

King County Committee of the Whole Meeting

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

9:30 am Public Comment Period regarding the Best Starts for Kids Levy Renewal

Good morning Council Chair Balducci and Councilmembers, my name is Carol Gibbs and I live in Bellevue, 98004.

I have been a Licensed Family Child Care Provider for 32 years. I am a leader in my Child Care Union, **SEIU 925**, and President of the **Washington State Family Child Care Association**. I want to tell you why I support the renewal of the Best Starts for Kids levy.

Child Care is in **trouble** in King County. **63%** of our County's working families live in a **Child Care desert**, meaning there are not enough Child Care slots for the children that need them. Families in the suburbs are more likely to live in one of these deserts, and low-income neighborhoods have even fewer child care options.

We need to think of Child Care as a basic infrastructure for King County. It is necessary to support our growing, robust economy. Statewide, we lose \$2 billion a year due to turnover and missed work because of Child Care issues, and that was before COVID.

Over my 32 years in this field, I have seen hundreds of Child Care providers close. Now, the estimate is that 30% - 50% of those currently closed will not come back. It will be a loss for our entire community if that happens.

\*In the last 10 years DCYF has licensed 266 Home Child Cares in Bellevue. Currently less than 20% of those are still active.

Part of the problem is the job doesn't pay enough to attract or retain staff: Child Care workers are paid less than pet groomers or dog walkers and most don't have health insurance.

Looking out over Lake Bellevue you see the Spring District awaiting Face Book, and GIX, bringing 2,000 new residents and 13,000 office workers. That's not to mention all the apartments that are going up in the Crossroads area.

What Child Care options will be available for the children of these people. I have found that parents enroll their children near their work as opposed to near their homes.

Without Child Care how are parents able to go to work?

By investing, as this renewal levy does, in expanding access to affordable **Child Care** for families and helping providers stay in business, we can jumpstart our economic recovery.

\*These figures taken from DCYF Child Care Check data base

## Best Starts for Kids Levy Testimony

Wednesday, 2/17 9-10AM

Good morning Councilmembers, my name is Diana Llanas. I am the Director of Roots to Wings Childcare Center in Burien. I have worked in child care for 12 years. My center serves 77, (but right now 34 kids) children and their families. Roots to Wings is a very special program because we provide care for essential workers who need care even until midnight and on Saturdays. Our teachers are also bilingual and we offer our program in Spanish. We are proud of the fact that we've been providing raises to our staff when they complete credits in higher education. Because of this commitment, we do not make a profit. The pandemic has been very challenging, and we had to expand our program to provide more school age care. I have been working with SEIU 925 to address the child care crisis and I want to speak in support of the renewal of the Best Starts for Kids Levy.

There are an estimated 758,000 kids under 12 in Washington who need child care, and only 188,000 licensed spaces for care for them. Without enough licensed care, families end up using unlicensed care, or one parent, usually women, quits their jobs. In Washington, 63 percent of people live in a child care desert, and unfortunately, this number is accurate to King County as well. In fact, today, we have 7,579 fewer child care slots for children in King County, due to the ongoing child care closures. 34% of all of the closures statewide are currently in King County. It is a dire situation for families and child care providers.

Part of this is because there are not enough parents who meet the income qualifications for receiving working connections subsidies, and therefore can't afford to send their children to child care. **Just recently an essential worker parent of ours called to reduce her care because she no longer qualified for the subsidy, even though her child needs our program.** Even parents who can afford Child Care, are paying more than their rent or mortgages to do so, and cannot afford tuition increases.

It is also hard for centers to stay open because our best teachers will often decide to work elsewhere once they have their education certificates. While our center has been able to reduce turnover by giving raises to our staff, we cannot continue to raise our tuitions. These raises have come at the expense of our owner, and still our teachers deserve more.

We know it took 11 years for our state to recover from the 2008 recession. We have to be bold now, if we want to see an equitable economic recovery where all families thrive.

# Kids First Washington

Child care is critical for our economy and for families to live and work in King County.  
Thank you for considering taking big steps in the Best Starts for Kids Renewal Levy.