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To: All Legislators

From: Ken Taylor, Executive Director
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families

Re: Support for a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for Child Care

Date: January 6, 2010

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families urges you to support a strong child care Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). As you know, the 2009-11 Budget required the Department of Children and Families to return to the Joint Committee on Finance with a proposal for a QRIS. The Department has sought advice from our agency and many others in order to draft a QRIS proposal. While we do not know the specifics of what the Department may recommend or when it will be released, we strongly support QRIS as a sound approach to assuring higher quality in child care settings.

We know how important the first five years are in children's development. We know that well over 160,000 children are served in regulated child care settings in Wisconsin, and that 60,000 of those children are funded through the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program.

And yet, besides basic regulation, which focuses primarily on health and safety, there is not a coherent system to ensure that children are in settings that help them grow, develop and learn.

We support a quality rating and improvement system for many reasons:

Quality matters. The quality of care kids receive has a significant and proven impact on their development and school-readiness.

A solid QRIS would protect our investment. Wisconsin Shares represents a major investment of state resources, so we must watch that investment carefully. Our investment will yield much better returns—in terms of both cost and child outcomes—if we work to improve and monitor the quality of care.

It would improve accountability. A QRIS will build much-needed accountability and oversight into Wisconsin Shares while also improving quality through technical assistance, professional development and incentives for improving programming.

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It would incentivize quality. By promoting best practices, a QRIS will help ensure that our scarce child care dollars are spent WISELY rather than rewarding substandard programs, which may be doing more harm than good.

It would empower parents. Parents need and deserve the best information possible about the settings in which they place their children. They need to know that when they go to work their kids are in good hands.

QRIS works. We know that at least 19 states already have statewide QRISs for child care, and evaluations are encouraging, for example:

- **Missouri:** A 2009 university study of Missouri's system found that programs with higher ratings were linked to children's gains in social/emotional and early literacy, and programs with low ratings actually had negative affects on child development.
- **North Carolina:** In the ten years from the establishment of North Carolina's QRIS, child care programs meeting high quality standards (4- or 5-star ratings) increased from 20 percent to 56 percent.
- **Oklahoma:** An evaluation of Oklahoma's "Reaching for the Stars" program found a significant increase in the quality of programs serving subsidized low-income children.
- **Pennsylvania:** A study of Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS system shows that it reversed a trend of declining quality in the state.

The time is now to provide a system for quality improvement, helping programs improve and children thrive.