



January 11, 2022

Dear Members of the Whatcom County Council:

We deeply appreciate your leadership and guidance to help improve the lives of children and families in our communities. The establishment of the Child and Family Well-being Task Force shows the desires of our leaders to help improve the lived experiences of children and families, who are the essential foundation of our society. The members of the Child and Family Well-being Task Force extend a warm welcome to new Council member, Kaylee Galloway!

Background

Our task force is a diverse and representative group with a variety of lived experiences and expertise. We are directly impacted by the issues of child care in our community. Through hundreds of collective hours and extensive community outreach we previously identified five priority areas for ARPA funding. All of the five areas impact one another.

- A: Increase child care workforce stabilization, development, and compensation
- B: Increase child care capacity
- C: Increase child care affordability
- D: Increase family supports and early childhood well-being
- E: Develop County infrastructure for child and family well-being coordination, evaluation, and planning

We continue to recommend a focus on Priority A, while continuing to explore supports for the other priority areas.

The Council recently passed a budget adjustment that allows for an initial \$5.5 million ARPA investment into child care in 2022; \$3.5 million dollars to support construction of previously determined capital investment projects and \$2 million to support the child care workforce.

Next Steps

The Task Force would like to support the Council with the programmatic decisions surrounding the workforce budget item. We appreciate the recognition by the Council that our Task Force provides a unique perspective as a representative body of diverse voices. We also are aware that other community based organizations and coalitions have been working on strategies to support child care improvements in Whatcom County. In the near term, we will engage with these groups to design the details of our workforce recommendations. Our partners will include representatives from Healthy Whatcom and the Whatcom County Child Care Coalition whose membership includes:

- The Opportunity Council
- Western Washington University
- Bellingham Technical College
- Whatcom Community College
- Center for Retention and Expansion of Child Care
- Whatcom Early Learning Alliance
- The City of Bellingham
- Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington
- Whatcom Racial Equity Commission
- Early Learning providers
- Community Members
- Whatcom County Health Department

Our goal in this endeavor is to facilitate select investments of ARPA funds into the child care system to ensure that they have maximum impact on child and family well-being.

Through this community collaboration process, specific programmatic recommendations will be shared focusing on workforce stabilization. We will update the Council in the Spring of 2022 to report on this collaborative work.

In our previous meeting, council members expressed interest in a comprehensive evaluation of existing data related to the priority areas. Our next step is to engage with Washington STEM as we work to bring forward more detailed recommendations based on this information and collaboration with community partners who are also engaged in this work. In particular, [Washington STEM](#) can help us analyze the return on investment for the various programming options which we understand is an important consideration.

Continuing to communicate and collaborate with community partners will be an important part of making recommendations for additional investments of ARPA funds to support child and family well-being over the course of 2022. We are also prepared to provide guidance, via a proposed ordinance or other mechanism, for how best to direct ongoing public investment to support child and family well-being.

Conclusion

As 2022 begins, we continue to pledge our commitment to improving child care accessibility and stabilization in Whatcom County. Thank you for acknowledging the challenging barriers that our current child care system creates for families, providers, and businesses in our community. We

look forward to working with the Council to create lasting change and improvements by investing in our youngest generation and their families.

Sincerely,

The Child and Family Well-being Task Force