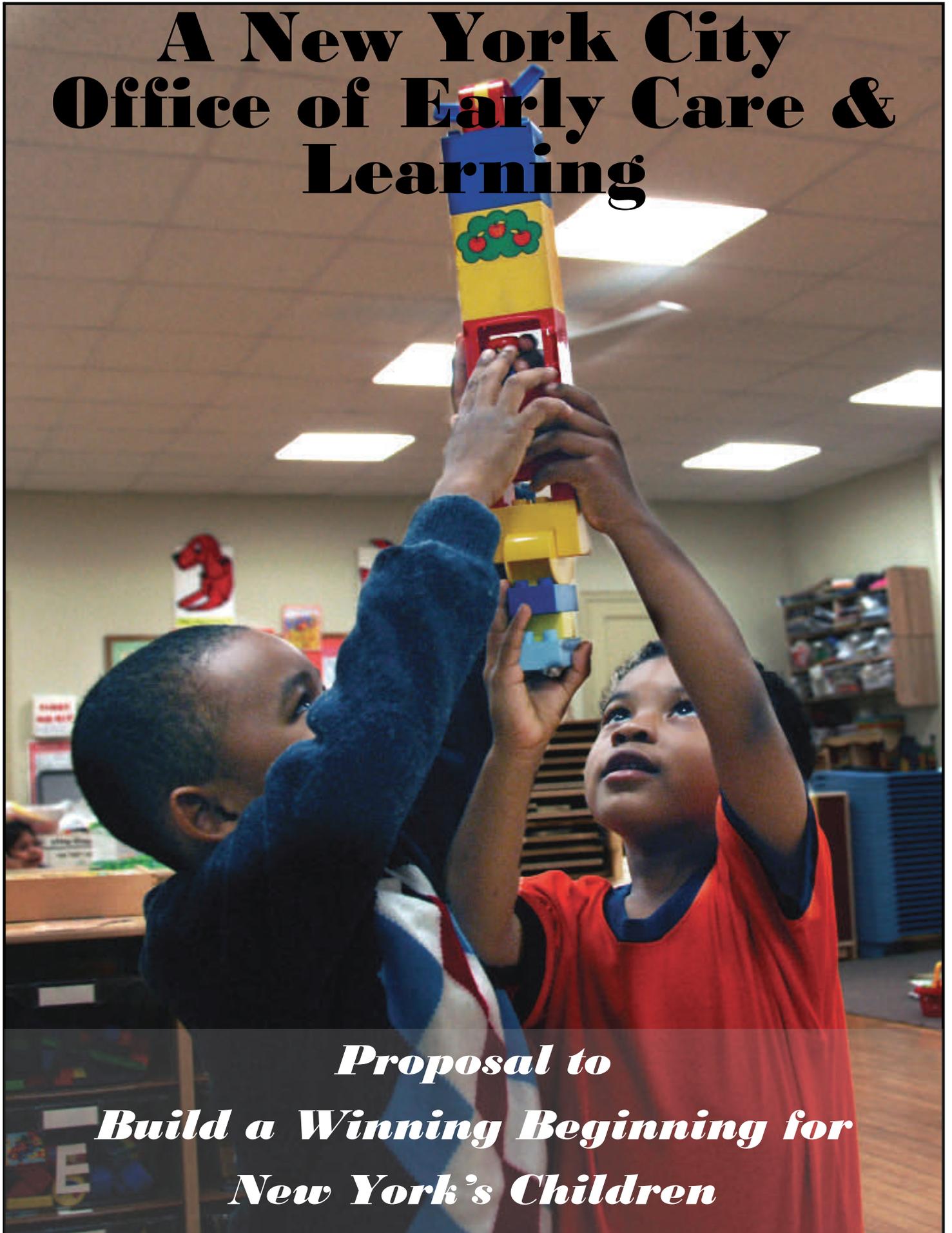


# **A New York City Office of Early Care & Learning**



***Proposal to  
Build a Winning Beginning for  
New York's Children***

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## **Acknowledgement**

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## **Proposal**



***New York City should establish a formal Office of Early Care and Learning, vested with authority at the highest level, to leverage resources, integrate services, simplify access and assure quality standards for all programs serving children from birth through five.***

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The creation of a new Office of Early Care and Learning within the Mayor's office would elevate early care and learning as a top policy priority. It will spearhead cross-agency and cross-sector efforts to create a more integrated, coordinated and high-quality system of early childhood services that prepares every child for success in school. The Office should provide essential, ongoing leadership for citywide efforts to improve and sustain use of resources and drive quality improvements across all early childhood settings.

