

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

COUNTY COURTHOUSE

311 Grand Avenue, Suite #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010



COUNCILMEMBERS

Rud Browne
Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kathy Kershner

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

April 27, 2021

Dear Child Care Teammembers:

On February 4, 2020, Whatcom County Health Board adopted the Child and Family Action Plan and made a commitment to "promote the health and well-being of all children and families in Whatcom County, with a special focus on the critical first years of life, and families that experience disproportionate challenges due to social and economic factors, discrimination, and health issues." The impact of COVID-19 on families and the child care system has been significant.

As Whatcom County begins to discuss how to best use our allocated funds from the American Rescue Plan Act, the Whatcom County Council would like your input and wisdom on how we could use these funds to permanently improve the affordability of child care in Whatcom County. These funds are "once in a lifetime" and it is highly unlikely that there will be any equivalent follow up or continued funding once they have been spent so it is critical that our community uses them wisely.

We are keen to hear your thoughts on how we can use these funds to improve child care availability. As you discuss options and our proposed Resolution AB2021-209 PERMANENT AFFORDABILITY OF CHILD CARE IN WHATCOM COUNTY <https://whatcom.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=9262003&GUID=9A30CE27-4388-4D70-98D0-D37D63A47A40> , we ask that you put forward solutions that meet the following criteria:

1. While we understand that there may be a need to spend some money on short term fixes to help stabilize some existing child care providers, no more than 20% of the funds ultimately allocated towards addressing childcare should be used on short term strategies.
2. At least 80% of the funds must be spent on items that will go towards permanently fixing the problem such as capital facilities along the following lines:
 - A. County owned facilities. These would be high quality designed to promote early learning and meet the requirements to qualify for the maximum level of state reimbursement.
 - B. Private facilities. Could be modeled along the lines of that portion of a facility dedicated for child care is funded via a low interest, loan program (subordinate to any bank finance), which would be repaid when the child care ceases to be provided or upon sale.
 - C. Alternative ideas are welcome, provided they provide a substantive permanent solution and generally allocate funds across different ideas in proportion to the number of permanent child care spots they support.

D. It is not the intent of this program to reimburse providers for the capital cost of facilities they already own.

We also ask that you answer the following questions:

1. What role do you see for Whatcom County Government in helping making quality child care accessible and affordable?
2. What roadblocks do you see in making this vision happen?
3. If this resolution was enacted, how would it positively impact child care in Whatcom County?
4. What is your vision for child care in Whatcom County in 2040? How do you see government, nonprofits, and businesses working together to provide quality childcare that is accessible and affordable?
5. If this resolution was enacted, how could it negatively impact child care in Whatcom County?
6. What other ideas do you have for how these funds would best be used for long-term, sustainable child care solutions?

Thank you for the work you do for the children and families in our community. We look forward to receiving your feedback and working together to help our Whatcom County families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barry Buchanan", with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Barry Buchanan, Chair
Whatcom County Council

c: Councilmembers
AB2021-209