

Why did Minnesota Ignore \$65 Million in Federal Child Care Help?

Incredibly, at a time when Minnesota families are reeling from the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, the Minnesota Legislature refused to put \$65 million in federal funds to use for their intended purpose – making child care more affordable and accessible for thousands of Minnesotans.

That’s because the Minnesota Legislature adjourned without passing federally required changes to reimbursement rates in the Child Care Assistance Program. Pre-COVID-19 the federal government sent Minnesota additional funds to help meet those federal requirements, yet they remain unspent. Minnesota is out of compliance with federal child care law, and cannot get into compliance without legislative action.

As we face the greatest economic challenge of our time we cannot afford to ignore money that is supposed to be helping families and communities. The longer these funds remain untouched, the longer young children fall into opportunity gaps, parents struggle to access child care necessary to work, and child care providers close. Help is there, not being used. And that is shameful.

Child Care Assistance (CCA) is about equity. It is part of the racial and economic structural change our society so desperately needs. The state’s most recent data show that 68% of children depending on CCA are children of color. This is about child access to consistent, safe environments. It’s about access to early childhood education. It’s about access to employment and economic opportunity for families.

Federal law changed in 2014, and Minnesota has yet to get its act together. The time to act is NOW. If not, we expect elected officials to answer for why they ignored this opportunity to improve the lives of tens of thousands of Minnesota children, families, and the child care providers who serve them while much needed funding sat idle.

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