



Alaska Early Childhood Advocacy Group



Southeast Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children



Anchorage Association for the Education of Young Children



Northern Interior Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children



BEST BEGINNINGS
Alaska's Early Childhood Investment

April 2024
Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Members of the Alaska Legislature,
As representatives of child care programs, early education organizations, and advocates across the state, we would like to thank you for your extraordinary work this session improving policies and funding within early childhood education. This includes the additional \$5 million for Head Start in the House's FY25 Department of Education & Early Development budget and the \$6.1 million to expand family access to child care assistance in the House Bill 89 (HB89) Child Care: Tax Credits/Assistance Grants fiscal note.

At the beginning of the session, members of the Alaska Early Childhood Advocacy Group (AECAG) visited with many of you and shared a request for a \$35.7 million increase in funding for early childhood education. We believed then and now that this sum is what is necessary to keep the sector solvent as we await the final recommendations of Gov. Dunleavy's Task Force on Child Care.

The AECAG's FY25 request includes funding components for Head Start, child care assistance for families, direct support for child care businesses, and benefits for the child care workforce. However, thanks to the investments that the House Finance Committee included for early childhood thus far, which amount to \$11.1 million, we wish to highlight that if push comes to shove the most critical element of the AECAG ask that remains unaddressed is direct operating grants in the amount of \$15 million to child care businesses through the Child Care Grant program in the Child Care Program Office. The next most important elements, which are also unfunded at the moment, relate to professional development and workforce training.



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We agree that families' access to child care assistance is an important strategy for increasing the number of parents participating in the workforce. And the increase in eligibility needs embedded in HB89 will work best when paired with \$15 million in direct operating grants to child care businesses through the Child Care Grant program. Without additional direct support to child care businesses, Alaska will continue to see child care providers closing their doors and reducing the number of child care slots available to families.

In summary, amending the FY25 budget to include \$15 million in direct operating grants to child care businesses through the Child Care Grant program will help support current child care businesses, provide an incentive for new businesses to start, and help stabilize the child care sector while the Child Care Task Force completes its final report.

Thank you again for your continued support for Alaska's children and families by supporting policies and funding opportunities that improve outcomes for Alaska's youngest citizens.

Sincerely,
The Undersigned:

- Stephanie Berglund, CEO, thread, Statewide
- Trevor Storrs, President/CEO, Alaska Children's Trust, Statewide
- Amie Collins, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, Statewide
- Blue Shibler, SEAAEYC, Southeast
- Kyle Gardner, AAAYC, Southcentral
- Robin Temple, Executive Director, NIAAEYC, Northern and Interior
- Laura Barrows, Infant Learning Program, Statewide
- Tamar Ben-Yosef, Executive Director, All Alaska Pediatric Partnership, Statewide
- Kristin Ramstad, Alaska Head Start Association, Statewide
- Melissa LaRow, Owner/Director, Coast to Coast Kidcare, Seward
- Kim Larson, Owner/Director, Kids R Fun Childcare, Haines
- Julie Jackson, Owner/Director, Imagine That Childcare, Fairbanks
- Annette Evans, Early Educator, Ventures/SSD, Sitka



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Lauren Wild, Parent and Child Care Utilizer, Assistant Professor UAS, Sitka
Maria Vilchez, Financial Manager, Open Arms CDC, Fairbanks
Sharlay Mamoe, Executive Director, Petersburg Children's Center, Petersburg

Tracey Schaeffer, Owner, Nunakins, Kotzebue

Bryana Garcia-DeLaCruz, Program Director, Thrivalaska Family Sprouts & Clubhouse, Fairbanks

Laura Talpey, Executive Director, Juneau Montessori School, Juneau

Kelly Doughty, Executive Director, Thrivalaska, Fairbanks

Heather Thalacker, Head Preschool Teacher, Imagine That Childcare, Fairbanks

Jade Hayden and Suzy Yang, Co-Founders of Hmoob Cultural Center of Alaska, Anchorage

Heather Thalacker, Head Preschool Teacher, Imagine That Childcare, Fairbanks

Laura Roark, Executive Director, Anchorage Montessori School, Anchorage

Katrina Rhynard, School Age Program Director, Thrivalaska, Fairbanks

Allison Plachinski, School Age Teacher Assistant, Thrivalaska, Fairbanks

Jessica Baker, Early Childhood Director, Little People's Education Center, Soldotna

