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August 14, 2020

Giannina Perez  
Office of Governor Gavin Newsom  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Sarah Neville-Morgan  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Kris Perry  
California Health and Human Services  
Agency  
1600 9th Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Kim Johnson  
California Department of Social Services  
744 P Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Quality Improvement in California

Dear Early Childhood Champions:

In 2017, staff and parent leaders from Parent Voices, the CA Child Care Resource & Referral Network, and the Child Care Law Center formed a group to begin examining CA's subsidized child care system and the racist, sexist, classist inequities within it. The group was called *Coloring Outside the Lines* and it planted the seeds in all of us to do better; to stop being afraid of calling out inequities when we see them and to hold ECE organizations and their staff accountable. What is new is that we've finally reached another Racial Reckoning in our nation and the Master Plan gives us an opportunity to take bold and decisive action.

Just over a month ago, Keisha Nzewi uttered a few words on a national webinar that brought on deep introspection among those who genuinely care about and work towards the improvement of our child care system: **QRIS is racist**. Though shocking to a few, this idea is not new. The overwhelming response has been that Keisha put into words, then said out loud, what many have felt for far too long. QRIS, though good in its intentions, has caused much harm since its inception, should be dismantled as a racist system and rebuilt as an anti-racist support for *all* child care providers, no matter the setting. It should be noted that Keisha was speaking of QRIS as a whole, not specifically about our own QCC. The following questions, analysis and requests were developed and answered in collaboration between California Child Care Resource & Referral Network and Parent Voices staff:

### **What motivated its creation?**

QRIS was created as a consumer education tool so parents have more information about the child care programs they are choosing from, and as a way to direct higher subsidy reimbursements to “higher quality” programs.

### **Who designs QRIS?**

Typically, the system has been designed by highly educated people, mostly women, and mostly white women. Those who have the greatest influence over QRIS, do not reflect the field that tries to work within the system. It was designed with child care centers in mind, resulting in trying to fit a round peg in a square whole when applying it to home based providers. This is evident when looking at the tools used in the system, which are dogmatic and eurocentric.

### **Who benefits from QRIS?**

While many providers have undoubtedly benefited from the system, whether in increased training and education, and perhaps pay, the real winners are those who implement the system. For instance:

- Teachstone (CLASS)
- Brooks Publishing Company (ASQ)
- WestE
- Pinwheel and other QRIS management systems

***These companies have a financial interest in keeping QRIS as is.***

QRIS research is ongoing, keeping many institutional pockets lined while producing more unanswered questions. Local First 5 agencies determine who is worthy of receiving quality funds. In fact, [the majority of Quality funding in California goes towards QRIS](#), much of it controlled by First 5. Additionally, QRIS was a way for R&Rs to earn more money during the Great Recession, perpetuating the inequity of pay between degreed coaches (more often white women) and R&R staff without degrees who still support provider quality (most often BIPOC women). Coaches are paid exponentially better than the teachers and Family Child Care providers that are being assessed, also furthering the inequities/racism that exists.

### **Who does QRIS leave out or overburden?**

Exempt providers, providers, parents, R&R trainers who are most representative of the providers they serve, children and families are harmed the most. For instance:

- QRIS was designed without the people it was meant to support. It was something “done to them, not with them;”

- Traditional requirements and supports for center based program staff are not necessarily the most effective for FFN/Exempt providers
- There are few points of access to the field for home-based caregivers, especially FFN/Exempt, unless they go through an R&R, yet their funding has not been substantial or sustained for the level of support needed and provided across communities using evidence-informed practices
- Power and gatekeeping lies with the coaches, often pushing providers out of the field;
- QRIS dismisses parents' expertise on what is quality to them;
- The further away a child care professional is from children, the more they are paid, leaving the mostly BIPOC workforce undervalued and underpaid;
- Education is more often a measure of how well a provider speaks and understands English and not about the skills, or knowledge, or experience they bring.

While California has yet to link quality to reimbursements, much can be learned from the Low Income Child Care Subsidies Distribution in the State of Mississippi [memorandum](#), from The Mississippi Advisory Committee, to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights:

- Quality Star rating system is progressive, so a center may meet a number of high quality indicators, however if staff does not hold the prescribed professional credentials, or costly structural center upgrades are required, they can't achieve the higher rating and subsequent reimbursement incentives
- Providers who accept or rely on vouchers to support facility operations are predominantly "operated by black women, staffed by black teachers, and located in low-income black communities, and serve black children"
- Rates are 60% below MSs market rate, so providers can't afford to make necessary improvements to earn higher ratings
- RAND Corporation: **QRIS does not necessarily capture differences in program quality that are predictive of gains in key developmental domains**
- NWLC Karen Schulman: some directors believe that the classroom environment standards do not place enough emphasis in teacher-child interaction...while paying attention to maybe other things on a checklist that may not reflect the actual...very important aspects of the quality of care.
- So: the state's promotion of child care centers with higher QRIS ratings to parents may unfairly harm primarily Black owned and operated centers that cannot afford the required upgrades
- FY15 data: 17% of facilities owned or operated by providers of color held a score of 3 or better, compared to 28% of white owned/operated.
- "There is racial bias on the part of the center visitors--we don't know how the standards are weighted" (National Equity Project quote from a provider)

Until a new Quality Improvement System is developed, led by the providers who will benefit from the new system, the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network requests the Master Plan include the following actions:

1. An acknowledgement and authentic apology for past and present harms caused by the inherently racist QI system;
2. Make amends by providing meaningful supports and resources to Black, Indigenous, Latinx, APIA, immigrant, or monolingual caregivers and teachers in every setting who have been harmed by the QI system;
3. Provide access to opportunities determined by those who have been most vulnerable to harm for healing and building resilience.

Numbers 2 and 3 should likely be a standing part of any new QI system for some time to come. While we have not laid out what a new Quality Improvement System should look like, we would like to reiterate that it must include and be led by child care providers, who actually care for children-not administrators, not coaches, not ECE educators-but providers who are in the classrooms of child care centers, and in their own homes caring for children. It should also include parent leadership- quality is in the eye of the parent. **Not another dime should go towards quality until an equity analysis is done on our state's quality spending, and every provider, in every setting, is paid what they are worth.**

Finally, for further context, we recommend the following reading:

[The Howard Colored Orphan Asylum: New York's First Black-Run Orphanage](#)

[The History of Women's Work and Wages and How it Has Created Success For Us All](#)

[Black women's labor market history reveals deep-seated race and gender discrimination](#)

[Mandarin-speaking nanny revolution grips America](#)

[The Historical Roots of American Domestic Worker Organizing Run Deep](#)

[For California Child Care Workers, Inequality Is Baked Into The System](#)

[Nannies and housecleaners have some of the hardest, least secure jobs in the nation. Now they're organizing to change that.](#)

[LATINA NANNIES / ANGLO FAMILIES : The INTIMATE EXPERIMENT : What Happens When Two Cultures Meet at the Playpen and the Cradle?](#)

In Solidarity,

Keisha Nzewi, Director of Public Policy  
California Child Care Resource & Referral Network

Mary Ignatius, Statewide Organizer  
Parent Voices CA

Kim Kruckle, Executive Director  
Child Care Law Center