

Preschool & Child Care Open Letter from Arizona Mayors

December 6, 2021

As Mayors of diverse communities across Arizona, we strongly believe in the importance of early childhood education. We are encouraged by the much-deserved attention being given to the essential role of child care and early learning for children, families, and our economy. Together, we urge Congress to prioritize and pass significant, sustained, and simultaneous investments in quality, mixed-delivery child care and preschool. The Build Back Better (BBB) Act provides those critical investments.

As community leaders, we are grateful for the American Rescue Plan and other crucial relief measures from the past year that have provided support to stabilize child care programs reeling from the pandemic and prevent more program closures in our communities. Thanks to federal relief funds, child care providers across the Grand Canyon state are able to apply for and receive consistent monthly child care stabilization grants that help them support staff and keep their doors open.

However, these grants are just the beginning of what's needed to recover and rebuild. Low compensation is leading to a severe staffing crisis being experienced by 84% of Arizona child care centers, as indicated by a provider survey from the National Association for the Education of Young Children¹. This is a workforce issue. The poverty rate for early childhood educators in Arizona is 20.5%², twice as high as the poverty rate for Arizona workers in general. The impacts of this staffing shortage are keeping Arizona's families, and particularly mothers, out of the labor force. Half of programs impacted by staffing shortages are serving fewer children. One in three have a longer waitlist, and one in five have closed classrooms or reduced their operating hours¹. Low child care wages undermine quality, limit supply, and diminish the benefits to children, families, and our economy.

Our country's child care field was fragile before the pandemic. Many parents were unable to find or afford quality child care, and educators were unable to provide that quality care without sacrificing their own families' economic well-being. 48% of Arizonans lived in areas where the supply of licensed child care was scarce³, and the average cost of child care was unaffordable, often over \$8,000 a year for a family³.

¹ National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2021). [Progress and peril: Child care at a crossroads](#). Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

² McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). [Early childhood workforce index – 2020](#). Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

³ America for Early Ed. (2020). [State fact sheets: Arizona](#). Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The truth is that we cannot go back to the crises and challenges that existed for families and the early childhood workforce prior to the pandemic. But there is a solution. Public funding can support an equitable, quality child care and preschool system. The BBB Plan currently before Congress will lead to transformative changes for Arizona families and educators. The average annual cost of child care in Arizona is \$11,017⁴. After the BBB Plan is implemented, working families could save thousands of dollars on their annual child care costs. In Arizona, only 38% of eligible 3-year-old and 4-year-old children go to preschool⁵. After the BBB plan is implemented, all children will have access to preschool. Families will have diverse options in a variety of early learning settings including family-based homes, child care centers, Head Start, and school districts. Providers will be able to pay their staff competitive wages that recruit and retain qualified, consistent workers.

Each of us stand in support of investments in child care and preschool. We know our communities benefit when families can count on having equitable access to quality child care and preschool options provided by early childhood educators who are prepared, supported, and compensated for the skilled, valuable, and essential work they do.

As Congress makes crucial decisions, we call on Arizona's Congressional Representatives to do everything in their power to prioritize a significant, sustained investment in child care and preschool to support our state's economy, our families' economic security, and our children's success.

Sincerely,

Mayor Paul Deasy
Flagstaff

Mayor William R. Diak
City of Page

Mayor John Giles
Mesa

Mayor Regina Romero
Tucson

Mayor Joe Winfield
Town of Oro Valley

⁴ Child Care Aware of America. (2020). [2020 State fact sheet: Arizona](#). Arlington, VA: Child Care Aware of America.

⁵ First Things First. (2020). [Fulfilling our commitments to children & communities: State fiscal year 2020 annual report](#). Phoenix, AZ: First Things First.