Continuity of Child Care for Families in the Child Welfare System

2016 Legislative Agenda

**Position:** Allow children involved in the child welfare system and their families to benefit from 12-month continuity of care provisions granted to other families receiving child care subsidies. Science tells us that continuity of care is critical for maintaining a healthy relationship between children and early learning program staff and achieving positive child outcomes. Children who have experienced maltreatment are among the state's most vulnerable children and therefore in greatest need of the advantages gained from stable, high quality child care.

**Key Facts:**

- **Need for stability:** More than half of child abuse and neglect cases involve children ages 0-5.¹ Many young children in foster or kinship care experience multiple placements that can inhibit their capacity to form emotional attachments. Our state's most vulnerable children are most in need of stable caregiving environments. Positive, stable relationships with adults buffer young children against the damaging impact of toxic stress.

- **Support high quality care:** Continuity of care should be coupled with the child's enrollment in programs participating in the early achievers program that rate at a level 3, 4, or 5 with sensible exceptions.²

- **2-Generation strategy:** While high-quality early childhood programs provide child care for caregivers to hold jobs and carry out other family responsibilities, they also enhance the well-being of the children and their families by promoting early learning, teaching caregivers skills to attend to their child's needs, and linking the family to needed supports, such as healthcare, that reduce sources of toxic stress.

- **Promote healthy development:** Disruptions in child care services can stunt or delay social-emotional and cognitive development. Research has also demonstrated a relationship between child care stability and social competence, behavior outcomes, cognitive outcomes, language development, school adjustment, and overall child well-being.³

- **Close a gap:** Most low-income families will be eligible to receive a substantial level of continuity of care through 12-month authorizations of their Working Connections Child Care subsidies as of July 1, 2016. That continuity was confirmed and extended in the 2015 Early Start Act, building on previously passed bipartisan legislation. Subsidies for child care for children involved in the child welfare system come from a different funding source, and continuity of care provisions for these children were not included in the Early Start Act.

**Alignment**

- “The legislature recognizes that empirical evidence supports the conclusion that high quality [early care and education] programs consistently yield more positive outcomes for children, with the strongest positive impacts on the most vulnerable children… [and] further understands that … stability of care [is] critical to enhancing program quality and improving child outcomes. . . .” (from the Early Start Act).

- In 2014, the legislature signaled its intention to ensure that children involved in the child welfare system are linked to quality early care and education programming. A bill passed that year that requires referral to preschool, child care, or early learning programs for all families receiving the family assessment response (FAR) services.

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² These provisions are consistent with RCW 26.44.272, which contains requirements for referral of families by Children’s Administration Family Assessment Response (FAR) workers to high quality preschools and child care programs.

³ Adams, G., Rohacek, M., & Danzinger, A. Child Care Instability, The Urban Institute, 2010