



## Memorandum

**TO:** Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

**FROM:** Erika Lautenbach, Director

**RE:** Opportunity Council – Center for Retention and Expansion of Child Care (C-RECC) Contract

**DATE:** JANUARY 16, 2025

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Attached is an 18-month contract between Whatcom County and Opportunity Council for your review and signature.

▪ **Background and Purpose**

This contract will expand and retain childcare slots through continued services provided by the C-RECC program. C-RECC is a partnership program initiated by the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Opportunity Council. C-RECC focuses on stabilizing, retaining, and expanding the capacity and the number of child care businesses across the five counties in our region: Whatcom, Island, San Juan, Skagit, and Snohomish. C-RECC's work over the last four years has focused primarily on stabilization of the childcare sector during the pandemic, funded in large part by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), State grants, and philanthropic contributions. Federal pandemic funding has dissipated considerably, but the need for C-RECC's services has not.

Access to affordable and high-quality early learning and child care is a documented need in Whatcom County. With a projected need for 8,501 child care slots by 2025 and only 3,828 slots currently available, C-RECC plays an important role in bridging this gap.

C-RECC has demonstrated significant success since its inception across the five-county northwest region it served, including:

- Retaining 4,300 child care slots
- Adding nearly 800 new capacity slots
- Supporting 90 early learning jobs
- Assisting over 300 providers with business coaching, licensing, and funding navigation

The Healthy Children's Fund seeks to increase affordable, high-quality, professional, and accessible early learning and childcare opportunities. This contract will continue C-RECC's services and the scope of work will focus specifically, as follows:

- Expansion: Recruiting and assisting 15-20 small to medium providers in licensing their childcare centers, aligning curriculum and programming with quality childcare standards dictated by DCYF, developing child/family recruitment plans, and coaching on center enrollment in Working



Connections Child Care and the USDA food program. C-RECC contends this work could create up to 320 new slots, with 35% of these slots serving Working-Connections eligible households.

- Leveraging outside funding: C-RECC staff will help existing Whatcom County providers apply for state and local funding opportunities that would increase the number of Working Connections childcare slots in Whatcom County.
- Employer supported childcare partnership: C-RECC will facilitate at least one employer-child care partnership to develop childcare slots for their qualifying workforce, as a model to be replicated across Whatcom County businesses. This partnership must ensure that added capacity serves households across the income spectrum of the employee's workforce, including significant slots for households at 85% AMI and below

▪ **Funding Amount and Source**

Funding for this contract, in an amount not to exceed \$411,631, is provided by the Healthy Children's Fund. These funds are included in the 2025 budget. Council authorization is required per WCC 3.08.100, as funding for this contract exceeds \$40,000.

Please contact Ann Beck, Community Health & Human Services Manager at 360-778-6055 ([ABeck@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:ABeck@co.whatcom.wa.us)) if you have any questions.

Encl.