



Congress of the United States

July 24, 2020

Dr. Robert R. Redfield, M.D.
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Director Redfield:

We write today to share our concerns for the challenges faced by the child care industry as providers work to respond and recover during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, we seek to share an overview of feedback from the child care community in New York State and to urge the Center for Disease and Control and Prevention (CDC) to work closely with providers and stakeholders at the state and local level by providing technical assistance in implementing the CDC's guidance and tailoring it to meet the needs of local communities across the country.

As you know, the availability and cost of child care have long been an issue for our nation, where in more than half of our states, the average cost of a year of child care is more than a year of in-state college tuition. The COVID-19 pandemic's economic impacts have exacerbated these issues and has had an unprecedented impact on the lives of American workers, parents, and children. In particular, the pandemic has hit low income, minority, and immigrant communities the hardest as these families already face significant racial and ethnic disparities in wealth, income, home ownership rates, rent burden, and are disproportionately employed in service sector jobs. Recent economic analyses have estimated that at least \$9.6 billion is needed each month to meet childcare needs for essential workers and to ensure that existing child care providers who have been forced to close during the pandemic can stay in business and reopen when it is safe to do so. Other analyses have found that the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to a permanent loss of nearly 4.5 million child care slots, leaving millions of families without the child care they need to return to work. It is clear that our economy hinges on the availability of high quality and affordable childcare, and without the resources and guidance to safely support and reopen child care programs, parents and caregivers will find it increasingly difficult to return to work—creating even greater economic challenges for our nation.

Throughout this pandemic, we have been in close contact with the child care community in our state of New York and have sought to assist and collaborate with providers, parents, and other stakeholders to respond to and meet the needs of children and families during and the pandemic. As our nation continues to respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that we recognize the paramount role the child care industry plays in enabling parents to return to work, as well as ensure clear coordination and assistance across the federal, state, and local levels to implement clear and tailored guidelines to ensure a strong foundation on which to rebuild and scale up our child care programs.

In our discussions with the child care community in New York State, providers and stakeholders have consistently expressed confusion around the disparities between the CDC guidance for providers and the state enforced guidance. Providers have requested that there be additional clarification and coordination between federal and state guidelines for child care to ensure providers are in compliance with all best practices to protect children, families, and staff. Given the recent announcements by the Administration to push for full reopening of schools, after school programs, and child care services this fall, the need for coordination between the CDC, and state and local entities to provide guidance will be more important than ever.

In addition to greater coordination between federal, state, and local guidelines, child care providers have requested that additional information related to safety protocols for staff and child interactions. For example, CDC guidelines call for the use of face shields in caring for infants and toddlers. Providers however, note the critical importance of eye contact, facial expressions, physical touch and speech between the caregiver and child to ensure proper development and communication, and worry that the use of a face shield could have detrimental impacts on infant and toddler development. Similarly, for three and four-year old children, providers would appreciate additional clarification on appropriate classroom set-up and the use of the term ‘space’ in order to better understand if and how many children are able to interact in a small group setting. Finally, providers have raised concern about any recommendations around alternating days, half days, or any other combination of reduced care hours or days, and have strongly requested that the CDC take into consideration the need for continuity of care and education for the children, the impact on families returning to work, and the additional costs on providers including cleaning and planning.

We are grateful to the CDC for your commitment to providing guidance and support to the child care industry as we work to reopen the economy and regain a strong footing. As the CDC reviews current, and considers future guidelines for reopening, retaining, and expanding child care facilities, we urge you to seek feedback from our nation’s child care providers and parents to help inform your decisions and ensure meaningful outcomes, and to work directly with state and local stakeholders to provide technical assistance in implementing this critical guidance. We would be more than happy to facilitate a meeting between you and your staff at the CDC with any stakeholders from New York if interested.

Now more than ever, child care is essential to our national economic recovery and the individual economic recovery of all families, in particular those who have been hit hardest by the economic impacts of the pandemic. We are committed to ensuring that Congress provides robust funding in the next relief package to help the child care community and support the work of the CDC to provide assistance to state and local governments, providers, and stakeholders in implementing this critical guidance. Thank you for your work during these challenging times, as well as your time and consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator