



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# **New Survey: Staffing Crisis Eliminates At Least 30,000 Child Care Slots; 32,000 Children Sit on Waiting Lists - Low Wages to Blame**

*Advocates call for wage supplement to stabilize child care sector for PA working families*

**HARRISBURG** (April 12, 2022) – Child care providers and advocates gathered in the Pennsylvania Capitol Rotunda this morning to release the results of a new survey showing that the historic child care staffing crisis- caused by low wages- continues to contract the capacity of Pennsylvania’s child care system. In response, advocates are calling on the General Assembly and the Wolf Administration to “Raise Child Care” by allocating \$115 million in sustainable state and/or federal funds as part of the final state budget to provide a \$2 per hour wage supplement for child care teachers and staff.

This new survey, conducted by partners of the Start Strong PA Campaign between March 8, 2022 and April 3, 2022, details the current child care staffing crisis in 994 Pennsylvania child care programs across 60 counties and its effects on working families' ability to access care.

According to the survey:

- **Nearly 32,500 children currently sit on waiting lists.**
- **More than 30,000 additional children could be served at respondents’ sites if they were fully staffed.**
- **91% of respondents reported staffing shortages.**
- **Programs need to fill nearly 7,000 open child care positions.**
- **48% of respondents have closed at least one classroom.**

The Start Strong PA March 2022 survey results depict a deepening crisis in the child care sector. In September 2021, Start Strong PA released a similar survey showing that Pennsylvania’s child care centers were experiencing a staffing shortage resulting in more than 25,000 children sitting on waiting lists. In just six months, the waiting list numbers have increased by nearly 10,000 children with 169 fewer providers reporting.

“The current child care crisis poses a real threat to Pennsylvania’s working families and overall economic recovery,” said David John, Vice President of Governmental Affairs, PA State Alliance of YMCAs. “A new report from multinational investment bank Goldman Sachs lists solving America’s child care crisis as one of four key areas of focus for policymakers to help small businesses recover their workforce, build resilience, create new jobs, and be positioned for growth.”

"To keep child care staff once you have found them, is as challenging as recruiting them. We are increasing pay, offering counseling for the mental and emotional exhaustion, and we still struggle to keep them energized because there are not enough of them," said Valerie Hamilton, Owner/Director of Children of God Educational Services in Bucks County. "I was barely able to make it to Harrisburg to share my story today."

"Our child care 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. "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 get into the business of child care because we love children, we love learning, and we love the positive impact we can make on those children, their families, and our community," said Sophia Estrella, Owner/Director of Elevation Child Care Center in Lehigh County. "It is heartbreaking to tell parents every day that we are not able to take in their child. Our center has waiting lists for each classroom, five infants, eight toddlers, three preschoolers and 12 school-age. What are those parents going to do?"

"This current situation is unsustainable. Our elected leaders must prioritize additional investments in the child care sector to address the systemic issues causing this staffing crisis," said Tana Rinehart, Area Manager, Warwick Child Care Center in Chester County. "These problems will not sort themselves out, they will not just go away, and the child care industry should not continue to be subsidized on the backs of the teachers and staff that work in it."

### **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](http://www.startstrongpa.org).

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