In recent years, the City has made early education a new priority, yet the early education sector still lacks a coordinated strategy and vision to create a quality early learning opportunity for every child. The new **Office of Early Care and Learning** housed in the Mayor's office can provide the critical leadership to attain that goal. That Office should create a vision and action plan to support children's learning and development and strengthen families. Equally important, the vision and action plan will position the City to take full advantage of new opportunities for federal and state funding to help the city build a world class system of early care and learning that prepares every child for success in school and beyond.

Without such strategic leadership the City could fail to qualify for critical new resources. In 2007, the Mayor's office began the work of integrating and coordinating early care and education, with the creation of the Early Care and Education Policy Steering Committee. It is coordinated by the Deputy Mayors for Human Services and Education. This cross-agency workgroup has taken some critical first steps toward integrating Pre-K, child care, and Head Start as part of an

ambitious expansion of Universal Prekindergarten. The committee also started to examine issues of governance and coordination, including a review of the legal and statutory mandates of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and Department of Education (DOE), and the roles of those agencies within the overall structure of municipal government.

The new Office of Early Care and Learning will take these efforts to the next level by providing long-term, ongoing, sustainable leadership around a shared vision to support better outcomes for children. It will also promote better use of resources and best practices in all early childhood settings. The new Office should:

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### ***The new Office should:***

- ✓ ***Adopt a vision and annual action plan***
  - ✓ ***Create formal linkages among city agencies***
  - ✓ ***Design an integrated data systems***
  - ✓ ***Convene an Early Learning Council which taps the expertise of external stakeholders***
  - ✓ ***Build strong linkages between schools and early childhood programs***
  - ✓ ***Promote innovative research-based strategies***
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- **Adopt a vision and annual action plan** for a unified, high-quality early care and education system that embraces all children and families while maximizing resources to ensure the highest

quality of services. The vision must set forth clear goals leading to improved outcomes for children.<sup>1</sup>

- **Create formal linkages** among the many city agencies responsible for administering early care and education, including the DOE, the ACS, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). These linkages should also extend to city agencies with responsibility for planning and facilities development.
- **Develop the data systems** across agencies and funding streams to support decision making, track progress, and maximize the use of resources. Federal stimulus money can be used to further this process.
- **Convene an Early Learning Council** that includes representatives from city agencies and external stakeholders to help develop the vision and action steps. This new Council will tap the considerable expertise and experience of providers and advocates to inform the process. It would align the City with the new State Early Childhood Advisory Council, which is moving the State toward more coordinated, high quality approaches to delivery of early childhood services.
- **Build strong linkages with community-based programs and public schools** with the goal of aligning funding and services. This will promote broad access and choices for families, make the most of public and private resources, and assure quality and continuity of educational and developmental goals across all settings.



- **Promote innovative research-based strategies** to produce better outcomes for children and make efficient use of multiple funding streams. These efforts may include expansion of community schools and “ready schools”<sup>2</sup> frameworks, as well as expansion of new models developed by the city’s diverse providers such as settlement houses, YMCAs and other community-based organization which co-locate early, youth and aging services.

### **The Time is Now: New Funding Opportunities and Policy Frameworks - Growing Need Among Families and Children**

This is a moment of great opportunity as well as great need. More families than ever need help providing a quality early learning opportunity for their children. The cost of an early childhood education now outstrips the cost of college tuition at City University of New York. Public agencies face great challenges in responding to these needs. At the same time, new federal policies and resources are available to address these issues. But those resources will only flow to cities and states that take new steps to improve quality and introduce research-based best practices. The federal initiatives will provide significant new incentives and resources to localities that create systemic approaches to increase access to quality early learning opportunities.<sup>3</sup> New York City and New York State must rise to the challenge.

New York City now invests over \$1.2 billion in early



<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I of this proposal, *A Vision of a Winning Beginning* for a framework based on national research.

<sup>2</sup> To learn more about the "Ready Schools" policy framework, visit <http://www.ncreadyschools.org>. This website provides a link to the ongoing work in North Carolina, which is a leader in implementing the new framework, as well as links to information to other states' work.

<sup>3</sup> The proposed Early Learning Challenge Grants, now making their way through Congress, are the best examples. In addition, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan has emphasized the need to strengthen early learning opportunities through the Race To The Top Grants and use of Title I education stimulus funding

childhood services but the city does not have good data on quality of the services provided or the outcomes for children. In just over ten years, the Pre-K initiative has expanded to serve over 100,000 four year olds statewide, each year. Fifty four thousand (54,000) four year olds have enrolled in New York City's schools and early childhood programs in the community. Pre-K has sparked new dialogue and partnerships between the public education community and early childhood professionals to strengthen collaborations that support children's development and learning across all settings. That effort revealed a need for better coordination of programming, capacity funding, assessment, and quality assurance. Workforce development also remains a daunting issue.

