

# Child Care for COVID-19 Essential Workers in San Diego County

## Proposal by San Diego County Emergency Child Care Task Force

MARCH 30, 2020

### Quick Summary

To ensure that essential workers who are parents or guardians of young children can continue to do their jobs at full productivity despite the shutdown of schools and some child care centers, **we propose a two-pronged response, prioritizing utilization of the existing system of care providers, for safe, rapid, and no-cost access to child care to augment the emergency child care actions taken to date:**

1. *Essential Worker Child Care Vouchers* - Provide child care vouchers to essential workers, with top priority for frontline healthcare workers, to enable them to secure no-cost child care. Voucher value will be sufficient to cover hazard pay for child care workers and the extra costs of providing care during the epidemic. Families can select any of the following care providers:
  - a. licensed child care center or licensed family child care home;
  - b. license-exempt school-age care for children in community settings;
  - c. care by a professional caregiver, if the caregiver meets Trustline background check, in the family's home or in the caregiver's home for children from only one family; or
  - d. by a family member, friend or neighbor, if the caregiver meets Trustline background check and care for only one family.

Proposed funding source: Emergency bridge funds from San Diego County and/or the State of California, augmented by philanthropy, for a limited time until the Federal CARES Act (S.3548) funds become available to cover the costs. \$5 million in local funding will provide approximately 3,000 essential workers with free child care for a month.

2. *Rapid Access School-Age Care in Schools* - As per Governor's orders, districts may selectively re-open a limited number school-age care centers at elementary schools to provide a free, easy-access care option for families. This option can be activated as needed.

Proposed funding source: LEA funding.

### Rationale for Urgent Action

Health care workers and first responders are on the front lines fighting COVID-19. They are risking their lives to keep us alive and safe. In the midst of their exhausting, heroic work, those with young children have the added burden of arranging and paying for child care because schools (which previously provided 30 hours per week of free child care) and some child care centers are closed. Many of these workers are now being asked to work extended and off-hours shifts, exacerbating their child care challenges. The demands on these workers will intensify significantly in the next few weeks as the epidemic takes hold in our region.

Hospital, police, fire and ambulance executives<sup>1</sup> in the San Diego region as well as SEIU state leaders representing front line medical service providers reported during the week of March 23 that child care

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<sup>1</sup> The Task Force members have heard urgent child care concerns from the Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties members (the VA, Scripps Health, UCSD Health, Alvarado Behavioral Health), AMR, San Diego Police Officers Association and the Sheriff's association.

issues are causing absenteeism and stress for workers and managers. Although child care capacity exists in the region, the cost of child care is prohibitive for the majority of personnel.

Based on interviews and preliminary survey information from human resources leaders at local health systems last week, hospitals expect the lack of affordable and accessible child care to create severe challenges to their ability to meet operational needs over the next few weeks. This is very concerning given the anticipated volume of patients hospitals are expecting to serve as they plan for a surge in COVID-19 patients. Hospital employees need childcare not only for the time they are at work providing patient care, but also to allow them to rest and recover between extended shifts at the hospital. These leaders, whom we need to be focused on service delivery, are distracted by side missions to find child care solutions for their personnel.

### Progress to Date

1. *Establishment of the San Diego County Emergency Child Care Task Force* - Beginning on March 16, approximately 25 leaders from the region's child care and adjacent systems<sup>2</sup> have been meeting (by Zoom) each morning to coordinate resources (such as food and cleaning supplies), share information about emerging guidance and regulations, formulate policy positions, centralize communications about child care and ensure that decisions are informed by perspectives from the early childhood education field.
2. *Launch and Promotion of the Enhanced Resource and Referral Line* - During the first weeks of the COVID-19 crisis, the region's primary response to these challenges has been to match essential workers with available child care options. The YMCA of San Diego County Resource and Referral Service provides this enhanced support to parents. **180 enhanced referrals and 77 online referrals have been provided by the YMCA since March 16.**
3. *Launch of San Diego COVID-19 Children's Fund* - The [San Diego COVID-19 Children's Fund](#) makes one-time grants to San Diego County families and child care providers of \$575 for child care or \$100 for basic needs. It was established by San Diego for Every Child through a major grant from Sara Jacobs with aligned funding from The San Diego Foundation among others, and it is administered by the YMCA Childcare Resource Service and Child Development Associates. Over **1,678 requests were submitted to this fund in the first three days after its launch on Friday, March 27.**
4. *Resource Coordination* - The Task Force serves as a clearinghouse for information on access to food, diapers and cleaning supplies for the child care providers around the region.
5. *State Policy Advocacy* - The Task Force developed a consensus set of state policy recommendations that were delivered to the local legislative delegation, key state agencies, the Governor's policy staff and state advocacy organizations on March 24. The clarity and boldness of the region's requests helped shape the state response.

