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Milwaukee Common Council
200 E. Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Members of the Milwaukee Common Council,

9to5 is on the frontlines working for economic security for all Wisconsin women — particularly women of color. The organization is headquartered in Milwaukee and has a statewide network of advocates. We write to you as you are crafting your plan for allocating the American Rescue Plan funds. We appreciate the gravity of this moment and thank you for your careful consideration of amendments. We believe investing in the early child care and education (ECE) sector is one of the most meaningful ways to respond to immediate needs and provide long-term rewards. ECE is a powerful two-generation economic development strategy. It allows the parents of young children to participate in the workforce and is a proven high-impact investment in children’s readiness for school, work, and life.

Headlines across the nation have celebrated jobs recoveries. However, we know that some people have been left behind in this recovery. Unemployment figures remain high for women, particularly Black and Brown women. This is not new. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Milwaukee’s Black and Brown families struggled to access quality, affordable child care, especially for infants and toddlers.

- Half of Milwaukee’s children – especially Black and Brown children— live in communities where there’s not enough access to quality care.
- For those with access, it remains too expensive for too many families. The average Milwaukee family has to pay over 20 percent of its annual income to afford care for one infant. This causes many parents of young children – and especially mothers – to cut back on work hours or opt out of the workforce altogether.

The pandemic dramatically exacerbated these gaps and stressed the child care sector to the breaking point. The majority of Milwaukee’s ECE programs stayed open throughout the pandemic to provide care for the children of essential workers and others who need it, including school-age children whose schools were closed to in-person instruction. However, programs are struggling to recruit and retain educators, due to insufficient pathways into the profession, poverty-level wages, and inadequate support. The average wage for early educators is just \$11/hour, and many do not receive benefits for this incredibly important work.

The staffing shortage leads directly to the gaps in access to quality, affordable child care that Milwaukee's families experience. According to a survey of Milwaukee child care programs from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 78% of Milwaukee respondents are experiencing a staffing shortage. And as a result of that staffing shortage:

- 51% of responding programs are serving fewer children
- 29% have a longer waitlist
- 29% are unable to open classrooms
- 21% have reduced operating hours

Without staff, Milwaukee's child care programs cannot provide care and education to those families who need it. Without access to child care, Milwaukee's parents cannot participate fully in the workforce and the city's economy.

You have an historic opportunity to invest directly in the child care workforce, thereby enabling the parents of young children to participate in the workforce and ensuring that Milwaukee's Black and Brown children and families reap the economic, academic, and social benefits of quality child care. We support Alderwoman Dimitrijevic's amendment which would

- Increase compensation for early educators through retention stipends;
- Strengthen and diversify the pipeline into the early education profession through an MATC-led ECE dual enrollment program and MKE Rising and Leading Men Fellows, programs that bring young men of color into the ECE workforce; and
- Make dedicated affordable housing available for early educators

We strongly urge members of the Council to support Alderwoman Dimitrijevic's child care amendment.

Sincerely,



Christina Thor

State Director, 9to5 Wisconsin

National Working Women's Association

9to5, National Association of Working Women, Wisconsin Chapter is on the frontlines working for economic security for all Wisconsin women — particularly women of color. The organization is headquartered in Milwaukee and has a statewide network of advocates. Follow the organization on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/9to5Wisconsin/> and on Twitter at @9to5WI.