The Mayor's Early Care and Education Policy Steering Committee has taken some initial steps toward integrating services, resources and capacity, including a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ACS and DOE on blending funding for child care and Pre-K. In addition, the interagency task force has begun to focus on more effective ways to share data and information across agencies and to develop common program assessment strategies across agencies and funding streams. But the City's current fiscal challenges and recent budget decisions revealed that much data and policymaking is still siloed among city agencies leading to inefficient use of resources and capacity, disruption for families and children and continuing need for common assessments across all settings.

The City needs to take the next steps to sustain and expand efforts to better manage scarce resources and take advantage of new opportunities. This will require strong and careful



leadership from the Mayor to assure city agencies collaborate in efforts to secure new federal resources and to create common quality standards seeking the best outcomes for children and families. It will also require strong collaboration with early childhood stakeholders, who bring a wealth of experience and expertise to the process. New York City has some of the most innovative providers who have created national models for best practices and efficient use of funding to support children's full development.

Research reveals that high-quality early care and learning programs are the best two-generation anti-poverty policy the City can adopt, helping parents work and children succeed in school. Federal Reserve economists report that there is no better public investment any city can make.<sup>4</sup> That is why national researchers are studying the best approaches to supporting quality early care and development opportunities for every child, starting prenatally. And that is why experts urge cities and states to champion better management of existing resources and capacity as a path of innovation.

In other words, leadership matters and strong mayoral leadership is especially critical in New York City, given the size, scope and diversity of early care and learning services here. At least eight government agencies share funding and regulatory oversight of early childhood services.<sup>5</sup> Each follows what are now competing and sometimes conflicting regulatory frameworks, making it increasingly difficult to deploy public resources efficiently. Providers and schools struggle to comply with myriad standards, inspections and reporting requirements. Families find it hard to

<sup>4</sup> Study by economists Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald can be downloaded at <http://minneapolisfed.org/pubs/fedgaz/03-03/earlychild.cfm>. Also James Heckman <http://www.heckmanequation.org>

<sup>5</sup> See PowerPoint presentation, 2008 CCI Primer Highlights, posted at [www.childcareinc.org/policy](http://www.childcareinc.org/policy). The eight agencies include Federal Department of Health and Human Services, State Office of Children and Family Services, State Department of Education, the Regional Head Start Administration and three New York City agencies, the Administration for Children's Services, the Department of Health and Human Services and the city's Department of Education.

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access services. Children’s early learning experiences are not always coherent or sufficiently based on research-based practice. Parents struggle to understand what is available.

This reality has encouraged policy makers, at every level of government, to recognize that effective early education requires *managing systems through effective governance as well as strengthening the delivery of services regardless of the setting*. The new Office of Early Care and Learning backed by strong mayoral support, can lead the effort to build a world class system of early childhood education by building on lessons learned in national research.

### **Key Components of a Successful Office of Early Care and Learning**

The new Office needs:

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#### ***Effectiveness through:***

- ✓ ***Authority***
  - ✓ ***Expert Staffing***
  - ✓ ***An Early Learning Council***
  - ✓ ***Commitment***
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**Authority.** To succeed, the Office must have the authority that comes from the full backing of the Office of the Mayor. It must be sustainable and take a systemic approach, with the authority to bring agencies together and to require them to follow through. The office must also have the authority to engage other stakeholders at the highest levels.

**Expert Staffing.** The Office must be directed and staffed by individuals knowledgeable and skilled in municipal governance, systems development, financing, and early care and education.

**An Early Learning Council.** An Early Learning Council – convened and staffed by the Office of Early

Care and Learning – should make recommendations for system improvements, assess progress toward goals, and integrate policy, practice and research. Stakeholder participation should be broad enough to build ongoing relationships and collaboration with early childhood and home visiting, public education early intervention, social health and mental health specialists, and advocates and unions. The city should seek to link this work with statewide planning efforts.

**Commitment.** The new Office must cultivate a culture of trust and collegiality to reach common goals across the usual boundaries of funding streams and service delivery and to engage stakeholders in the process. Agencies must be required to commit to the process at the highest level.

### **Key Tasks for the New Office**

Building on the work of the City’s Early Care and Education Policy Steering Committee, the Office should:

- Create and implement an annual plan that includes a set of priorities and an annual assessment of progress in improving system outcomes and outcomes for children and families.
- Compile and update annually all relevant data about the present system, including child demographics, an inventory of existing resources, funding streams, resource allocation, and actual program costs.
- Develop, manage, and staff the Early Learning Council as an integral part of planning, implementing, and assessing changes and improvements. The Council will also serve as a resource on current research and best practices.
- Create formal strategies to foster, and mandate where necessary, coordination, integration and improvements of services,

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and to ensure the meeting of legal and statutory mandates.

- Develop ongoing processes for stakeholder engagement and policy analysis, such as forums, hearings and focus groups for providers, parents and others.

