



July 22, 2020

Sent electronically

Subject: Childcare Necessary for Economic Recovery

Dear Senator Murkowski, Senator Sullivan, and Congressman Young,

The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce urges you to include childcare facilities in any future COVID-19 response and economic stimulus. In an economy where many parents work, the businesses, non-profit organizations, and military installations of our membership will not be able to return to full strength if their employees are unable to find local, affordable childcare.

Childcare is particularly a challenge in rural areas, where national childcare chains generally do not operate, and local options are limited. Finding affordable childcare was already a challenge for working parents in Interior Alaska prior to the pandemic. As an isolated region, we need to utilize the skills of all available workers to operate and grow our economy, not to mention re-open and revitalize it during what has been and will continue to be a transformative year for all. If employees are unable to access quality childcare options, some parents will choose to stay out of the workforce entirely, placing a strain on employers and potentially increasing unemployment. The shortage of childcare options in the Interior will be intensified if some centers close permanently as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

We acknowledge that state and federal health standards have been designed to keep children (and families) safe, but they could result in closure of childcare facilities if they are not met with tools and financial assistance. Childcare centers already exist on thin profit margins due to the need to balance the high staffing expenses inherent to the business while providing service to families at affordable prices. As one example, asking providers to limit class size in order to provide appropriate physical distance in classrooms or home daycare environments reduces revenue. Commiserate reductions in staff are difficult because the ratios are not efficient. Purchasing additional sets of toys and supplies for each child reduces the opportunities for infection to spread, but it places the cost burden on the family or increases childcare costs for the facility. Economic viability is integral to any business model, and childcare facilities are a critical part of our

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economy's infrastructure; therefore, additional tools and financial assistance are prudent to maintain quality childcare. We must look for ways to support childcare facilities as they transition to the new realities of a world with COVID-19.

We urge you to take these factors into account for your Interior constituents as relief efforts continue in Washington, D.C.

The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce represents over 650 business members throughout Interior Alaska. We work to advocate for the best business environment, promote economic strength and growth for interior Alaska, and to develop the resources and networks enterprising people use to share knowledge.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marisa Sharrah".

Marisa Sharrah
President/CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sabrina Binkley".

Sabrina Binkley
Board Chair