Laura Norton-Cruz, Board of Directors for Nunakins, Rural Alaska Child Care Advocate, Statewide

Elia Peterson, Director, Open Arms Child Care Center, Fairbanks

Laurie Mead, Owner, Kyrie 'N Friends Child Care, Soldotna

Christina Eubanks, Executive Director of Hillcrest Children's Center, Anchorage

Jessica Simonsen, Board of Hillcrest Children's Center, Anchorage

Donna Kelliagh, Owner, Mother's Den, Anchorage

Rachel Byers, Executive Director, Little Bears Playhouse, Girdwood

Andrea Fittje, Childcare Provider, Mitkof Monster Childcare, Petersburg

Joann McCain, Owner, Joz's Kidz Daycare, Seward

Valentina Tereshchenko, Lead Teacher, Dee Little Angels, Wasilla

Charity Lawrence, Program Support, CCS Early Learning, Wasilla

Jamesha Russell, Administrator, Camp Fire Alaska, Southcentral Alaska

Amanda Lee, Family Advocate, Thrivalaska Head Start



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Mildred Parker, Reverend, Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, Anchorage
Nickelle Pantoja, Owner, Cheney Lake Family Child Care, East Anchorage
Branwen Collier, Owner/Director, Early Learning for Everyone, Anchorage
Lori Berrigan, Administrator, Palmer LifeWays, Palmer
Jade Hayden, Co-Owner, Hmoob Cultural Center of Alaska, Anchorage
Suzy Yang, Co-Owner, Hmoob Cultural Center of Alaska, Anchorage
Susan Anderson, Interim CEO, Boys & Girls Club Alaska, Statewide
Melanie Hooper, President & CEO, Camp Fire Alaska, Statewide
Kylie Buzzak, RALLY Supervisor, Juneau School District, Juneau
Brandi Jo Nyberg, Child Care Advocate, Farmer at Sauntering Roots Farm, Farmers' Market Manager at Matanuska Community Farmers Market, Palmer
Jenifer Stephens, Member/Director, Alaskan Seedlings Learning Center, Palmer
Corina Quevado, Assistant Teacher, Children's World Bilingual Montessori School, Anchorage
Elaina Sedivy, Teacher, Soldotna Kids, Soldotna
Daniela Rodriguez, Preschool Teacher, Anchorage
Susan DeLoach, Corporate Administrator, Bright Beginnings, Mat-Su
Cristina Santos, Lead Preschool Teacher, Discovery Preschool, Juneau
Elianta Pichardo, Owner, Sweet Home, Anchorage
Susan Jenkins, Home Day Care Provider, Sue's Day Care, Ketchikan
Casie Warner, Early Childhood Coordinator, Seward
Kristen Dutson, RALLY Site Manager, Juneau School District, Juneau
Monica Lidren, Administrative Director, Children's World Bilingual Montessori School, Anchorage
Debbie Potter, Teacher Assistant, Fairbanks Montessori School, Fairbanks
Salwa Abuamsha, HR Coordinator, Camp Fire Alaska, Anchorage
Stefanie Ostlind, Early Head Start Home Visitor, CCS Early Learning, Mat-Su
Marlene Stephens, Owner, Mouse Trap Playschool, Mat-Su
Rocio Arce Espinoza, Assistant Teacher, Kids Corps Inc. Anchorage
Patty Meritt, Child Care Advocate, Fairbanks
Linda Camahuali, Teacher, Kinder Care, Anchorage
Shanai Segal, Teacher, Tundra Tykes, Anchorage
Stephanie Smith, Teacher, Anchorage Waldorf School, Anchorage
Dana Carlson, Teacher, Open Arms Child Development Center, Fairbanks



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Gracelyn Shaw, Child Care Provider, Little Friends Child Care and Preschool, Palmer

Carmen Cano de Guevara, Child Care Worker, Children's World Bilingual Montessori School, Anchorage

Nicki Shelton, Retiree, Parents as Teachers, Hoonah

Samuel Ohana, Mental Health Coach, Hillcrest Children's Center, Anchorage

Angela Acosta, Spanish-Language Assistant Teacher, Children's World Bilingual Montessori School, Anchorage

