



October 19, 2021

Dear Council Members of the Whatcom County Council:

Thank you for your support of our work and great discussion at last week's Council meeting. We appreciated the opportunity to hear your priorities and questions and look forward to developing a more specific proposal for investment into our local child care industry.

We wholeheartedly agree with your approach and vision. Our survey shows the community, including parents, strongly supports both investing ARPA dollars in child care and addressing Priority A (Increase child care workforce stabilization and development) first. We greatly appreciate your effort to create an authentic community involved process and your bold vision to invest significantly in child care. We gladly accept your invitation to continue to be a part of this work. We are mapping out a process to engage others in our community to help us do the research needed to develop specific funding proposals based on analyses of return on investment, feasibility and overall impact on the sector. We continue to advocate for at least half of the ARPA funds, a \$22.25 million investment, be directed toward child care and we commit to having the suggested initial investments ready for action by your first Council meeting in January 2022.

We cannot emphasize enough that the stabilization of the current workforce must be the number one funding priority. It is an urgent and a fundamental need. This summer, even when parents were drowning trying to balance working while caring for their children, there were 618 vacant early child care slots. These slots were open because child care programs couldn't retain or hire the staff needed for their programs. Child care workers are leaving the field at an alarming rate. New college graduates from Western Washington University's early learning program are choosing other lines of work. Increasing child care capacity and increasing affordability for families simply won't work if there aren't qualified child care teachers to staff programs.

While stabilizing the current workforce is most urgent, each of the five priority areas outlined in our initial proposal are essential to invest in over time for our local community. In addition to providing specific information supported by data as to how best to invest in workforce stabilization, we will work with you to develop the specific investments needed to support children and families today, tomorrow and forever.

We do anticipate engaging external expertise to contribute to the analysis needed to develop a suitable investment plan. We will look to our local colleagues in the Child Care Coalition, Child Care Aware and the Center for Childcare Retention and Expansion as well as resources at institutions, such as Western Washington University, and the Healthy Whatcom Results-Based Accountability process, to help us. The Health Department has indicated they have funds available to support work related to children and families and are prepared to oversee any necessary contracts.

Thank you for the opportunity to continue to inform the County government's role in this work. Together we will make a difference for Whatcom County's young children and their families.

Submitted to you by the Resources and Funding workgroup

Child and Family Well-being Task Force

Members: Anne Granberg, Astrid Newell, Brian Nelson, Greg Hansen, Jamie Desmul, Jed Holmes, Jennifer Wright, Ray Deck and Vesla Tonnessen