

**Palm Beach County’s Children’s Services Council,
Early Learning Coalition and Healthy Beginnings Coalition**

*****Background and Talking Points*****

SUPPORT AN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM OF CARE

1. Establish an Advisory Council on Early Childhood –Support Florida’s application to the federal government for an Advisory Council on Early Childhood. Assure Florida’s Advisory Council on Early Childhood will represent and integrate all state and local early childhood systems

Background: Florida is in the process of applying for **Early Childhood Advisory Councils** The Head Start reauthorization requires governors to designate or establish an advisory council to improve the quality, availability and coordination of services for children from birth to school entry. The act designates certain membership of the council but may include representatives deemed relevant by the Governor who must also designate an individual to coordinate the activities of the council.

Florida is currently in the process of developing an application for its advisory council. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding for Head Start includes \$100,000,000 for State Advisory Councils which will **“lead the development or enhancement of a high-quality, comprehensive system of early childhood development and care that ensures statewide coordination and collaboration among the wide range of early childhood programs in the state including child care, Head Start, IDEA, preschool and infants and families programs and prekindergarten programs and services”** (Administration for Children and Families, ACF).

According to the ACF, “the councils play a key role in planning a better coordinated system, facilitating working relationships among essential partners and moving toward integrated delivery of services to young children and families.” The application deadline is August 1, 2010. The federal share of the cost of activities shall be 30% and the state share is 70%, which may be met by cash or in-kind contributions. It has been estimated that Florida could receive \$4 million for the advisory council and related activities.

2. Fully Fund Access to Quality Early Care and Education for All Eligible Children

Early Care and Education System Refinement- Support the development of a coordinated statewide professional development system. Support the use of evidence based curriculums, pre-and post-tests, and universal screenings and assessments in all early childhood programs. Require background checks for all child care employees prior to employment. Position Florida to address all of the components identified in proposed early learning challenge grants. Authorize AWI as the responsible state level entity for early care and education.

Background: The state and Early Learning Coalitions have been working to develop a system of early care and education that promotes quality by recognizing professional development and other elements of quality programs. Seven counties have implemented Quality Improvement Systems to recognize and reward quality in child care settings.

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Proposed **Early Learning Challenge Grants** would make available \$1 billion a year over 8 years in competitive grants that would challenge states to build a comprehensive, high-quality early learning system for children birth to 5 that includes: Early learning standards reform, evidence-based program quality standards, enhanced program review and monitoring of program quality; comprehensive professional development, a coordinated system for facilitating screenings for health, disabilities or mental health, improved support to parents, a process for assessing children's school readiness and using data to improve child health outcomes. Funds are available for renewable quality pathways grants and development grants, which are not renewable.

The **Plan of Action for Coordination of Child Screening in Florida** is a proposed implementation plan for the child screening recommendations adopted by the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet in March 2009. The plan recognizes the variety of state agencies and partner organizations that are involved in child screening and offers a range of options for meeting the goals of the Cabinet. It is intended as a mechanism to track progress in coordinating child screening across Florida.

Objective 1: Create a statewide protocol for child screening and assessment for use across all state programs and service areas

Objective 3: Coordinate and maximize child screening awareness and outreach

Objective 4: Expand use, supports, knowledge and skills relative to child screening by health care providers

Objective 5: Expand use, supports, knowledge, and skills relative to child screening by early care and education practitioners

Objective 6: Expand use, supports, knowledge, and skills relative to child screening by child welfare and juvenile justice practitioners

Objective 7: Review state policies and practices and develop a vision and strategic plan for full funding and coordination of child screening, assessment, and follow-up

Support the use of curricula that has proven outcomes in early childhood programs.

Background: There are no curriculum requirements for child care programs. Each center can use whatever programming they choose. An evaluation of curricula used in early childhood programs has identified a list of curricula which has been demonstrated effective in helping children be ready for school in the areas of literacy and language, mathematics and behavior.

- *DLM Early Childhood Express* (Integrated) supplemented with *Open Court Reading Pre-K* (Literacy/Language).
- If a Math component is desired, we recommend *Pre-K Math* supplemented with *DLM early Childhood Express Math software* (Math).
- If a behavior management curriculum is desired, we recommend the *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies Pre-K* program.

Require background checks for all child care employees prior to employment.

Background: A recent examination of background checks for child care workers identified a problem in workers hired and working with children prior to getting the results of the background checks. In addition, exemptions for those with felonies were made. Legislation (SB 428) has been proposed (by Senator Rich) to address these issues.

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Authorize AWI as the responsible state level entity for early childhood.**

Background: Currently early childhood programs are governed by the Department of Education, the Agency for Workforce Innovation and the Department of Children and Families. As a result, program administration and oversight and accountability may be confusing or duplicative. Governance and administration of Florida's early learning system should be consolidated under the Agency for Workforce Innovation Office of Early Learning to streamline the system.

Quality Child Care – Fund quality childcare for children from working poor families. **This program includes federal funds.**

Background: Stimulus dollars prevented cuts and boosted funding for child care for working poor families. These dollars will fade out over the next two years while the need will continue; even with the stimulus funding **5923** remain on the waiting list for child care.

In addition, based on a request to agencies to address a 10% budget reduction, current proposed cuts by AWI to subsidized child care care include: **\$55.6 million impacting low income working families.** This is on top of a **budget shortfall of \$37 million** due to the use of stimulus funds to replace the budget shortfall from non recurring funds the previous year.

Pre-kindergarten -- Fund a quality pre-kindergarten program for 4-year olds.

Background: Due to the use of stimulus funds (\$38 million to replace the budget shortfall from non recurring revenue used the previous year and the deficits from 2008/10 and 2009/10 (\$17.8 million), **the PreK program is facing a total shortfall of \$55 million** just to maintain services. This does not account for the anticipated growth in the program estimated at \$22 million.

Based on a request to agencies to address a 10% budget reduction, current proposed cuts by AWI to the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program reduces the school year base student allocation from \$2,575 to \$1942 (\$633 reduction). It is anticipated that some providers will dropout of the program due to the reduction in reimbursement. The program must track program characteristics, demographics, and progress; use evidenced based curriculum; and be adequately funded to reach a measure of quality to help children be ready for school.

Early Steps - Fund critical early intervention for young children ages birth to three. **This program includes matching federal funds.**

Background: The Early Steps program was a recipient of stimulus funding which will disappear in 2011/12. In addition, the funding for the program was supported by non recurring funding in 2009/10. Continued funding is necessary for this early intervention program. Families may wait when they seek services for young children with a physical, developmental or other delay which has come to their attention, or to the attention of a child care worker or other provider. This could

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include a hearing delay, speech problem, autism or other delay which, at this critical time in a child's development, can have a serious consequence. Early intervention services can make a significant impact. Provide funding for timely assessments for developmental, physical or other delays families have identified with their young child age birth to three, reduce caseloads that are excessive, as well as screen and serve children who have a substantiated child abuse and neglect report. This program includes federal matching funds that could be lost if state funds are reduced.