Maria Contreras, Owner, Home Child Care Service, Anchorage

Princess Lao, Assistant Teacher, Open Arms Child Development Center, Fairbanks

Nina Vignola, Teacher, Learn to Play in the Bay, Early Learning Center-Settlers Bay, Mat-Su

Mercedes Castro, Owner, Growing Together Bilingual Child Care, Anchorage

Kellie Armstrong, Teacher, Thrivalaska, Statewide

Juliet Fortaliza, Owner and Provider, Fortaliza's Day Care, Kodiak

Maria Stefanie Montana, Assistant Teacher, Children's World Bilingual Montessori School, Anchorage

Teresa Glover, Administrative Director, Little Friends Child Care and Preschool, Palmer

Martha Reyes, Owner, Cristo Viene, Anchorage

Arelis Arias, Owner/Administrator, Arelis Care, Anchorage

Laurie Wade, CEO, Rabbit Creek Community Association, Anchorage

Ma Quimel, Lead Teacher, Crystal Child Care Development, Anchorage

Jessica Simonsen, EHS Manager, RurAL CAP, Anchorage

Nikki Richman, Teacher, The Learning Center, Fairbanks

Tami Doone, Child Care Associate, YMCA, Eagle River

Limaann Kelemete, Lead Infant Teacher, Kinder Care Southcentral Foundation Day Care, Anchorage

Noah Stamm, Lead Teacher, Great Places Early Learning Center, Wasilla

Alana Humphrey, Board of Directors, thread, Statewide

Lydia Colon, Owner, Lydia's Day Care, Anchorage

Brett Tyner, Board of Directors, Boys & Girls Clubs of Southcentral Alaska, Anchorage

Carol Flame, Teacher, Open Arms Child Development Center, Fairbanks



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John Gensel, Program Administrator, Creative Play and Preschools, Kenai
Lydia Ossorgin, Child Care Advocate, Anchorage
Santa Claus, Reverend and Child Care Advocate, North Pole
Channing Caindec, Owner, North 60, Anchorage
Marissa Sanchez, Lead Teacher, Petersburg Children's Center, Petersburg
Nathaniel Snyder, Family Services Program Manager, Resource Center for Parents and Children, Fairbanks
Yelena Garcia, Owner, iCare for Kids, Anchorage
Monica Garcia-Itchoak, Child Care Advocate, Anchorage
Rebecca Calvin, Lead Teacher, Tlingit and Haida Head Start, Sitka
Edith Adelaida Corado Marroquin, Teacher, Children's World Bilingual Montessori School, Anchorage
Tarah Sweeney, Owner, Progressive Physical Therapy, Anchorage
Teresa Xiong, Assistant Teacher, Kids' Corps Inc. Anchorage
Lauren Dowd, Administrator, Little Mountain Movers Academy, Anchorage
Roberta Britain, Accounting Generalist, CCS Early Learning, Mat-Su
Ana Castillo, Teacher, Yaneri Bilingual Child Care, Anchorage
Joyce Takak, Teacher, Kawerak Inc. Elim
Kaila Pfister, Parent, Communications Director, Alaska Children's Trust, Anchorage
Mary Anger, Project Manager, Citywide Childcare Cooperative, Anchorage
Mike McArdle, Board of Directors, Boys and Girls Club of Southcentral Alaska. Anchorage
Perseveranda Espinal, Administrator, My 2nd Home Day Care, Anchorage
Lauren Lux, Director of Accounting Operations, Boys and Girls Clubs of Southcentral Alaska, Anchorage
William Canady, Owner/Educator, Puffin Heights Montessori, Anchorage
Yaso Thiru, Owner, First Entrepreneur LLC, Anchorage
Tonis Shine, Senior Director of People Operations, Boys and Girls Clubs of Southcentral Alaska, Anchorage
Hilary Patterson, Senior Director of Clubhouse Operations, Boys and Girls Clubs of Southcentral Alaska, Anchorage
Maria Legend, Teacher, Community Family, Anchorage
Kelsey Paveglio, HR Generalist, Child Care Advocate, Eagle River
Martha Rocha, Owner, Kenai Daycare, Anchorage



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Irma Coronado, Owner, Irma's Child Care, Anchorage

