

Dear Early Childhood Funding Commission Co-Chairs,

We are writing as Jewish United Fund's (JUF's) Early Childhood Collaborative ("The Collaborative"). The Collaborative is a coalition of early childhood directors, teachers, researchers, and community members committed to increasing access to and enrollment in high quality Jewish early childhood education in the Greater Chicago Metropolitan Area. Our 36 programs are available to children of all faiths and income levels, serve children with diverse developmental and learning needs, welcome a range of ages between 6 weeks and 6 years, and offer half-day and full-day options. Our 486 teachers serve 2,142 children.

We utilize the Collective Impact approach to help us reach our ambitious goals. This process involving small scale experiments, feedback loops and scaling successful initiatives has led us towards strong outcomes. One example is our partnership with the Erikson Institute. In spring 2019 we launched a cohort of 10 students in a fully funded Master's in Early Childhood Education at the Erikson Institute. Not only are these educators learning from one of the premier institutions in the country, but we are also offering retention bonuses to those who stay in the field and teach in one of our programs for at least two years following the completion of their degree. We anticipate that these educators will not only be more satisfied with their work and happier in their role but will also share what they learn with their colleagues, amplifying the gains of this partnership many times over. We believe this is an example of an innovative approach that can be highlighted in the Commission's recommendations on access to high-quality services. It is no longer enough to just streamline the process; dollars must also be used in innovative ways to help make change that is both equitable and high quality. This can be achieved through state grants that support the development of innovative and replicable practices.

We are thrilled that the Commission is making a concerted effort to think holistically about our ECEC structure. After reviewing the draft Commission report and participating in a Town Hall, we write to offer our perspective. Specifically, we want to mention at least three ways funding should be earmarked to help all early childhood education and care programs.

- Inclusion is at the forefront of our work. There should be additional funding for disability inclusion support in private centers. Before the pandemic, our centers were educating over than 3,000 children a year, including children with special needs, and they receive limited funding to support their inclusion efforts. We rely on fundraising to provide professional development for our educators and to get resources such as aides and equipment to the children. We highly recommend the Commission develop a model akin to the [SEIT services provided by the State of New York](#) and integrated into childcare centers.
- Now more than ever we have needed early childhood construction dollars. COVID-19 has presented early childhood with myriad challenges, most of which early childhood has weathered better than any other sector. However, programs are now finding that outdated HVAC systems do not meet the new needs

and must be updated. Most early childhood programs can't afford this and are scrambling to identify less cost-prohibitive, but ultimately short-term fixes. Additional dollars that can be disseminated quickly and can be used for construction are a critical investment.

- Increase income eligibility for CCAP. Many needy families are unable to utilize CCAP dollars because their income is just above the current eligibility cut off. Families should not be forced to make difficult decisions about early childhood based on price alone. While many Collaborative families are fortunate to receive assistance through JUF, the reality is that CCAP expansion can move the needle on access to high quality early childhood programs.

We have enclosed a detailed factsheet about The Collaborative. Please consider us as a resource as the Commission moves forward in both finalizing its report and identifying Implementation Steering Committee members.

Sincerely,

Anna Hartman, JUF Director of Early Childhood Excellence

Jenna Turner, JUF Director of Early Childhood Learning

Kate Warach, JUF Project Manager for the Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative