

Social Policy _____ Position: Child Care & Early Childhood Education

Statement of Position

The League of Women Voters of Alaska believes that children's early years are some of their most important learning years. For many children, these years are spent in a combination of child care and/or preschool settings. Funding early childhood care and education is an investment in the social and economic health of our children, communities and state; an investment that brings substantial current and future returns. Accessible, quality early childhood care and education benefits all levels of society. The League of Women Voters of Alaska supports state and local policies, legislation and programs committed to the following principles: (1) All children are entitled to safe, nurturing care. (2) Caring for children is a societal as well as a family responsibility. (3) Quality childcare that is responsive to diverse needs of children and their families should be available to all socio-economic groups on an ability to pay basis. (4) Job protected, paid parental leave is highly desirable and stable funding is a necessary component of a healthy policy.

AMPLIFICATION

Administration/ Local Support

Support a state administrative structure which provides for optimum effectiveness in implementing child care policies, programs, and services by meeting the following criteria and understandings:

- a. The welfare of the child is the primary focus;
- b. Policy is effectively implemented;
- c. Private and public programs are efficiently coordinated;
- d. The administrative staff has ongoing training in child development;
- e. Responsible agencies are effective advocates for child care and are responsive to public concerns.

Availability/Accessibility

Support measures that ensure availability of accessible, quality child care that is responsive to diverse needs of children and their families, such as the following:

1. Provide incentives and encouragement for private providers and employers to expand the supply of child care, e.g. simplify the regulatory process without lowering standards; provide loans for startup costs; offer tax breaks; assure reasonable insurance rates; act as a model employer by offering child care services and benefits to state employees;
- b. Facilitate and expand child care programs offered at public school facilities and other public agencies;
- c. Ensure the provision of after-school child care programs and services through elementary school years that are age appropriate, supervised, and include enrichment activities.

Quality

Support state responsibility to ensure the delivery of quality care. Support measures that:

- a. Establish and maintain quality standards for all forms of early childhood education and care;
- b. Encourage and assist all early childhood care providers to maintain and provide safe, enriching quality child care and learning;
- c. Provide incentives for family child care homes to become licensed;
- d. Provide effective monitoring of child care programs that are regularly evaluated;
- e. Support and facilitate increased wages and benefits for early childhood educators;
- f. Ensure that families have access to information that will help them to recognize and choose quality care.

Affordability

Encourage state responsibility to follow these actions:

- a. Meet the need for subsidized child care to all socioeconomic groups through reliable and diverse sources of state funding;
- b. Use various incentives to encourage businesses to offer child care services and benefits to their employees;
- c. Promote and seek federal assistance for child care.
- d. Provide regular review of statutory Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) for all state funded child care programs and services
- e. Strengthen the Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies' role in recruiting and supporting quality, affordable child care.

Local Government

Support diverse community efforts, where appropriate, to meet identified local needs for child care services. Support measures that:

- a. Provide incentives for private providers through such means as subsidies, fee waivers, and simplification of the regulatory process;
- b. Include child care elements in community development plans;
- c. Commit the use of public lands and facilities for child care programs.