May 1, 2019

Hon. Holly Mitchell, Chair
Senate Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

Hon. Phil Ting, Chair
Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: Budget Request for Improvements to the Stage 1 Child Care Program

Dear Chairpersons Mitchell and Ting:

The above organizations are pleased to support the “Strong Start for CalWORKs Families“ budget request, which gives families entering the CalWORKs program the stable child care they need to get ahead and stay ahead. This request streamlines Stage 1 eligibility rules so that families have continuous, stable Stage 1 child care, minimizing costly and harmful disruptions for children, parents, employers, and child care providers. Over the last few years, we have made significant progress in addressing poverty and promoting equity through the budget process. The “Strong Start for CalWORKs Families” budget request is the next step in advancing economic
security for families struggling to make ends meet, and a strong start for all children, particularly children of color. This budget request would adopt the recommendations for Stage 1 child care contained in the Draft Report of the Blue Ribbon ECE Commission.

Stable child care is critical to strengthen parents’ ability to work, improve their prospects in the job market, and increase their earning potential. Continuity of care creates the stable conditions children need for healthy development and preparing them for lifelong success, inside and outside of the classroom.

The lack of initial, stable child care holds families back and threatens their ability to fully benefit from the safety net supports of the CalWORKs program. Current law is supposed to give families affordable child care as they work or participate in welfare-to-work activities, however many families entering CalWORKs are not getting the Stage 1 child care that they need. Parents are often unaware that they even qualify for child care and the burdensome process of obtaining a child care authorization is full of unnecessary red tape. For families who do get a Stage 1 child care authorization, it is usually short-term, sporadic, and frequently disrupted, leaving them nowhere to turn. Moreover, when families do not have safe, stable child care for their children, this often leads to being sanctioned, resulting in benefit reductions that drive families into deep poverty and homelessness.

The “Strong Start for CalWORKs Families” budget request seeks to fulfill the promise made when the CalWORKS program was created 20 years ago, that families would have affordable child care to keep their children safe and learning, and that families would experience no break in child care services as they transitioned between the three CalWORKS child care stages. By providing the same 12 month eligibility used in all other subsidized child care programs, and using existing technology to ensure seamless transfers, this budget request gives children living in poverty in California a strong start.

When children can thrive and families can work and provide for their needs, California grows stronger immediately and in the future. For these reasons, our organizations urge you to support the Strong Start for CalWORKs Families budget request to streamline Stage 1 child care eligibility rules so that all families enrolled in CalWORKs are afforded the reliable, continuous child care necessary to improve their family’s success and end the cycle of poverty.

Sincerely,