



Parent Advisory Committee Meeting Summary: March 23, 2021

Attendees: Cheryl (Cherie) Shroeder, Deborah Corley-Marzett, Lissette Frausto, Mary Ignatius, Naima Facih, Patricia Lozano, Patrick MacFarlane

1. Welcome and Introductions (Mary Ignatius)

In her opening remarks, Chair Mary Ignatius presented an overview of the meeting structure, including describing the process the Committee will use to select two members to serve on the full Early Childhood Policy Council and a discussion on the Child Care Program Transition with members of the Parent Voices Transition Parent Advisory Committee.

2. Early Childhood Policy Council Appointments

- California Health and Human Services Agency (CHHSA) Deputy Secretary, Kris Perry, facilitated the voting process to appoint two members of the Parent Advisory Committee (Committee) to join the Early Childhood Policy Council (Council). She reminded members that those elected to the full Council will take on Council member duties in addition to their current Committee duties, including attending four Council meetings per year.
- Deputy Secretary Perry initiated the process by first asking each Committee member if they would like to withdraw their name from consideration. After establishing a list of candidates, Deputy Secretary Perry gave each candidate 30 seconds to explain why they would like to be considered for the Council role. After hearing from each candidate, each Committee member identified two people they would like to appoint to the Council.
- Committee Chair Ignatius and member Lissette Frausto were appointed to the full Council.



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3. Child Care Program Transition Update

- California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Deputy Director of the Child Care and Development Division, Dr. Lupe Jaime-Mileham; CDSS Deputy Director of the Family Engagement and Empowerment Division, Jennifer Hernandez; and CalWORKs and Family Resilience Branch Chief, Kristina Meza, presented an overview of the Child Care Program Transition Plan and elevated transitional components that directly impact families.
- Following the presentation, Dr. Laura Pryor from Social Policy Research Associates (SPRA) engaged the Committee and members of the Parent Voices Transition Parent Advisory Committee in a discussion to provide parent input on the CDSS Child Care Transition Plan.

A high-level, thematic summary of the parent-input discussion and public comments received during the meeting can be found in the following pages.



ECPC Parent Subcommittee Meeting Summary Write-Up March 23, 2021

Prepared by Social Policy Research Associates and Parent Voices

The Early Childhood Policy Council (ECPC) Parent Subcommittee convened on March 23, 2021. A core component on the agenda was for the CDSS to update parents on the child care program transition from the California Department of Education (CDE) to CDSS and to receive feedback on this transition plan. To collect comprehensive parent feedback, the CDSS Transition Parent Advisory Committee joined the ECPC Parent Subcommittee meeting, bringing the total number of parent attendees to fourteen.

Parent feedback centered on many of the issues discussed in the “Paths to Policy Change” section in the [CDSS transition plan](#), including (1) consolidating CalWORKs stages; (2) creating a Statewide Verification Hub; (3) improving the waiting list; (4) expanding child care facilities; and (5) improving accessibility to Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care. This summary shares parent comments and recommendations for each of these five policy areas and concludes with parent reflections on opportunities to improve the child care system through this program transition. Parents’ insights and recommendations are intended to support and inform CDSS’s post-transition planning.

CalWORKs Consolidation

In alignment with recommendations from the [Master Plan for Early Learning and Care](#) and the [2019 Blue Ribbon Commission \(BRC\) report](#), the CDSS transition plans suggests consolidating the various child care program and funding streams to reduce challenges that parents currently face when transitioning through the child care stages. As stated in the transition plan: “Consolidation of CalWORKs child care may prevent families from experiencing breaks in child care and could lead to a greater number of CalWORKs families experiencing self-sufficiency and independence from aid” (40). Parent comments about navigating the child care subsidy program resonated with the intent behind CDSS’s plan to consolidate CalWORKs stages. Key themes and recommendations on this topic are described as follows.



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Key Themes

Poor communication about stages and transitioning across stages:

Parents described how inconsistent communication between stages can result in parents being dropped from their child care program. Specifically, parents recalled that county staff do not communicate consistent and thorough information about the different CalWORKs stages, eligibility requirements, status, and progress. This poor communication can create confusion and added challenges, resulting in parents losing their child care subsidy.

