

Chaffee County Economic Development Corporation

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Public Policy Committee Pillar Position Statement

Date: August, 2022

Issue: Childcare and Early Childhood Education

Background:

Today's children are tomorrow's workforce. And, more pointedly, today's parents are today's workforce. According to EPIC (Executives Partnering to Invest in Children) a nonprofit business advocacy organization in Colorado, the Centennial State is among the least affordable places for child care, and supply does not meet current demand creating what are oftentimes called "childcare deserts." And yet when we look to the future, and our workforce needs, we know based on data published by EPIC:

- An investment in early child care and education can produce an \$8.60 return for each \$1 invested.
- Investments in early child care and education have substantial impact on educational success, as well as health, poverty, workforce development and the economy.
- Children participating in quality child care and education are more likely to stay away from teen pregnancy, drugs and criminal activity.
- Parents – the current workforce – are more productive when they are not concerned about their children during the work day.

According to the Chaffee County Childcare Initiative (CCCI), the lack of child care in our communities has been a long standing challenge for residents, which directly impacts employers. There are a number of established childcare centers, and in-home childcare providers, but they are minimally meeting the needs of families. Most of these providers have "waitlists" that exceed two years. According to the Colorado State Demographer, Chaffee County is home to approximately 200 children under the age of one. However, the County only has 10 licensed child care slots to serve these infants. As Chaffee County continues to attract a younger and more diverse demographic this issue will grow.

Data collected by CCCI states that 65 percent of Buena Vista parents and 73 percent from Salida reported lack of childcare is causing them to consider "quitting their jobs or moving from the area" and 64 percent of parents report lack of childcare makes it "difficult for them to get and keep employment."

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CCCI is a relatively new non-profit focused on creating one licensed childcare option in Poncha Springs. According to the organization's masterplan, it seeks to help initiate more options throughout our area to better serve our youngest community members, their families, our economy, and the community as a whole.

Any previous action/intersection with issue for Chaffee County EDC:

Chaffee County EDC collaborates with the Chaffee County Early Childhood Council.

Position:

The EDC encourages public policies and investment strategies that increase access to childcare options and early childhood education for our workforce and residents, including the efforts of private, nonprofit, and philanthropic partners. At the local and county level, such actions often include code changes, incentive policies, tax credits, and public-private partnerships, particularly in support of childcare and early childhood education businesses. At the State level this could include engaging with advocacy organizations leading efforts to ensure better policies and additional capital investment opportunities that could be leveraged in Chaffee County.

Rationale for Position:

Chaffee County is a childcare desert. We lack adequate childcare services for our current population, impacting the ability of individuals to fully engage in the economy and in turn limiting economic growth. Supporting and partnering to advance strategies, policies and investments that provide additional access to early childhood education and childcare facilities are good business decisions that have both immediate workforce benefits for those currently employed in Chaffee County, as well as a long term economic benefit for our future workforce.