



Memorandum

TO: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

FROM: Erika Lautenbach, Director

DATE: 11/22/24

RE: CENTER FOR RETENTION AND EXPANSION OF CHILD CARE (C-RECC)

Whatcom County Health and Community Services (WCHCS) proposes financing the continued community services offered through the Center for Retention and Expansion of Child Care (C-RECC) in Whatcom County. C-RECC is a partnership program initiated by the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Opportunity Council. C-RECC NW 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. The Center's work over the last four years has focused primarily on stabilization of the childcare sector during the pandemic, funded in large part by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), State grants, and philanthropic contributions. Federal pandemic funding has dissipated considerably, but the need for this service has not. Fortunately, the services provided by C-RECC, as well as the resulting expansion and preservation of childcare in Whatcom County, would qualify as eligible expenditures under an alternative source of funding: the Healthy Children's Fund (HCF).

Background and Importance

Access to affordable and high-quality early learning and child care is a fundamental 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 a pivotal role in bridging this gap.

C-RECC has demonstrated significant success since its inception, 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.

Pilot Plan



- The Healthy Children’s Fund seeks to increase affordable, high-quality, professional and accessible early learning and childcare opportunities. WCHCS is working on a one-year pilot program of \$233,000 to continue C-RECC’s critical services. The scope of work will focus specifically as follows: Expansion: Recruiting and assisting 10-15 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 160 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.

At the end of the pilot, WCHCS will evaluate C-RECC’s progress toward the above goals to determine future program funding. There will be particular attention on number of Working Connections created as part of C-RECC’s expansion efforts.

Please contact Sarah Simpson, Child and Family Programs Supervisor, at 360-410-2400 or ssimpson@co.whatcom.wa.us with any questions or for further information.