

30 March 2020

The Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC
NSW Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister Mitchell,

**Re: How the NSW Government can further assist
over 5,600 early childhood education and care services and over 66,000 employees**

Please note that this letter will be publicly shared with the Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) NSW members who operate over 1,600 services, as well as non-members.

Thank you for your letter dated 26 March 2020. Under the circumstances, we respectfully ask for more assistance from the NSW Government, especially to ensure that the sector remains financially and operationally viable during and after the experiences with the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) so that over 330,000 children (and the families) can be educated and cared for across New South Wales.

Although we appreciate that the impact of and responses to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to be evolving, we sincerely believe the following are additional and practical ways in which the NSW Government under its own power can do to assist the over 5,600 early childhood education and care services and its over 66,000 employees:

1. Appropriate additional NSW funding to all service(s) (when needed) who are called by frontline personnel as parents to assist with their education and care of children, especially if the service(s) has been financially negatively affected by COVID-19.
2. A written guarantee from the NSW Government that the education and care of frontline personnel's choice of education and care for their children will be the parents' decision only.
3. A fairer Start Strong Funding for privately-owned, community and not-for-profit long daycare services at least similar to that provided by the South Australian, Queensland and Victorian Governments and as originally recommended by Professor Deborah Brennan since 2012. This means an increase of the quantum of funding (ie from \$459 per child per year to at least \$1,729 per child per year, a relaxation of the 600-hours-per-year requirement, as well as the use of such funds to support for labour costs that currently is denied).
4. Distribution of the funding for all 3-year-old children and not just those in community preschools as originally announced by Treasurer Perrottet in the NSW Parliament on 19 June 2018.
5. Should any service be temporarily closed because of COVID-19, that the NSW Government provide written guarantee all grandfathered regulatory provisions relevant to those affected services remain intact when the service(s) is re-opened.

Through Premier Berejiklian's advocacies at the National Cabinet as well as yours through the Education Council, we ask for your (continuing) assistance for immediate implementation of the following in light of COVID-19:

- i. The distribution of the Commonwealth's Child Care Subsidies (CCS) without the need for co-contributions from parents regardless of whether the service remains open or shut.
- ii. The temporary suspension of the requirement for children to attend their last day of service in order for services to receive the CCS.

In the context of what the NSW Government can additionally provide in terms of relief and support in the face of COVID-19 to businesses that also benefit the service providers of early childhood education and care, they would be:

- (a) The increase of the payroll tax threshold for small businesses to \$2,000,000 (and not \$1,000,000) beginning FY2020/2021.
- (b) Grants to businesses to pay 50% of their annual premiums for their workers compensation insurance policies that are due in the next 6 months.
- (c) Grants to either local governments or to businesses to pay for Council Rates (or at least the difference between commercial and residential rates) relating to commercial properties that are due in the next 6 months beginning 1 January 2020.
- (d) Deferral of any debts of small businesses to Revenue NSW for the calendar year 2020.
- (e) Grants to small businesses to help them pay for their business insurance policies due in the next 6 months in order to ensure cover for third parties (especially children and families).

We are most appreciative of the fact that our Australian governments and 98% of banks have moved to defer repayments of bank loans and ensure the protection of leases.

ACA NSW would be happy to elaborate further of any of the above proposals should you require any further information and clarification.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,



Chiang Lim
CEO

- encl 1. Copy of letter from NSW Minister Mitchell (RML20/877) (26 March 2020)
 2. Copy of letter to NSW Minister Mitchell (9 March 2020)

- cc The Hon Gladys Berejiklian MP, Premier of New South Wales
 Ms Jodi Mackay MP, Opposition Leader of New South Wales
 The Hon Kevin Conolly MP, NSW Parliamentary Secretary for Education
 Ms Jodie Harrison MP, NSW Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education
 Mr Martin Graham, A/Executive Director, NSW Department of Education

Mr Chiang Lim
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Childcare Alliance NSW
chiang.lim@childcarealliance.org.au

RML20/877

Dear Mr Lim

Thank you for your letter of 9 March 2020, to the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, regarding the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and implications for the Early Childhood Education sector (the sector). The Minister has asked me to respond on her behalf. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the critical role of the sector in this unprecedented situation of COVID-19 and commend all services for their professionalism in protecting the children's health, safety and wellbeing. The Australian Childcare Alliance NSW's efforts to assist the sector in these difficult times are greatly appreciated.

The Department of Education is fully aware of the complex challenges faced by services as a result of COVID-19, and I can assure you that all efforts are being made to keep this vital sector in operation. As you may appreciate, this is a rapidly changing and highly unpredictable situation, and the Department is adapting as needed to best support families and the sector.