When I was on welfare getting transferred into stage two, I got dropped completely because the people from welfare and then the people from the stage two center wouldn't communicate with each other. They wanted me to go back and forth between them, but they were never available at all. Every time I called they just give me the run around. So, I ended up just getting dropped completely to where I didn't even get it.

Challenges with accessing providers across stages:

Parents explained that providers often do not want to accept subsidies due to the administrative process and the length of time it can take to get payments. As a result, parents looking to use subsidies have a more challenging experience finding eligible providers. This issue is further exacerbated for parents who are looking for a provider with specific skill sets to meet their child's needs (e.g., families and children with disabilities).

Current income eligibility guidelines across stages prevent parents from accessing the care they need and can result in parents intentionally keeping their income lower than what may be possible:

Currently, child care subsidy eligibility is determined by families' gross income, as opposed to their net income. Parents communicated that their net income is not a true reflection of their "take home pay" and therefore continue to struggle with affording child care through the subsidy program. Parents expressed that they become fearful that a raise in their income may result in losing their child care support. Furthermore, parents explained how fluctuations in their income or finding a new job can result in "steep cliff" in the amount of family fees parents are expected to pay.



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I was in CalWORKs and after being in CalWORKs I got a job, and I wasn't on CalWORKs for a long time. I waited two years to get child care after getting a job and being on welfare. And I just think the process would be better if, one we just have a transition because I understand we either could pay our rent, or we could pay our child care. So, if we have an easy transition when we get a job, it would be great not to just cut us off and then we have to wait X amount of times. Because maybe we might be able to get a career job where, you know what I mean, where we need child care and they cut off our child care before we can transition; it can be a problem.

Parent Recommendations

1. Eliminate disruptions to CalWORKs child care due to transitions, job changes, income fluctuations, etc.
2. Create income eligibility guidelines that factor in a parent's geographic location, net income, and cost of living factors.
3. Ensure that the consolidation of stages also preserves the intent to fully fund the subsidy program.
4. Create smoother processes and systems for the paperwork and orientation process for CalWORKs.
5. Minimize or eliminate parent fees for eligible families.

I feel like there shouldn't be an income eligibility because we all need child care, period. As working families and working parents, we need child care to keep on continuing our growth and career and it sucks to feel like, "Oh, I make too much and I can't receive that child care anymore." So, to me, a lot of times I felt like I had undermined myself just to keep underneath that limitation and it just limits you and it keeps you in the system and we really don't want to stay there. So, it's like, if we're going to offer the help, then let's really give the help.

Statewide Verification Hub

Parent comments from the 2019 BRC report highlighted the challenging and burdensome processes for verifying eligibility for child care resources. In response to this known challenge, the transition plan states that CDSS is committed to "simplifying, streamlining, and modernizing eligibility processes as much as possible" (40) and has proposed creating a Statewide Verification Hub to facilitate this process. Overall, parents agreed that this type of system would be helpful and had the following comments and



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recommendations regarding the current eligibility system and a potential Statewide Verification Hub.

Key Themes

Current paperwork processes are time intensive and deficit-focused:

To verify eligibility for child care, parents must go through multiple income verification steps. This process is time intensive for parents and often requires them to take time off from work. Furthermore, the language used in the current paperwork conveys a perspective that the state is doing parents “a favor,” and parents feel that this language lacks an equity perspective and has racist connotations.

The current eligibility system creates confusion for both parents and their employers:

In addition to the eligibility verification process being time intensive and cumbersome, it can also be confusing for both parents and employers to know what information to provide. Additionally, parents explained how the current system forces parents to share personal information with their employer about their need for child care assistance. As a result, some employers may view these parents as a burden.

And I know when you want to move your schedule and have different hours, you'll have to do the employment verification. And many times, and I say this out of experience, the employers don't even know what they need to fill out in those forms. They're like, "What do you want me to do? I know you need child care, but what exactly do I need to put in this form to let you have that child care to be able to come to work?"

