

2023 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The Ready Louisiana Coalition – a bipartisan group of 120 organizations including chambers of commerce, civic organizations, businesses, and advocacy organizations representing more than 1 million people in Louisiana’s workforce – exists to advocate for one issue: increased access to high-quality early care and education for the children and families who need it. Our membership believes that investing in high-quality early care and education will prepare our youngest children for a smart start in life, enable families to be productive in the workforce, and serve as an economic engine for communities across Louisiana.

During the 2022 legislative session, state lawmakers made a historic down payment on our future by allocating \$84 million in new funding for early care and education. However, in 2024, Louisiana is set to run out of millions of one-time federal stimulus dollars. Without further recurring investment, too many Louisiana families will not have access to affordable, quality child care.

We, the Ready Louisiana Coalition, urge the Louisiana Legislature to:

- **Appropriate \$315 million to maintain child care access for 16,000 children** birth through four as a result of expiring one-time federal funds and **expand access to high-quality early care and education for over 9,000 in-need children**, as recommended by the bipartisan Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education Commission; and
- **Continue to incentivize cities and parishes to invest local dollars** to expand high-quality early care and education seats through new revenue sources and appropriating 10% of recognized excess revenues to the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund.

Louisiana needs to maintain child care access for over 16,000 young children and their families. The Legislature must appropriate \$200 million in ongoing revenues to retain the gains we have achieved thus far.

In 2022, Louisiana invested a combination of state money and one-time federal relief dollars that allowed over 28,500 in-need children and their families to afford high-quality early care and education. However, the one-time federal funds expire in 2024, meaning over 16,000 children will lose child care seats – the largest loss of birth to three child care seats in over a decade. Policymakers must take action to replace federal funding to avoid slowing the progress that Louisiana has made to reduce unemployment and increase workforce participation after the severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, a record number of in-need children had access to high-quality early care and education programs and a record-low number of people in the state were unemployed (below 4%). Maintaining early care and education access for young children strengthens the Louisiana economy, which loses \$1.3 billion a year due to the impacts of child care breakdowns on working parents, and helps reduce the number of working parents who miss work, leave or change jobs, come in late, or leave early because their child care situation was unreliable, unaffordable, inaccessible, or some combination of the three.

Working families who benefit from state investment in child care are a crucial part of the workforce and keep our economy running by working as nursing assistants, cashiers, elementary school teachers, sanitation workers, and construction laborers. If Louisiana wants to keep unemployment numbers low and make sure that employees do not leave their jobs, it is crucial that the Legislature replace federal funding and invest \$200 million in order to give thousands of parents the support they need to be productive members of the workforce.

Louisiana needs to continue to close the gap so that all in-need children in the state can have access to high-quality early care and education programs. The Legislature must appropriate \$115 million in ongoing revenues to expand access to high-quality care for an additional 9,000 in-need children.

There are an estimated 147,000 children, birth to three, in need of high-quality early care and education programs in Louisiana today. Last year, the Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Commission found that it will take a \$115 million investment, with subsequent investments for 10 years, for Louisiana to close the gap for all in-need children to have access to an early care and education program. If Louisiana kicks the can down the road on this \$115 million investment, in 10 years, our state will experience a collective \$12.1 billion economic loss. But if we make that investment, and continue making it, we will experience a collective \$1.8 billion economic gain.

Increasing state funds in early care and education programs will help participating children achieve long-term positive outcomes and prepare our youngest learners to enter kindergarten while their parents work, look for work, or go to school. Public investment in early childhood provides a greater return than any other time of life; Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman's recent research shows a return on investment (ROI) of up to 13%. If only 1% of our total state dollars are spent on early care and education, there is room for us to truly make children our priority. Louisiana must follow the ECCE Commission's recommendation and invest \$115 million to help young children enter high-quality early care and education programs.

Localities need more state matching funds to incentivize local investment in high-quality early care and education. The Legislature should make a one-time investment of 10% of recognized excess state funds.

The Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund (the Fund) is a state fund that offers local entities, including cities and parishes, a dollar-for-dollar match on investments made to expand access to quality early care and education for children who need it most. Though the Fund has several revenue sources, those sources are not yet generating significant revenue to match local commitments year after year. As of January 2023, the Fund has a total balance of \$50.58 million. Many communities in Louisiana have been making local investments in expanding early care and education, such as New Orleans, Shreveport, and Jefferson Parish, and these investments will total \$28.2 million a year in 2023. Louisiana needs to continue to increase revenue sources for the Fund and appropriate 10% of recognized excess revenues to incentivize local communities to invest in high-quality early care and education. Louisiana communities have stakeholders at all levels committed to expanding access to high-quality early care and education through local investments. State policymakers have an obligation to support local efforts for communities across the state.

We, the Ready Louisiana Coalition, urge our leaders to invest state dollars in early care and education programs and the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund during the 2023 Fiscal session to ensure children have the quality early learning experiences they need and to support Louisiana working families.

READY LOUISIANA COALITION: INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS