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<sup>2</sup> Organizations represented on the Task Force are: Chicano Federation, Child Development Associates, Children's Paradise, Educational Enrichment Systems, First 5 Commission of San Diego County, Kids on the Go, MAAC Project, Neighborhood House Association, San Diego County Office of Education, San Diego for Every Child, The San Diego Foundation, San Diego Grantmakers, San Diego Workforce Partnership, SAY San Diego, YMCA Childcare Resource Service

## Child Care Systems Assessment

System Component	Status	Lead	Comments
Availability of care	Yellow	Various	See attached dashboard. Some large centers are closed, including all Head Start & State Preschool sites. Before & after school programs are closed. Most family child care homes are open.
Affordability	Red	Various	The high cost of child care is a major barrier for accessing available child care in the region. Many families of school aged children had little to no child care expenses prior to school closures and family budgets do not allow for this added expenditure. Extended shifts including evenings and weekends are creating additional child care cost burdens.
Resilience of regional child care system	Yellow	Various	Mixed. Public contracts and voucher payments are being sustained through the crisis (so far), but providers reliant on private pay customers are struggling due to reduced enrollment and increased costs. <b>Today, the assessment is yellow, but would change to red</b> If additional funds do not flow into the existing child care sector the industry is at risk of not being viable post the COVID-19 crisis. The economic impacts of this would be far reaching.
Resource and Referral	Green	YMCA Childcare Resource Services (CRS)	Fully functioning with “enhanced” referrals whereby agents call child care providers on behalf of parents to confirm openings. Expanded hours as well. <b>However, utilization of resource and referral line is not as high as anticipated.</b> See attached dashboard. With funding to address the high cost of care, it is believed that referral support would have much higher utilization.
Voucher (Alternative Payment) System	Green	Child Development Associates (CDA) and YMCA CRS	Fully functioning.
Child Nutrition Services	Green	CDA and Chicano Federation	Fully functioning to continue payments to open providers. State waivers issued to adjust meal times and food components of meals as a result of grocery limitations.

## Target Populations for Proposed Bridge Funding

- The child care provided through the *Essential Worker Child Care Vouchers* and *Rapid Access School-Age Care in Schools* programs would target parents and guardians who are required to work outside the home as essential workers in the COVID-19 response.
  - First priority: children of parents/guardians in health care sector
  - Second priority: children of parents/guardians in police, fire, emergency services and military services
  - Third priority: children of parents/guardians in other essential services who must work outside the home
  - Fourth priority: children of parents/guardians in essential services who are able to work from home but are unable to complete their job duties while caring for their children.
- It is difficult to estimate accurately the demand for these programs. In the first two weeks since the state shelter-in-place order, many families were able to make short-term arrangements to care for their children at home, and that is the safest place for them to be. But as the epidemic approaches its peak, and with the understanding that the shelter-in-place orders will likely remain in effect through at least April 30th, we need *all* skilled workers, including working parents/guardians with young children, to be available to do their jobs.

## Desired Impact

- **Desired Impact for Employers**
  - Increased availability of workers in critical roles
  - Reduced absenteeism
  - Reduced time spent trying to solve employees' child care struggles
- **Desired Impact for Essential Workers**
  - Reduced cognitive load on working parents/guardians to figure out child care arrangements, worrying about their children in unstable child care arrangements and worrying about child care expenses
  - Reduced child care costs
- **Desired Impact for Children**
  - Happy, safe, learning and loved
  - More predictable routines, which add resiliency during traumatic times
  - Support to complete school work
- **Desired Impact for Child Care Providers**
  - Support resilience of child care providers through the crisis so that child care capacity is available when the crisis abates and parents/guardians are able to go back to work

*Developed by members of the policy committee of the San Diego Emergency Child Care Task Force and ratified by the full task force. Committee members can respond to questions about this proposal:*

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