Parents often do not know which child care programs they are eligible for:

Parents commented that a hub to verify eligibility across programs would be essential for supporting continuity of care. Specifically, the current system does not clearly highlight the programs that parents are eligible for. A Statewide Verification Hub can help parents become aware of programs they may be able to access.



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Parent Recommendations

1. Create more comprehensive training or orientation events to help parents understand the network of child care options that are available to them.
2. Ensure that the Statewide Verification Hub is offered in multiple languages.
3. The Statewide Verification Hub should be centralized and communicate directly to counties. For example, the hub should function like the IRS portal where all information is in a single place and it is easy to track progress.

I was thinking maybe a way that could help is that maybe think of like when I filed for my taxes. When I just can go to the IRS website, I put in my certain information like my social security and then it pops up. They show me the progress of when I'm going to get my return. I think in the same aspect for child care resources and everything on one website where you could put in your information and it would pop up and it'll tell you the progress and where you're at and what else you could apply for all in one place. I think would make it easier for all of us to see ourselves. Not really relying on a person to call us or something like just that information is there for you to access whenever you really want to go check it out.

4. All paperwork and eligibility systems should remove language about "fraud" and other terms that unnecessarily promote stigmas about receiving aid. Instead, language should come from an asset-based perspective and communicate an intent to support and uplift parents.

I think there's a symbolic sort of move that would be helpful. Which is removing some of the very prominent language about fraud and perjury from a lot of the documentation that's in CalWORKs. Frankly, I think it's racist and it puts a lot of pressure on parents that are not going to... I think it's unnecessary and I think it's a small symbolic change but I think it's something we should consider within the rules.

The Waiting List

Another main concern expressed by parents in the 2019 BRC report was the waiting list and the extensive amount of time parents often remain on the waiting list. While the waiting list is not explicitly discussed in the CDSS transition plan, CDSS recognizes that it is something that should be included in post-transition planning, as it is a primary area of



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concern for families. Specifically, parents described the following challenges and proposed recommendations regarding the child care waiting list.

Key Themes

The waiting list process is confusing and lacks transparency:

Parents that shared their experience of being on the waiting list explained that the overall process was challenging. Parents did not know their status on the waiting list or for how much longer they might be on the waiting list. As result, parents felt that they got lost in the system and were left without support.

I've been on the subsidies waitlist for four years and I have no idea of what that means in a sense. Based on the work that I've been doing here with Parent Voices in the last year, I've learned a lot but that's just because I've been in this space. And that's when I learned about what [rank] that I was in. That's how I learned how the [rank] that I'm in works. But there is no information for me to do that. And when I do call and when I have called to get information, they can't tell me anything of where it is or where it's at or anything. And so, it would be really nice to either have updated information on where the situation is, or what my status is as a parent.

Parents are forced to stay on the waiting list for unreasonable amounts of time:

Parents shared that families can be on the waiting list for ten or more years and that ten years is an unreasonable amount of time for parents to not receive support with child care. They do not think that a ten year waiting time should ever happen and therefore reflects flaws in the current waiting list system.

The current waiting list system reinforces problems with income eligibility:

Parents described that one of the main problems with the waiting list is that families must lower their income to become eligible for CalWORKs. In other words, parents feel forced to keep their income lower than what they could potentially make or else they might not receive a needed child care subsidy and get pushed further down the waiting list or kicked off completely.

Parent Recommendations

1. The waiting list system should provide consistent updates to parents regarding their status on the waiting list.



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2. Furthermore, this communication should be coupled with information about additional resources that parents can access while they are on the waiting list, such as CalFRESH (known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP), WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), or other public assistance programs for which they qualify.
3. The income eligibility requirements should be revised so that parents do not get removed from the waiting list when their income level exceeds the threshold but they still are in need of a child care subsidy.
4. Each month, a set number of families from the waiting list should be provided with a child care subsidy so that more parents on the waiting list can access subsidies more quickly.

