



The Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network: A Stabilizing Force During Unstable Times 2011-2013 Public Policy Agenda

Through our work supporting families, child care providers, and local communities, the WA State Child Care Resource & Referral Network (CCR&R Network) is keenly aware of the difficult economic situation facing the State of Washington. This financial crisis is particularly evident in the child care industry. More than half of all families that use child care report that the “Great Recession” has impacted their child care in some way*. Child care facilities are struggling to stay open as families are forced to withdraw their children due to unemployment and cuts in child care subsidies.

The “Great Recession” has also decimated the state’s incoming revenue, which has forced the Governor and Legislature to make many difficult funding reductions. This includes the CCR&R Network, which has had its funding reduced by 28% over the current biennium. These cuts have led to a significant reduction in parent referral line hours, delays in many early learning initiatives, a near halt to supports for Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers, layoffs, and more.

Knowing all of this, the CCR&R Network puts forward a public policy agenda that:

- ✓ Provides families and caregivers the support they need to get through this difficult time
- ✓ Contributes to the state’s economic recovery
- ✓ Addresses the “Preparation Gap”
- ✓ Allows the early learning field to continue to move forward on initiatives that will increase access to high quality child care for Washington’s families

1. Budget Request: protect critical investments currently supporting Washington’s child care system, particularly state funds appropriated to the WA State Child Care Resource & Referral Network.

- **\$213,000 for core CCR&R services**
- **\$80,000 for FFN Supports, funded by the Department of Early Learning’s budget proviso to “develop and provide culturally relevant supports for parents, families, and other caregivers”**

2. Policy Request: ensure that Washington State continues its progress in building a comprehensive professional development system for the child care industry, including the state’s model for a quality rating and improvement system.

* NACCRRRA, “The Economy’s Impact on Parents’ Choices and Perceptions about Child Care”, <http://www.naccrra.org/publications/naccrra-publications/economy-impact.php>

~NACCRRRA, “Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2010 Update”, <http://www.naccrra.org/publications/naccrra-publications/parents-and-the-high-cost-of-child-care.php>

BUDGET AND POLICY REQUEST BACKGROUND

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Washington State needs to get back to work in order to pull itself out of this economy, and Washington's families need child care in order to work. Three-quarters of parents rate affordable child care as the most (31 percent) or one of the most (45 percent) important factors in helping working families*. In fact, Washington rates as one of the 10 least affordable states for infant center child care~. The CCR&R Network presents families with child care options and information on local resources so that they can quickly find child care they can afford. Unfortunately, cuts to the CCR&R Network have reduced our parent referral lines, meaning many families who call in for information will have to leave a message and wait for staff to return their call. That is not conducive with the current economic situation because as the unemployed return to the workforce, they need child care immediately.

The CCR&R Network is much more than parent referrals, and our other services are in demand as well. The CCR&R Network's FFN Initiative provides support to informal, license exempt caregivers, a growing demographic due to the economy. This initiative has almost been wiped out by funding cuts and any further cuts would make these services unavailable. Licensed providers rely on our provider services to support their small businesses during these tough times. These services include mandatory training, technical assistance, consumer referrals, and licensing remediation. Washington's K-12 system is partnering with the state's early learning system now more than ever to ease the transition into the K-12 system and align curriculum for children from early childhood through the 3rd grade, and the CCR&R Network is leading the charge in bringing local early learning systems to the discussion.

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The CCR&R Network is the state's foremost provider of community-based child care professional development. Even during times like these, policymakers must not lose ground on improving the quality of child care. The research is clear: quality is vital to gains children make in early learning. Despite the current economy, parents still rank the quality of care over affordability as their top concern*.

The path to child care quality is professional development and QRIS. Both of those efforts stand at a crossroads, at a time the state is struggling economically. Funding for the QRIS pilot is set to expire at the end of this fiscal year. The Professional Development Consortium (PDC) will deliver its recommendations to the legislature in December of 2010. Despite the fact that there are no resources available to implement the PDC's recommendations and Seeds to Success statewide, the CCR&R Network believes that this is an opportunity to build capacity for a time when resources will be available. This includes merging the PDC's recommendations with the QRIS framework. We encourage the legislature to take the necessary steps to keep these efforts moving forward.

* NACCRRRA, "The Economy's Impact on Parents' Choices and Perceptions about Child Care", <http://www.naccrrra.org/publications/naccrrra-publications/economy-impact.php>

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