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To our members, friends, and colleagues,

Yes, the last few days have been frustrating, disappointing, and demoralizing. We have a FY 23-24 budget agreement awaiting signatures. So, while not final because there are some other moving parts, we do know what has and has not been invested in Early Learning. No increases in Pre-K Counts. No increase in Head Start. Child care will receive enough funding to maintain the status quo of Child Care Works.

Where are we? What didn't they hear?

Hundreds of child care programs are out of business; classrooms are closed; waiting lists are so long that some infants will be toddlers or preschoolers before they can get a slot in a high-quality program, and let us not forget child care teachers making so little that they are eligible for Medicaid, SNAP, and other public benefits.

We were not making this up. We have the data to support this. It's about investments in children, families, early childhood teachers, and the small businesses that make up the system that enables families to work and Pennsylvania's economy to thrive — child care.

Businesses told us, the Chambers told us, the United Way told us, members of law enforcement and the military told us — access to affordable child care is imperative — without the workforce behind the workforce, we can't increase access and availability. In a recent poll, 81% of Pennsylvania voters supported wage increases for child care teachers to prevent program closures.

Decades of maintaining the status quo, requiring, but not investing in quality — how many new bills impacting child care are proposed by the legislature each year? How many regulatory changes are enacted without a fiscal note for what it will cost child care providers to comply? COVID heightened our awareness of the importance of child care. Programs closed and others couldn't fully reopen when their teachers found they could work for more money at Target and or in fast food.

What will it take? Thousands of early childhood supporters' letters, data supporting the need, Zoom meetings, rallies, and face-to-face activities in Harrisburg with legislators didn't work. While not yet signed, HB611 is the FY 23-24 Pennsylvania budget. The House and Senate have defined their priorities and the Governor will sign. This proposed budget provides the resources to maintain the child care status quo — but that is not enough. Programs will continue to close; others will struggle to retain and recruit teachers -- a system failure that could have been prevented. But we can't give up — the fight must continue.

Thank you for your work. Thank you for sharing your stories. Thank you for the stamina it takes to continue advocating for what we need in this field. AND thank you for the support you provide every day to children, their families, and your colleagues so they can thrive.

Deepest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Diane", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Diane P. Barber
Executive Director