

December 3, 2019

Dear Representatives and Senators:

As early learning, housing, education, and human services advocates, we want to thank you for your ongoing support of children and families experiencing homelessness. We are writing to ask you to maintain access to high quality child care for children experiencing homelessness. We currently allow a family experiencing homelessness a “Homeless Grace Period” of up to four months to meet the full eligibility requirements of the Working Connections Child Care subsidy. Data from the first two years of the program demonstrate that for 50% of families accessing the grace period, four months was not enough time. These children often are living in unpredictable, traumatic situations. We know that a nurturing, kind, safe, and stable child care environment is a critical support during the most important stage of their development. That’s why we are seeking your support in extending the Homeless Grace Period from 4 to 12 months.

While most parents experiencing homelessness are actively looking for work, for about half of families four months is not enough time to secure employment during the crisis of homelessness. In addition to job searching, families are trying to resolve homelessness in a market with little affordable housing and high rents, often simultaneously struggling with past evictions and debt, domestic violence, and behavioral and physical health issues.

There is also the reality that our state is in a child care crisis. For some families, it might take all four months just to find a child care provider able to meet the needs of their family. This can be especially difficult for families experiencing homelessness, who may need support with unique behavior or health needs, care during nonstandard business hours, and accessing transportation.

We cannot overstate the importance of child care in the lives of young children and their families experiencing homelessness. We know from research that high-quality early learning environments protect kids from the impacts of trauma and helps them build resilience. It can also disrupt the cycle of homelessness and intergenerational poverty. Homelessness also exacerbates current inequities in our education system, where six out of 10 students experiencing homelessness in Washington are students of color.

Extending the homeless grace period under Working Connections Child Care is a small change that would make all the difference in maintaining nurturing environments for the kids who need it most.

Thanks again for all your support for children and families experiencing homelessness. We hope you will support this policy and budget request.