Nick Moe, Public Policy Manager, thread, Statewide

Amanda Fieldhouse, Child Development Assistant, Kids Corps Inc. Head Start, Anchorage

Valentina Tereschenko, Infant and Toddler Lead Teacher, Dee Little Angels Daycare, Wasilla

Charity Lawrence, Program Support Assistant, CCS Early Learning, Wasilla

Jamesha Russell, Program Administrator, Camp Fire Alaska, Anchorage

Rachel Byers, Executive Director, Little Bears Playhouse, Girdwood

Valentina Anderson, Teacher, Cook Inlet Native Head Start, Anchorage

Kerri Raia, Administrator, Little Dippers Learning Center, Skagway

Cheri Francis, Owner/Administrator, My Favorite Preschool, Mat-Su

Laura Lloyd, Teacher, Southcentral Foundation Learning Center, Anchorage

Melanie Saeteurn, Teacher, Clare Swan Early Learning Center, Anchorage

Grecia Areche Rodriguez, Teacher, Sunflower Preschool, Anchorage

Rochelle Soper, Administrator, Smiling Stars Home Child Care, Anchorage

Lisabeth Croft, Teacher Assistant, Anchorage Montessori School, Anchorage

Anchorage

Shelly Titus, Associate Educator, CCS Early Learning, Mat-Su

Rose Ann Ramos, Child Care Associate, River of Life Christian Fellowship Daycare, Kodiak

Heather Fuller, Teacher, Business Environmental Leadership Council, Anchorage

Dnayla Alston, Teacher, Little Wildflowers, Wasilla

Karina Painter, Teacher Assistant, Open Arms Child Development Center, Fairbanks

Faina Melkomukov, Owner, Stay Play & Learn, Homer

Pamela Crain, Teacher, Tundra Tykes, Anchorage

Brandon Sampson, Assistant Teacher, Open Arms Child Development Center, Fairbanks

Gabriela Olide, On Call Relief, Karousel Kidz Learning Center, Mat-Su

Maylyn Tawney, Receptionist, Open Arms Child Development Center, Fairbanks

Chasity Evanow, Lead Teacher, Bunnell House Early Childhood Lab School, Fairbanks



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Nickelle Pantoja, Owner/Administrator, Cheney Lake Family Child Care, Anchorage

Elia Peterson, Director, Open Arms Child Development Center, Fairbanks

Ivelisse Ramos Cruz, Administrator, Ivelisse Child Care, Anchorage

Raeleen Peltola, Early Head Start Teacher, Cook Inlet Native Head Start, Anchorage

Nicole Nothstine, Child Care Associate, Children's Pallas, Cordova

Candice Vialpando, Marketing Manager, Child Care Advocate, Statewide

Roda Sosa, Childcare Provider, Roda Daycare, Anchorage

Maribel Contreras, Owner, Maribel Daycare, Anchorage

Yvelisse Celda De Andujar, Teacher, Amber Bilingual Child Care, Anchorage

Divina Villegas, Assistant Lead Teacher, Crystal Child Development Center, Anchorage

Anne Shade, Child Development Director, Bristol Bay Native Association, Bristol Bay

Leslie Nelson, Owner, Kids Stay N Play, Fairbanks.

Rachel Faulkner, System Program Director, Anchorage Gymnastics Association, Anchorage

