

**March 31, 2026**

To: Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education and Care

Re: Texas' Opportunity to Strengthen Early Childhood Education and Care

Chairman Holt and honorable members of the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education and Care,

Philanthropy Advocates and the 23 undersigned organizations thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments concerning your important work ahead for the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) as established by HB 117 (89R) last year.

This Task Force exists alongside promising efforts to better support ECEC, including meaningful data system and coordination improvements across programs through the Early Childhood Integrated Data System, the newly required strategic plan for the improvement and expansion of early learning and educational opportunities for young children with disabilities, and the Quad Agency Initiative established by the 89<sup>th</sup> Legislature in 2025. Alongside each of these initiatives, the Task Force serves a critical role with a **rare opportunity to work across ECEC programs to reimagine a coherent system** that provides stronger starts for young Texans and their families, greater value for taxpayers, and a more robust and supported workforce for Texas employers.

**The state's ability to achieve the goals outlined in HB 117 (89R) of expanding affordable capacity and improving Kindergarten Readiness is limited by the system's fragmentation, funding constraints and the state's lack of a comprehensive vision.** Today, funding flows through multiple federal and state streams administered by different state and local entities, each with its own charge, rules, structure, and expectations, making coordination extremely difficult. At the same time, no single individual or agency has sufficient authority or is held accountable for addressing the challenges facing children, parents, providers, and employers in Texas.

While Texas is not alone in these challenges, this fragmentation has real consequences for Texans:

- **Struggling families:** Texas is experiencing a system mismatch in ECEC that directly impacts families. With 61% of children under 6 having all available parents in the workforce, finding affordable care remains out of reach for many.<sup>1</sup> Texas' child care subsidy waitlist had nearly 95,000 children as of 2025,<sup>2</sup> and centers are simultaneously experiencing under-enrollment. As of school year 2023-24, only an estimated 45% of eligible three- and four-year-olds were enrolled in public prekindergarten (75% of eligible 4-year-olds and 16 % of eligible 3-year-olds).<sup>3</sup> **Altogether, the demand far outpaces the supply that can best meet the needs of Texas' families.**
- **Unsupported employers:** Child care barriers shrink the Texas workforce. With 603,000 job openings as of 2025,<sup>4</sup> employers struggle to recruit and retain workers: 60% of non-working parents cite child care as a top reason they aren't in the workforce.<sup>5</sup> This is compounded by the cost to businesses in replacing exited employees, which costs an average of 6-9 months' salary.<sup>6</sup> **Ultimately, this results in an estimated \$9.39B annual loss for Texas as a whole.**<sup>7</sup>
- **Burdened providers:** ECEC providers across settings (private, in-home and faith-based childcare/prekindergarten, and public-school prekindergarten programs, etc.) face misaligned

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<sup>1</sup> [First Five Years Fund](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Texas Tribune](#)

<sup>3</sup> [The Commit Partnership](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Bureau of Labor Statistic](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Best Place for Working Parents](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Best Place for Working Parent](#)

<sup>7</sup> [US Chamber Foundation, "Untapped Potential Report: Texas" \(2023\)](#)

eligibility standards, duplicative licensing and reporting requirements, and a lack of clear state guidance. **Red tape slows their work without a clear place to turn for support.** The Legislature took initial steps to improve this in parts of the ECEC system by establishing the Quad Agency Initiative, and we are hopeful that this effort will result in meaningful identification of actions to streamline and align regulations, rules, and policies impacting child care providers.

- **Ineffective data:** Leaders can't answer basic questions about the early childhood system. Data is either uncollected, disconnected across program types, or published in ways that obscure the full picture. **Critical questions – like how many unique children are being served, how many have access to quality seats, how are our early educators being trained and what qualifications do they hold, and how many early education classrooms are experiencing teacher vacancies – remain unanswered.** The Legislature took initial steps to remedy some of these gaps by codifying an Early Childhood Integrated Data System, and we are hopeful that work is implemented fully, maintained, and utilized to inform system initiatives and efforts.
- **Inconsistent quality and outcomes:** Without consistent quality standards across program types, children experience an uneven system as they matriculate through program types (e.g. from childcare into prekindergarten at different settings). As of 2024-25, just 1 in 2 (51%) Texas kindergartners are entering “ready” for their kindergarten year.<sup>8</sup> **By third grade, roughly half of students meet grade-level expectations in reading and math, and only five percent of these students catch up to grade-level within two years.**<sup>9</sup>

### *Goals to Consider*

The Governor’s Task Force on Early Childhood Education and Care should make recommendations for a governance system in Texas that ensures the following:

- **Families** can select an affordable early learning option that fits their needs and allows them to return to work. Parents are empowered with clear information and access to the supports that help their child thrive.
- **All children** enter kindergarten ready to learn and prepared for lifelong success through access to high-quality early childhood education and care across settings.
- **Providers** deliver high-quality early learning experiences across settings through a prepared, supported workforce and aligned systems. There are enough **affordable, safe, high-quality spots for children** made accessible for parents so that they can productively participate in the workforce or advance their education.

Ultimately, Texas’ local and state economies stand to benefit from families who are supported through reliable and coordinated ECEC resources to hold jobs, raise children, and participate in their community. **Streamlining transitions between care settings, providing expectations and an ability to measure the impact of our ECEC programs can achieve both education and workforce outcomes desired by the state.**

We encourage this task force to pursue a “whole-system” redesign and resist reinforcing silos that the current system produces, taking into consideration all perspectives touched by the fragmented governance structure Texas has today.

Finally, we are grateful to Governor Abbott and members of this Task Force for your efforts to **ensure the experiences of our youngest Texans and their families are at the center of your work together.**

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<sup>8</sup> [TPEIR](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Texas Academic Performance Reports](#)

**Additional Supporting Organizations**

