr, Woonsocket Head Start Child Development Association*