Krystal Strong, Preschool Teacher, Mt. Edgecumbe Preschool, Sitka

Margaret Jenkins, Program Staff, Camp Fire Alaska, Anchorage

Morgan Besser, Teacher, Thrivalaska, Statewide

Foketi Tago, Teacher, Open Arms Child Development Center, Fairbanks

Cynthia Lilleston, Assistant Teacher, Anchorage Waldorf School, Anchorage

Tabatha Peterson, Program Director, CCS Early Learning, Wasilla

Alex Nichols, Senior Site Director, Camp Fire Alaska, Anchorage

Amy Williams, Assistant Director, Juneau Montessori School, Juneau

Amanda Lee, Family Advocate, Thrivalaska, Statewide

Gladys Roark, Owner, Gladys Daycare, Anchorage

Kira Thompson, Owner, Karousel Kidz Learning Center, Mat-Su

Katherine Mercurief, Teacher Mentor, Cook Inlet Native Head Start, Anchorage

Jessie Kiffer, Teacher, Liz's Daycare, Ketchikan

Kelley Willson, Owner, Teddy Bear Loving Daycare, North Pole

Anna Oseguera, Owner, Estrellas Magicas, Anchorage



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Andrea Fittje, Child Care Provider, Mitkof Monster Child Care, Petersburg
Tiny Thomas, Day Care Provider, Tiny's Kid Care, Anchorage
Jessica Liska, Owner, Happy Root Daycare, Juneau
Selina Ellis, Home Visiting Coordinator, Kids Corps Inc. Anchorage
Jennifer Clark, Professional Development Director, Child Care Advocate, Anchorage
Edith Sanchez Covarrubias, Head Teacher, Children's World Bilingual Montessori School, Anchorage
Barbara Dubovich, CEO Emeritus, Camp Fire Alaska, Statewide
Matthew Baxter, Director, Anchor Lutheran School, Anchorage
Patricia Gilbert, Infant Toddler Teacher, CCS Early Learning, Mat-Su
Terri Robertson, Administrator, Carousel Child Care, Anchorage
Tonya Dickerson, Owner, Northern Lights Preschool and Child Care, Anchorage
Deyanira Rojas, Owner, Deya's Daycare, Anchorage
Joann McClain, Teacher, Joz's Kidz Daycare, Anchorage
Angela Rush, Child Care Advocate, Alaska Child and Family, Anchorage
Tamora Harding-Childs, Teacher, thread, Statewide
Jeremy Robida, Concerned Citizen and Child Care Advocate, Valdez
Andrew Krenz, Teacher, Anchor Lutheran School, Anchorage
Deanna Scott, Owner, Dee's Little Angels Child Care, Wasilla
Ana Rodriguez, Owner, Chiquilladas Child Care, Juneau
Teresa Felton, Owner, Kids R Us, Anchorage
Hannah Hoelscher, Teacher, Creative Play, Kenai
Mrudula Dandekar, School-Age Lead Teacher, Open Arms Child Development Center, Fairbanks
Sharon Bullock, Owner, Kamie's Kid Kare, Eagle River
Crystal Stricklin, Family Services Manager, Camp Fire Alaska, Anchorage
Suyeon Yi, Administrator, Crystal Child Development Center, Anchorage
Kimberly Stacy, Teacher, Alphabet Kids, Ketchikan
Yolanda Hernandez, Child Care Provider, Mauricio's Child Care, Juneau
Jeff Baker, Owner, Little People's Learning Center, Soldotna
Lokilani Fruean, Office Manager, Carousel Child Care Center, Anchorage
Joan Registe, Administrator, Joan's Daycare, Anchorage



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Tina George, Director, A Child's World, Anchorage
Abram Goodstein, Rabbi, Jewish Education Center, Anchorage
Maria Mata, Administrator, Karousel Kidz Learning Center, Wasilla
Sheena H, Preschool Teacher, Tanaina Child Development Center, Anchorage
Brandi Nelson, Child Care Advocate, Alphabet Kids, Ketchikan
Yinna Mancilla, Teacher, Children's World Bilingual Montessori School, Anchorage
Nora Ramos, Teacher, Play All Day Care, Anchorage
Gregoria Moran, Infant and Toddler Assistant Teacher, Children's World Bilingual Montessori School, Anchorage
Yineth Serrato, Teacher's Assistant, Open Arms Child Development Center, Fairbanks
Angela Niggel, Infant Toddler Teacher, CCS Early Learning, Wasilla
Kueni Maake, Teacher, ABC Center, Juneau
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Stacy Goodwin, Teacher, Thrivalaska, Fairbanks
Kerrie Spain, Owner, Bright Minds Learning Center, Wasilla
Xenia Ventimiglia, Senior Site Director, Camp Fire Alaska, Statewide
Amber Bond, Child Care Associate, Sunshine Station Child Care Center, Talkeetna
Ahna Steiner, Teacher, Alaska Seedlings Learning Center, Palmer
Rick Farrell, Executive Director, Bear Valley Community Association, Anchorage
Larry Parker, CEO, YMCA Alaska, Southcentral
David Koch, Director of Child Care, YMCA Alaska, Statewide
Ashley Crace, Director of Early Childhood Education, Lower Kuskokwim School District, Bethel
Margot Grant Gould, Government Relations Manager, KinderCare