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**New Survey: Historic Staffing Shortage Eliminates At Least 30,000
Early Care and Education Slots; Over 38,000 Children Sit on Waiting
Lists - Low Wages to Blame**

*Advocates call for increased investment to stabilize and strengthen early care and
education sector for PA working families*

HARRISBURG (March 1, 2023) – Partners of the Start Strong PA and Pre-K for PA advocacy campaigns released new survey results detailing the historic staffing crisis in the early care and education sector that continues to contract the capacity of child care, Pre-K Counts and Head Start State Supplemental programs. Advocates are calling on Governor Shapiro and the General Assembly to increase investment in early care and education programs using recurring funds as part of the 2023-2024 state budget.

The new survey, conducted between January 31, 2023 and February 12, 2023, details the current staffing crisis in Pennsylvania child care, Pre-K Counts and Head Start State Supplemental programs and its effects on working families' ability to access care.

More than 1,100 programs across 54 counties responded to the survey. According to respondents:

Staffing Crisis:

- Programs need to fill nearly 4,000 open staffing positions.
- 85% of child care respondents reported staffing shortages.
- 50% of child care respondents have closed at least one classroom.

Impact on Working Families:

- Nearly 35,500 children currently sit on child care waiting lists.
- More than 30,000 additional children could be served at respondents' sites if they were fully staffed
- Over 2,200 children currently sit on Pre-K Counts waiting lists.
- Over 650 children currently sit on Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program waiting lists.

The February 2023 survey results depict a deepening crisis in the early care and education sector. In May 2022, Start Strong PA released a similar survey showing that Pennsylvania's child care centers were experiencing a staffing shortage resulting in nearly 32,500 children sitting on waiting lists. These new survey results show that over the past 10 months, waiting list numbers have continued to increase across Pennsylvania. It is not surprising that this industry, with pay averaging less than \$12.50/hr and 50% of professionals who work in it qualifying for government benefits, cannot compete for staff with other industries offering higher wages for less specialized skills.

"One hundred and twenty of our YMCA sites responded to the survey and the numbers are staggering," said David John, Vice President of Governmental Affairs, PA State Alliance of YMCAs. "Those programs have 382 open staffing positions that have caused the closure of 269 classrooms. Across 36 counties there are nearly 4,700 children on waiting lists. That means thousands of families without care."

"Our early care and education programs need more than one-time funds to begin to solve this crisis. While we are thankful for the federal monies that have helped stabilize many programs, those funds are running out. We must give this industry long-term resources," said Jen DeBell, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children (PennAEYC). "The partners of Start Strong PA believe that immediate and sustained action is required to boost pay for Pennsylvania's child care teachers and staff to stem this tide of closures and wait lists."

"We no longer can offer school-age care because of staffing. If we can't get some help soon, I don't know how long we can continue. Someone else just left our program to take a job in housekeeping at a local hospital night shift making \$16.00/hr." said Jocelyn Kreig, Owner/Director of Sunshine and Rainbows Child Care in Lackawanna County. "I can't compete and there's just not enough money to go around. Everyone is already working overtime and I am now the cook and relief staff along with being the director."

"This current situation is unsustainable. With tens of thousands of families sitting on waiting lists, how can those parents return to work? said Diane Barber, Executive Director of Pennsylvania Child Care Association (PACCA). "The partners of Early Learning PA just released results from a new poll last week that an overwhelming majority of voters believe funds invested in child care and child care teachers is money well spent. Our elected leaders must prioritize additional investments in the early care and education sector to address the systemic issues causing this staffing crisis."

About Start Strong PA

Start Strong PA is an initiative of Early Learning PA. Through a statewide collaboration of partners, Start Strong PA aims to support healthy child development, working families, and the economy by increasing access to and affordability of high-quality child care programs for young children. Learn more at www.startstrongpa.org.

About Pre-K for PA

Pre-K for PA launched in 2014 with the vision that every 3- and 4-year-old in Pennsylvania will have access to high-quality pre-k. Learn more at www.prekforpa.org.

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