### **Where the Work Needs to Begin<sup>6</sup>**

The starting points for the work, outlined below, are based on input from a think tank and interviews with



policymakers and educational experts across the country who shared lessons learned about creating new governance for early care and education to create efficiencies and better outcomes for children. To move forward effectively, the Office needs to set forth:

**Clear goals for child and program outcomes, as well as system outcomes.** Program goals should include long term objectives such as school readiness, improved quality and access, and family involvements. System goals should include achieving fiscal efficiencies, better coordination of funding and capacity, maximizing resources, and streamlining standards and regulations.

**Guiding principles** such as:

- Clear objectives for action and accountability mechanisms to track and report progress at each stage

- Issues must be framed comprehensively at the start with a long term vision
- Both top-down and bottom-up perspectives need to be considered to achieve meaningful results
- Resources generated through fiscal efficiencies should be reinvested in early education and care to improve quality
- Ongoing examination of what works and what needs improvement based on strong data systems and research

### **A System of Early Care and Education**

The proposal to establish an Office of Early Care and Learning is based on long term experience and ongoing commitment to strengthening early care and education opportunities for children in New York City. CCI, and our many colleagues around the City, stand ready to share our expertise and experience, and to work with policy makers to help build a better and more efficient system of early care and education.

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix II of this proposal, *Questions the Office Needs to Address*

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## **Appendix I**

### **The Vision of a Winning Beginning**

#### ***For Children***

- *All* young children have access to the quality early education and care they need to succeed in school and life including those with special needs
- Every program – whether in schools, child care and Head Start centers, preschools, family homes, or other venues – meets consistent quality standards
- Every early education and care professional is well prepared, has access to ongoing professional development, and is fairly compensated

#### ***For Families***

- Programs are located where families can conveniently take advantage of them
- Schools, programs, and services are responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity
- Each family can access the array of family supports and services needed to raise healthy children
- Families are respected and welcomed

#### ***For New York City***

- A strategy for coordinating service delivery to improve and sustain early care and education programs and services, improve access for all families, and promote better outcomes
- Federal, state, city, and private resources are deployed in the most effective manor to assure quality early education and care
- The successes of children and their families lead to great and longstanding financial benefits for the city, including, but not limited to:
  - **Reduced costs** of remediation, special education, social services, and crime prevention, and
  - **Increased income** emanating from a more capable and efficient workforce, higher earnings achieved by children and families, and consequent increases in tax collection.

***Based on New York's Action Plan for Young Children and Families  
Winning Beginning NY, a statewide action coalition***

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## **Appendix II**

### **Questions the Office Needs to Address**

#### ***Program***

- What must the City do to put in place common, sensible standards for effective early care and education across all modalities?
- How can the City best assure well-prepared, appropriately credentialed, and appropriately compensated early childhood professionals?
- How can we simplify the enrollment process and help families better understand their early care and education options? How can we help them move easily from one program to another?
- What quality assurance strategies can the City put in place?
- How might the City best gather the data it needs to effectively serve its children and families?
- What data do we have and what data/research we need to make the appropriate decisions?

#### ***Fiscal***

- What are the existing resources when seen across the system as a whole?
- How can the City make more efficient use of its existing early care and education resources?
- What new resources might the City be able to tap?
- Are there any non-monetary resources that the City can employ to ease the financial cost?
- What investment is needed in program support and system infrastructures?

#### ***System-wide***

- What parts of our system need improvement and better coordination? Are there any parts of our system that still need to be developed?
- What is the responsibility of each City agency to State and Federal agencies?
- What role does early childhood education play in each agency?
- What is the charge of each agency?
- What are the statutory requirements for each agency?
- How can the City bring greater consistency to regulations? Are there regulations that can be waived in order to assure quality and effectiveness?

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# *Building Bright Futures For Children*

## **About CCI**

CCI is nationally recognized as a leading voice for meeting the care and developmental needs of children from birth through school age. Founded in 1982, CCI champions the right of all children to start life with the best possible foundation of care, learning, and health.

CCI provides:

- Information and consultation to parents
- Professional training and development to the field
- Advocacy and analysis to influence public policy and practice

The backbone of CCI's efforts is: helping families find the best quality early care and learning for their children, partnering with professionals to improve and expand their services, and influencing public policy to assure sensible and affordable options. Working with each of these sectors gives CCI the insight to recommend policies that make quality learning environments a reality for all children. CCI is a New York City-based organization. CCI is also part of a national network of child care resources and referral agencies.

Please visit our website at [www.childcareinc.org](http://www.childcareinc.org). For more information, questions or concerns about this proposal, please email Betty Holcomb, [bholcomb@childcareinc.org](mailto:bholcomb@childcareinc.org)



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