Each month go to that list and pull off those parents that are on a long-term waiting list that way they can trickle in. Because no matter what, somebody always has a need and they get moved down and they keep moving down and don't ever make the list. But if we had a system that allowed the agencies to go in and pull at least 10 families off a month, 10, 20, whatever, 30 families off of a month of the long-term list, that way they can trickle in and we won't have the four-year waiting list. We won't have people on the waiting list for 10 years that really need the child care. That's a part of servicing the whole family.

Facility Expansion

The transition plan also stated that “CCDSS will explore existing fund options and coordinate in partnership with LPCs [Local Planning Councils] to create data-informed plans and establish technical assistance capacity to aid in facility expansion,” (25).

Furthermore, the transition plan states that CCDSS will support facilities expansion in underserved communities, recognizing the need for equitable access to child care.

Parents agreed with the need to support facility expansion in underserved communities and shared the following comments and recommendations underscoring the need for more child care facilities.



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Key Themes

There are not enough child care facilities in underserved neighborhoods:

Parents shared that facilities in residential neighborhoods are typically located in high-income areas and are not accessible to most families. Some parents believe that in many cases, private providers are reluctant to open facilities in lower income areas.

Furthermore, parents shared that increasing facility availability in communities of color is critical for supporting racial equity.

Facilities are expensive because they are based in residential areas where the average family income is around \$103,000 a year—to pay for the care of two children is around \$30,000. That is equivalent to one semester at a University. That is very expensive. So, the zone where I live, where the population earns between \$30,000–\$60,000, cannot afford child care at those private facilities. And those facilities don't open child care centers in this zone because it's not a profitable business. Because no one will pay for those prices. So, then the question is, who can open those child care facilities?

There is a lack of information around parents' needs with child care facilities:

Too often, child care facilities are built without considering where parents need care and the type of care that parents need (e.g., non-traditional hours). As a result, parents have to travel outside of their neighborhood and have limited access to a child care facility that meets their needs.

Providers often do not accept parents with child care subsidies:

Parents shared that their child care options are further limited because many providers will not accept child care subsidies due to the delays in payment and other challenges with receiving payments from the State. Thus, expanding facilities into new neighborhoods may not be helpful unless it becomes easier for providers to accept parents with subsidies.

Parent Recommendations

1. City and local developers should allocate resources for provider facility expansion and involve companies (e.g., Google and Apple) with funding child care facilities.



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2. Ensure that new facilities have sufficient open and outdoor spaces. The pandemic highlighted the importance of children being able to play outside to support their development.
3. Parents should be surveyed about their child care needs to help inform facility expansion.
4. To help streamline the distance parents need to travel each day, parents suggested expanding or building child care programs in neighborhoods near schools.
5. Consider co-locating child care facilities with major workplace centers so parents can easily get to their children, if needed.

I think we should also look at where parents are working. Because when I was looking for my child care, I wanted to find somewhere that was closer to my job. Because if anything happened and I needed to get to my son, it would be easier if it was closer to my work than he was to my home because it would have took me longer to get back home than it would have been from him to be closer to my job. So, I would think that if you're going to be looking at child care providers, it may be... we have all of these companies and things like that, that maybe you can company, or you could go in partnership with some of these places, especially places that are county businesses or something like that and provide child care centers at the workplace.

6. Child care facilities should also be located near transit centers so parents can drop off their children as part of their commute to work.
7. Improve the process for paying child care providers who accept subsidies so that parents have more options when trying to find a facility.

Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care

The CCDSS transition plan also recognizes that equitable pay is needed for FFN care. The BRC reports highlighted that often times, family, friend, or neighbor care is the best option for families; however, current payment structures have created challenges for families for accessing family, friend, and neighbor care. CDSS hopes to create family, friend, and neighbor care policies that are more supportive for parents. Parents offered the following comments and recommendations regarding the need for and improvements to family, friend and neighbor care.



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Key Themes

For many parents, family, friend, and neighbor care is the most desirable child care option.

Parents described that families often choose FFN care for the following reasons: trust, cultural needs, language needs, and variable hours. Therefore, many parents rely on other adults or family members for care, but often times they cannot access state-supported compensation for the caregiver.

