

May 10, 2023

My name is Blue Shibler, and I reside in Juneau. I am writing/calling in as the Executive Director of the Association for the Education of Young Children Southeast (AEYC-SEA), a nonprofit serving child care providers, families and young children in SE Alaska for the past 40 years.

I am in support of HB89 as a measure to increase access and affordability of child care for working families. Child Care subsidies are widely known to reduce the wealth gap by increasing employment and earnings for families with low and middle incomes. Access to affordable, high-quality child care and education during the early stages of a child's life should not be a privilege reserved for wealthy families. The expanded income eligibility guidelines in HB89 would allow more families to have choice in who they leave their kids with while they are at work.

In my work with families, I most often hear from those who are making just enough to be disqualified for subsidies, but not enough to pay for quality care. These families are often forced to make tough employment choices, and often need to use unregulated child care because it is cheaper – but they don't feel great about it. Some recent examples of this are:

- A single mother who takes her two young children to the neighbor's house everyday while she works, but worries because she knows they watch TV all day and don't get fresh air or exercise.
- A set of grandparents who have legal custody of 2 children under age five. They need child care because they struggle to physically care for the kids all day – because it is exhausting even for the young – but their retirement income disqualifies them for subsidy. They use 'babysitters' found through Facebook to help them occasionally.
- A single parent who has a good state job but has to turn down promotions and pay increases because they would disqualify her for the child care subsidy she is currently receiving. This is actually a situation I hear about often -parents who earn even a small raise at work can find themselves no longer eligible for benefits and suddenly unable to afford something they had covered when they were earning less, turning a raise into a pay cut.

In addition to the expanded eligibility for child care subsidies, HB89 would incentivize employers to help their employees afford child care. Subsidizing professional child care arrangements for an organization's employee's makes sound business sense because it potentially reduces the stress and anxiety that working parents might regularly experience while worrying about their children during their normal work hours. Employer subsidized child care is known to increase employee retention and improve productivity.

With growing attention from lawmakers, broad public approval for increased investment in child care, and bipartisan agreement that helping families afford quality care is a good idea; implementing policies to make child care high quality and affordable in Alaska makes good economic sense. I hope you see the value in affording choice for families and pass HB89 out of committee.

Thank you for taking my comments today.