

Opinion: Brown's budget ideas decimate child care

By Linda Asato

On Jan. 6, 2012, Gov. Brown released his 2012-13 budget proposing severe changes and devastating budget cuts to the systems that support low-income children and families. These proposed cuts destroy the pathway to success for children and families and dismantles decades of investment in California's long-established system of child-care services that support the dual goals of helping parents earn and children learn.

Child care is a critical support ensuring parents can participate in the paid workforce. High quality and reliable child care is the only way a parent can go to work and offers multiple benefits for employers. Quality early care also offers substantial benefits to children during their earliest years which narrows the achievement gap, increases high school graduation rates, and reduces crime and delinquency.

We are outraged that the governor's proposed \$516.8 million budget cut to child care, which he wants adopted by March, would eliminate 62,000 child care slots. This is on top of \$883 million child-care reductions, equivalent to 114,762 child-care spaces, lost since 2008.

This level of assault delivers a damaging blow to families that are struggling to improve their lives. The proposed March 2012 adoption/implementation date is unreasonable, unnecessarily forcing families into crisis, without adequate transition time. His proposed changes significantly limit parental choice for low-income parents and their ability to choose quality care for their children.

Long term, his proposal begins to dismantle the backbone of our stable child-care system by eliminating contracts for our

highest quality child development centers and reducing the reimbursement rates to an unrealistic level of operation. These small businesses and nonprofit centers will close their doors, stalling economic recovery especially in low-income communities.

The governor's proposal to move the administration of child care (except part-day preschool) out of the Department of Education's Child Development Division and transfer it to the Department of Social Services doesn't acknowledge the critical role education plays in the child-care setting.

While we value the important role the California Department of Social Services plays in licensing child-care facilities and conducting background checks for all categories of child-care providers, we highly value the California Department of Education's mission to educate all students from early childhood to adulthood.

The Network strongly believes child care is a dual investment that supports children and low-income parents. In order to maintain this dual investment in California's families, administration of child care must remain with the California Department of Education.

CDE was recently awarded a \$52.6 million federal Early Learning Challenge Fund grant to develop a quality rating system to inform parents and policymakers of program ratings. Destroying the child-care supply and dislodging it from the CDE goes counter to the purpose of this federal investment.

Overall, these cuts destroy the dreams of thousands of low-income families who yearn for economic self-sufficiency. These cause irreparable damage to the quality of care that is currently available to all families.

The Network will work with our partners to inform legislative leaders and the governor of the harm this budget and corresponding policy changes will inflict on families,

providers, and our fragile economy. California cannot afford the devastating impact that will be caused by the proposed budget cuts and administrative changes to our recovering economy and to our long-term economic prosperity.

Please contact Choices for Children to share your voice and join local advocacy efforts at (530) 541.5848 or online.

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