And I know that's a lot of situations where there are family members that help us parents at the beginning. Because trusting just anyone with our babies is not the easiest thing to do. And so, until we do find that person, if we can rely on... and then of course in some situations like mine, where my mom was like, "I don't want to charge you for taking care of my grand baby," or "you're my daughter," things like that. So, it's always become kind of a crazy type of situation when you have to deal with families and money and things like that. But if this was a service that I could have probably provided my mom with, she probably would have been able to help me a little bit longer because she ended up having to stop so she could go back to work.

Given the lack of facilities in many neighborhoods, FFN care also fills a child care availability gap.

As highlighted in the previous section, parents feel that there are not enough child care facilities, particularly in underserved areas. Building from this, parents shared that until California achieves the long-term goal of facilities expansion, families must be able to easily access FFN care.

Parent Recommendations

1. The FFN system needs resources and incentives to support families, friends, and neighbors in their efforts to provide care.
2. Pay exempt providers more than \$2–\$3 per hour to support equitable access to FFN care.

I feel very strongly about FFN care because I usually care for my kids because they're little. Like people have said, we can't trust anybody with our kids. I feel we definitely need to revamp the pay structure for the FFN care because that's what a lot of our families are using.



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3. Parents should have more information about the Alternative Payment Program to support paying for FFN care.

Parent Reflections on the Benefits from the CDSS Transition

In addition to the specific policy areas highlighted throughout this summary, parents commented more generally on the current challenges with the child care system and the benefits of the CDSS transition for addressing those challenges.

Key Themes

Parents have many cost of living demands that compete with being able to pay for child care.

Parents shared that it is common for families to choose between paying for rent, gas, or child care. As a result, parents suggested that child care should be available for everyone, regardless of their income.

And here in Silicon Valley, families pay around \$1800–\$2000 in rent. And their average income is \$40,000–\$50,000. And so that means that families have to choose between paying for rent, groceries, bills, car gasoline or paying for child care services. That is the drama that we live in this city. So, there is no use to optimize [child care quality] if a large population of the children are eliminated from participating.

Misaligned standards across programs prevent families from being able to uplift themselves.

For example, parents cannot receive unemployment benefits and go to school full time. Often times, parents are told to get a better job. However, getting a better job requires more education, but parents cannot pursue full-time education and receive unemployment supports. The Employment Development Department should be factored into this process.

I actually am working, in school online, and I have my four kids that have school online right now. Thankfully after spring break, they'll be going back to school a couple of days of the week. But still, I mean, it's hard. And especially like with CalWORKs with their contracts, my schooling hours don't count for them. Even when I was in school on campus, it doesn't count because it's not on their contract. So, if I have child care, they don't cover those hours that they're in there... So, I think they need to broaden the things that they cover when it comes to schooling.



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Even if they don't cover it, still cover those hours for child care because at least we're doing something to better ourselves to be better for our children.

CDSS needs a plan to ensure that equity, justice, and the whole family is being served by the transition and its training of case managers.

Parents expressed deep concern about families who fall through the cracks and highlighted that families are coming to programs and trusting that they are receiving all the information they need, which is sometimes incomplete. Furthermore, parents shared that they have experienced bias and a lack of compassion among some case managers. Thus, parents recommended that case managers have a standard set of information that is given to every family.

What happens is that you have some case managers who might look at that parent a little differently. If that parent comes in in pajamas. If that parent comes in looking a certain way, the case manager looks at that parent little negative perhaps. We don't know that. So how are we going to make sure that the parent is given all the information. Perhaps there is a required form that each agency or contractor is to give each parent that has everything that they need to know that's available to them. No parents should be left behind or left out of any information. But the problem is that this is what happens.

Public Comments

At the conclusion of the parent discussion, the meeting opened to public comment. Additional parents, as well as providers and other community members, affirmed the key themes presented in this summary. These public comments also reinforced the importance of listening to parents and incorporating their feedback to help create a working child care system.

I want to thank you guys all for this opportunity... It's appreciated by the parents. And I just hope that through this meeting, you guys take into consideration everything that these parents have said because we have spoken out and used our voices for change. So, thank you.