



Memorandum

TO: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
FROM: Erika Lautenbach, Director
RE: Western Washington University – Childcare Preservation Contract
DATE: JULY 18, 2024

Attached is a contract between Whatcom County and Western Washington University for your review and signature.

■ Background and Purpose

According to the latest census¹, there are approximately 10,500 children under the age of five living in Whatcom County. The total current child care capacity in the County is, however, only 3,686 children enrolled in 106 programs² leaving a substantial service gap. Access to safe and affordable access to childcare is more salient among families at or below the federal poverty line: in a low income needs assessment³ conducted by the Opportunity Council, childcare access was ranked as one of the most important needs for families with children under five who also ranked it as lowest in availability across multiple needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic further limited access to safe and affordable childcare in Whatcom County. Across the state, Washington lost approximately 25% of their childcare workers⁴ due to the pandemic and has still not fully recovered. One of the goals of the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF) established under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) is to expand and enhancing childcare and early learning services.

Through a competitive bidding process (RFP 22-52) Western Washington University, Associate of Students Child Care Center, (hereinafter, 'Subrecipient') was selected and recommended for funding to be used to purchase and install a portable building, including infrastructure and furnishings to be used for two licensed child care classrooms. Upon completion, this project will create an additional 20-25 slots bringing their overall capacity to 87. In addition, the project will drop their minimum age of eligibility from 24 months to 12 months.

■ Funding Amount and Source

Funding for this contract, in an amount not to exceed \$529,800, is provided by the American Rescue Plan Act [ARPA (ALN 21.027)]. These funds are included in the 2024 budget and Council authorization is required, per WCC 3.08.100, as funding for this contract exceeds \$40,000.

Please contract Eric Chambers, Special Projects Manager at 360-778-6199 (EKChambe@co.whatcom.wa.us) or Ann Beck, Community Health & Human Services Manager at 360-778-6055 (ABeck@co.whatcom.wa.us), if you have any questions.

Encl.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/whatcomcountywashington>

² <https://www.oppco.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ELAFS-Community-Needs-Assessment-2023.pdf>

³ https://www.oppco.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Community-Needs-Assessment_09.15.21editspdf.pdf

⁴ <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/71981d3ec3a1d02537d86d827806834b/Child-Care-Trends-COVID.pdf>