

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 30, 2020

Ms. Shannon Christian
Director, Office of Child Care
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C ST SW, Room 4502
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Ms. Christian:

We write to request additional information about how the Office of Child Care is responding to the unprecedented challenges facing our nation's child care system as a result of COVID-19. School and child care provider closures across the country are impacting millions of children and their families. While these closures are important to help decrease the spread of this virus, frontline workers are needed at their places of employment now more than ever, but in many cases do not have safe child care for their children. Yale School of Medicine estimates that more than 3.5 million children of health care industry workers currently need access to child care.¹ We must work together to identify ways to provide child care access to workers who are performing necessary services, like health care workers, and ensure that all child care providers that remain open have the support and guidance necessary to provide accessible and safe care during this pandemic.

As the primary support for early childhood education programs at the federal level, the Office of Child Care is best positioned to provide guidance on how to most effectively activate child care providers across the country to meet the current, critical needs. Your input is especially useful in ensuring that the \$3.5 billion in additional emergency funding for the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) under the CARES Act, the third COVID-19 response package, is used most effectively. As we work to get needed support to child care providers across the country, we must also work to activate this emergency funding to provide essential child care assistance to workers on the frontlines of COVID-19 response efforts, including health care sector employees, emergency responders, and sanitation workers.

This global pandemic, which is unparalleled in modern day history, requires us to look beyond the typical measures to address community needs. Across the country, states and communities are putting into place innovative approaches to address the lack of accessible child care for those who must continue to go to work. In New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation is working in a public-private partnership with the state to develop the NH Emergency Childcare Collaborative to ensure that essential workers have access to safe day care centers that align with nationally accepted guidelines.² In Maryland, the state's hospital

¹ <https://medicine.yale.edu/covid/other/childcare/>

² <https://www.nhcf.org/about-us/community-crisis-action-action-fund/>

association is working with the state Departments of Health and Education and nongovernmental organizations to set up child care programs for hospital health care workers.³ In other communities, grassroots efforts have emerged where people who are unexpectedly out of work, including medical students unable to work with patients, are providing safe and affordable child care options.⁴ While some communities have solutions to meet this critical need, your unique capacity to share effective innovative solutions and provide best practices and guidance would assist many more communities in doing the same.

Experts across federal agencies must work together to problem-solve and meet the current needs posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. We ask that you provide child care providers and frontline workers across the country with much-needed guidance, and request a response to the following questions no later than April 6, 2020:

- 1) Please provide us with any guidance you have already provided to states and grantees regarding the impacts and response efforts related to COVID-19.
- 2) Who are the other agencies and organizations you have been collaborating with? Please describe the type of collaborations you have had.
 - a. Are there other agencies you have not collaborated with that you feel will be useful partners in tackling this challenging problem?
 - b. Have you been in contact with state education agencies and local school districts that are working to meet the child care needs of families in their communities resulting from COVID-19?
- 3) How can child care providers that have been closed to COVID-19 be utilized to serve the immediate needs of frontline workers?
- 4) How can child care providers that have remained opened, but are experiencing lower enrollment as a result of COVID-19 make open slots temporarily available to frontline workers?
- 5) In light of guidance released by the Office of Head Start on Tuesday, March 24⁵ – can you explain how local communities may be able to utilize closed Head Start facilities to temporarily serve immediate child care needs of frontline workers?

³ <https://www.mhaonline.org/connect/from-mhas-president/mha's-friday-update-messages/2020/03/16/next-phase-in-coronavirus-response>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/health/medical-students-coronavirus.html>

⁵ <http://hsicc.cmail20.com/t/ViewEmail/j/49EE44613EEA4C892540EF23F30FEDED/5F3026F49207B9A846778398EADC2510>

- 6) Please provide guidance on how willing child care workers who are employed at closed programs may be used to help fill the immediate child care needs for frontline workers?
- 7) What role can child care resource and referral agencies play in helping connect families to available child care options in their communities and in supporting providers?
- 8) Please provide guidance on how open programs should remain appropriately cleaned and sanitized to reduce the risk posed by COVID-19?
- 9) Please provide guidance on how open programs should put into place, if necessary, screening processes for COVID-19, social distancing protocol, and any other appropriate public health recommendations?
- 10) Please share any child care models that you are aware of that have been effectively deployed to serve frontline workers and could be deployed elsewhere to help respond to COVID-19.
- 11) Please advise on how states can most effectively leverage and/ or adapt their Disaster preparedness plans under CCDBG to best respond to COVID-19.

It is important that child care providers across the country have the necessary information and support to help meet emergency child care needs as our country responds to the spread of COVID-19. We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Senator Margaret Wood Hassan
Senator Jeanne Shaheen
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Sherrod Brown
Senator Ron Wyden
Senator Sheldon Whitehouse
Senator Amy Klobuchar
Senator Tim Kaine
Senator Thomas R. Carper
Senator Richard Blumenthal
Senator Chris Van Hollen

Senator Robert P. Casey Jr.
Senator Charles E. Schumer
Senator Richard J. Durbin
Senator Jack Reed
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
Senator Tammy Duckworth
Senator Tina Smith
Senator Cory Booker
Senator Bernard Sanders
Senator Elizabeth Warren
Senator Kamala D. Harris