

*November 8, 2023*

Dear Members of the Economic Affairs Interim Committee,

We, the Early Childhood Collaborative of the Greater Helena Area want to thank the Economic Affairs Interim Committee for prioritizing the study of child care, a critical support for children and families in our communities. Accessible and affordable quality early care and education opportunities for families with young children ensures parents can participate in the workforce, children are provided with the critical early education that impacts lifelong brain development, and our communities are thriving.

A Montana Department of Labor & Industry report from earlier this year notes that licensed child care capacity in our state meets only 43% of the demand. In 2022, the lack of high-quality child care prevented as many as 68,000 parents from fully participating in the labor force. See the report here:

[https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/EAG-Articles/EAG-0223\\_Final.pdf](https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/EAG-Articles/EAG-0223_Final.pdf)

As this U.S. Chamber Foundation report indicates, for every \$1 we invest in early childhood, we receive a return of \$16 in the form of reduced special education needs, higher rates of grade level retention, reduced incarceration rates, improved health, and future employment outcomes. Learn more:

[https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Leading%20the%20Way\\_0.pdf](https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Leading%20the%20Way_0.pdf)

The Early Childhood Collaborative of the Greater Helena Area facilitates cross-collaboration with key stakeholders to build a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system that supports the health and wellbeing of children and families. We are well connected to our community, including parents, early child care and education providers, and local leaders, and are well attuned to the unique challenges and opportunities that exist within our community's child care systems.

We encourage the Economic Affairs Interim Committee to leverage our expertise and connection to our community as the committee studies the issue of child care in Montana. We would welcome the opportunity to participate in conversation, connect you with our broader local networks, and share our insights throughout the interim session. Thank you for your work to support the economic health of our children, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

Early Childhood Collaborative of the Greater Helena Area