With regard to your question on service closures, the Department does not have the authority to direct service closures for reasons other than non-compliance with the *Children (Education and Care Services) National Law* (National Law) and National Regulations. NSW Health, as the lead agency responding to COVID-19, will provide any advice to close down services if and when it becomes necessary. I suggest you contact NSW Health with any questions regarding their processes. At this stage, so far as the Department is aware, there are no plans to force a shutdown of services. Should the situation change, the Department will communicate information from NSW Health to the sector as soon as it is available.

I note your concerns on regulatory compliance during the COVID-19 situation. I am pleased to advise that the Department is already supporting services affected by COVID-19 through temporary relief to staffing or qualification requirements in the National Regulations. Application fees for these waivers will be refunded or waived for services that have been affected by COVID-19. In applying for a waiver, services should demonstrate how adequate supervision will be maintained. The Department's priority remains the safety, health and wellbeing of children in care.

The Department acknowledges the importance of funding stability in supporting the ongoing provision of education and care to children and families. For NSW funding, Start Strong funding will be maintained at current levels for the remainder of 2020.

We also understand that social distancing presents challenges in many early childhood education and care settings. Services are encouraged to consider how best to manage social distancing and supervision at the same time depending on their unique circumstances. However, the Department is also seeking advice from NSW Health to develop resources that provide more specific guidance around social distancing and for use as educational materials for children.

We will continue to communicate and engage with the sector through livestreamed events. On 18 March 2020, the Department held an online livestreaming session with over 1,000 participants across the state. Department staff communicated up-to-date information relating to COVID-19 and answered concerns raised by the sector. The sector has been largely supportive of the livestreamed session and much of the feedback was positive. Further livestreamed events are planned and will be announced as soon as possible.

We are in regular contact with NSW Health to monitor and respond to COVID-19 on a day-to-day basis. We are also working closely with the Australian Government and other Regulatory Authorities to ensure consistent communication and collaborative responses to COVID-19.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Martin Graham
A/Executive Director
Early Childhood Education
26 March 2020



9 March 2020

The Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC
Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning
Parliament of New South Wales
52 Martin Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister Mitchell,

Re: Request for NSW Government's reliefs/assistance for NSW-based early childhood education and care services during temporary disruptions due to the Novel Coronavirus

The Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA) NSW is the state's peak body representing 1,600 privately-owned centre-based childcare services who employ about 25,000 individuals and serve up to 125,000 children and their families.

As you would expect, due to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), ACA NSW is already providing current operational and government-sanctioned health information to our members as well as non-members. We are on-track to host a series of live webinars with well over 1,000 registered approved providers. We are also providing tools and information to both members and non-members wherever possible.

Nationally, our sister-state peak bodies and we are collectively in discussions with the Federal Government seeking practical solutions to address business continuity. We anxiously await the Federal Government's announcement(s) in the very near future.

Similarly, we would like to work with the NSW Department of Education and seek solutions to concerns that are within the NSW Government's domain, for example:

1. What are the differentiating circumstances underlying a biosecurity event versus a quarantine event for which the NSW Government would declare to direct a (temporary) closure of any NSW-based early childhood education and care (ECEC) service?
2. Should any staff member(s) of ECEC services be self-isolated or be unavailable due to confirmation of COVID-19 infection, given the underlying labour shortages and higher staffing requirements of NSW compared to other Australian jurisdictions, what temporary flexibilities can the NSW Department of Education extend to such affected service(s) for their regulatory compliance and qualifications requirements while managing risk and not sacrificing quality?
3. Will the NSW Government make available fee subsidies to community preschools to cover any lost fees, including where families are paying by the week rather than by the term?
4. What support mechanisms and assistance are available from the NSW Department of Education to ECEC services to assist them and their families with COVID-19?
5. How will the NSW Department of Education support one-source-of-truth with other government agencies and the affected service(s)?

ACA NSW is conscious of ensuring that public health standards are maintained while supporting the needs of children, their parents and NSW-based ECEC services' operations. As such, you will appreciate that ACA NSW is doing everything it can to assist members as well as non-members through this pandemic and help prevent uninformed panic.

We very much look forward to your considered response. And we thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely



Chiang Lim
CEO

- cc
1. The Hon Gladys Berejiklian, Premier of New South Wales
 2. The Hon Kevin Conolly MP, NSW Parliamentary Secretary for Education
 3. The Hon Jodi McKay MP, NSW Leader of the Opposition
 4. Ms Jodie Harrison MP, NSW Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education
 5. Mr Martin Graham, A/Executive Director, NSW Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate, NSW Department of Education