

Dear Members of the Legislature,

Thank you for considering child care legislation early this session. I just returned home after visiting Juneau to advocate for additional Head Start funding to allow Head Start organizations to meet the mandatory 20% non-federal match. Additionally, organizations in our region have been working hard to build out additional child care centers. The lack of affordable quality child care has negative impacts in every region of our state. In the Bering Strait region, we have employment opportunities with development of the Port of Nome and minerals development, the healthcare sector, and more. However, we will have a hard time capitalizing on these opportunities if parents can't find child care. Both Norton Sound Health Corporation and Kawerak have several job vacancies currently listed as we have limited childcare options combined with a housing crisis. Last year the House passed child care legislation on a bipartisan basis, but unfortunately that bill died in the Senate. Please keep pushing ahead to pass the strongest possible legislation to stabilize this sector, support working families, and ensure employers can fill job openings. Former legislator Reggie Joule used to say: "The best social program is a job." However, if parents cannot obtain childcare, employment is out of the question. Our state is experiencing a workforce shortage and I believe passage of this bill will help alleviate this problem.

Thank you for your service to our great state.

Melanie Bahnke, President
Kawerak, Inc.