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Advocates Applaud Wolf Administration’s Release of One-Time Federal Funds to Boost Pay in Child Care Sector

Sustained long-term action needed to address unlivable wages causing workforce shortages and classroom closures

HARRISBURG (May 17, 2022) – The principal partners of Start Strong PA, applaud the Wolf Administration’s release of \$98 million in one-time federal child care funding to provide support to providers seeking to recognize staff dedication through retention bonuses and assist with personnel development and recruitment. The Administration expects to release these funds in one lump sum to approved providers beginning July 1 until September 30.

"While we are grateful for continued short-term efforts to tackle Pennsylvania’s child care crisis, sustained investment is needed to permanently address the sector’s currently unlivable wages," said Jen DeBell, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children. "The on-going staffing crisis is resulting in closed classrooms and tens of thousands of Pennsylvania children sitting on waiting lists for care. This has a profound impact on working families and the entire economy as employers from all sectors struggle to retain their workforce."

Start Strong PA is calling on the General Assembly and the Wolf Administration to "Raise Child Care" by allocating sustainable state and/or federal funds as part of the final state budget to provide a permanent \$2 per hour wage supplement for child care teachers and staff. This would help providers retain their current workforce as wages continue to rise throughout the economy. A March 2022 survey conducted by Start Strong PA showed that the historic child care staffing crisis-caused by low wages- continues to contract the capacity of Pennsylvania’s child care system.

The survey, conducted 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.**

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.

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.

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