



Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition

Disability Rights Wisconsin ♦ Madison Area Accredited Early Childhood Association
Milwaukee Child Care Alliance ♦ Parents Plus ♦ School Administrators Alliance
Supporting Families Together Association ♦ Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health
Wisconsin Association of School Boards ♦ Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association
Wisconsin Council for Exceptional Children - Division for Early Childhood
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families ♦ Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
Wisconsin Family Child Care Association ♦ Wisconsin Head Start Association

To: Wisconsin Legislators
From: Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition
Subject: Early Learning
Date: June 9, 2009

Response to Joint Finance Committee Action on Early Care and Education

The Wisconsin Early Learning Coalition is grateful that the Joint Finance Committee strongly supported the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program, adding significant funding and rejecting cost-saving proposals that would have had negative impacts on low-income families, their children, and the child care programs and staff caring for their children.

Quality Rating and Improvement System for Child Care

We recognize that this is a difficult budget with painful decisions necessary, and we know that services to low-income families were given high priority. But we believe a great opportunity to improve early learning in child care settings by creating quality rating and improvement system was sadly missed in the budget coming out of the Joint Finance Committee. This was the most favorable Federal funding environment for early care and education in 8 years as evidenced by President Obama's campaign pledges regarding early care and education and Representative Obey's leadership regarding the stimulus package. It was disappointing that the quality funds set aside in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) did not lead to a step forward in improving child care quality.

While it is essential that low-income working families have access to needed child care through Wisconsin Shares, it is not enough to just help pay for a child care slot if it provides only marginal care and little or no early education or worse. In this budget Wisconsin has an opportunity to take a step forward to improve early learning and development for all children, and most importantly for low-income children in child care settings—children who would greatly benefit from effective high-quality programs that prepare them for school and beyond.

A strong body of research tells us that investing in early learning is one of the best investments we can make for school readiness. The benefits from high-quality early care and education include increased achievement in school, reduced need for special education, lower crime rates, and higher earnings in adulthood. But these benefits only come if the programs meet high quality standards.

In FY 08-09 Wisconsin had a quality child care budget of \$10,111,600. The federal ARRA child care allocation to Wisconsin provides \$5.2 million over two years designated for quality improvement, or \$2.6 million per year. It seems logical that with additional federal stimulus Wisconsin's quality budget moving into this biennium would be at least \$12.7 million per year-- enough to develop and implement a quality rating and improvement system. However, due to a technical budget maneuver in the budget developed by the Joint Finance Committee (backing out TANF funds transferred to the child care fund) these federal funds were essentially shifted from quality improvement.

Our Coalition strongly supported these earmarked funds to be used for a quality rating and improvement system that would set quality standards for child care and help programs meet the standards through training, technical assistance, scholarship and wage stipends. However, virtually no additional funds were allocated for these quality improvement efforts in the Joint Finance package.

We also supported continuation and expansion of 4K through start-up grants to school districts, with a priority for community-based collaboration. The start-up program was not expanded, and it was eliminated in the second year through Joint Finance action.

We support any efforts to improve the budget by including funding for the quality rating and improvement system and expanding 4K start-up grants, and we will work with any legislators who want to take action.

