



Early Childhood Policy Council

Meeting Agenda, Attendance, and Summary Report

Thursday, February 26, 2026
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Physical Meeting:
WestEd, 5th floor, Capitol Room, 1000 G Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

Agenda

Welcome and Introduction

- Welcome
- Review of agenda

Immigration Enforcement: Model Policies to Protect Safe Spaces

- Presentation by the Office of the Attorney General
- Council discussion and advice on model policies

Council Budget Priorities Letter

- Presentation by subcommittee
- Council discussion of draft letter
- Possible Council endorsement
- Determine subcommittee for May Revise letter

Council Process and Topics That Align with Legislation

- Overview of Assembly Bill 563 provisions and Council process
- Council questions and discussion
- Determine subcommittees
- Invite suggested priority topics

General Public Comment

Attendance:

Council Members: Andrea Fernandez Mendoza, Claire Ramsey, Diana Ramos, Donna Sneeringer, Karla Pleitez Howell, Kay Ruhstaller, Mary Ignatius, Natali Gaxiola, Ristyn Woolley, Robin Layton, Shanna Birkholz-Vasquez, Socorro Martin, Sonia Jaramillo, Stephen Propheter, Tonia McMillian

Guest Speaker: Christina Riehl, California Office of the Attorney General

Summary Report:

Welcome and Introduction:

Karin Bloomer, meeting facilitator for the Early Childhood Policy Council (ECPC), opened the first meeting of 2026. Full welcoming remarks are recorded on pages 3–5 of the [ECPC February 26 meeting transcript](#).

Membership transition and new member introductions

Claire Ramsey, Council Chair and Chief Deputy Director of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) explained that the Council was established in 2020 with maximum six-terms years, so its first members' terms are beginning to expire. Ramsey thanked outgoing Council member Janet Zamudio for her service. She then welcomed Zamudio's replacement as appointed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Shanna Birkholz-Vasquez, and one of the Governor's newly appointed members, Ristyn Woolley.

Birkholz-Vasquez introduced herself as Associate Director of the Early Education Division at the California Department of Education (CDE). She shared her experience in mixed delivery and universal pre-kindergarten (UPK) implementation, having previously served as Administrator of the UPK Implementation and Support Office. Birkholz-Vasquez emphasized her commitment to equitable access to high-quality early learning and expressed enthusiasm for contributing to council work.

Woolley, then, introduced herself as Director of the California Head Start State Collaboration Office, housed within the CDSS Child Care and Development Division. Woolley brings over 26 years of experience across early childhood roles including teacher, education manager, Head Start grant implementation, and state policy work at both the CDE and CDSS. Woolley highlighted her expertise in Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) implementation and passion for research. She explained that her Council participation is grounded in the Head Start Act's collaboration mandate and described her office's role in coordinating Head Start services with broader systems (education, health, dental/vision, nutrition, mental health).

Ramsey announced the ECPC webpage now includes links on how to apply for Council appointments through the Governor, Legislature, and Superintendent of Public Instruction. She thanked Council member Mary Ignatius for proposing this addition to support equitable access to service opportunities before moving into the agenda topics.

Immigration Enforcement: Model Policies to Protect Safe Spaces:

The Council welcomed guest speaker **Christina Riehl**, Deputy Attorney General in the Civil Rights Enforcement Section of the Office of the Attorney General (AG's Office). Riehl presented on the efforts being undertaken by the AG's Office to create model policies for child daycare and California State Preschool Programs (CSPP), as stipulated in AB 495. Riehl summarized key provisions of the bill relevant to early childhood settings:

- Limits on collecting citizenship/immigration information: Licensed child care facilities and license-exempt CSPP facilities (and their employees) are prohibited from collecting information or documents about children's or families' citizenship or immigration status, unless required by law to administer a state or federally supported education program.
- Reporting requirements: Licensed child care facilities must report any requests for information or access to facilities for immigration enforcement purposes to the CDSS and the AG's Office. License-exempt CSPP facilities may submit reports to the AG's Office, but it is not required.
- Emergency contact requirements: If a child's parent/authorized representative is unavailable, the facility must first exhaust parental instructions related to the child's care in the child's emergency contact information.
- Model policies timeline: The AG's Office must publish model policies by April 1. CSPP programs must adopt them by July 1 and licensed child daycare facility and license-exempt CSPP facilities shall ensure parents or authorized representatives of children in care are aware of the model policies. Facilities that have existing policies must revise their materials to be consistent with the model policies.
- Caregiver authorization affidavit changes: AB 495 broadened the definition of "relative" for caregiver authorization affidavits and made other related amendments, including broadening the definition of "authorized care" to include immunizations, physical exams, and school-conducted medical exams.
- School-site access constraints: Amendments to Education Code 234.7 restrict local educational agencies from allowing voluntary access to non-public school areas for immigration enforcement without appropriate judicial authority.

Riehl described AB 495's consultation requirements. She noted that meetings with providers and agencies began in December and consulting with the Council on the model policies is also specifically required.

Council discussion and advice on model policies

Riehl opened the floor to the Council to share their thoughts and feedback. The full text of Council discussion on model policies to protect safe spaces is on pages 8–17 of the [ECPC February 26 transcript](#). The following themes emerged from the discussion:

- Scope and applicability: The model policies apply to all CDSS-licensed child care settings, both child care centers and family child care homes.
- State vs. federal information collection: Providers need clear guidance to resolve conflicting requirements and avoid unnecessary collection of sensitive identifiers.
- Federal- and blended-funding programs: Mixed-funding programs, such as Head Start and CSPP, need practical direction to stay aligned with federal rules and California law while protecting families.
- Urgency and real-time needs: Providers want immediate support before April 1 and clearer communication on what the CDSS and CDE are doing to notify and prepare programs.
- Operational protocols for encounters: Programs need training for responding to access requests and nearby enforcement activity (for example, training on creating appropriate signage and step-by-step response procedures).
- Messaging to families: Providers need ready-to-use, legally sound scripts, forms, and templates that inform families without escalating fear, especially in smaller programs. There is a desire for consistent messaging across the field.
- Values-based framing: Guidance should explicitly affirm that educators and child care providers are not “immigrant police” and clarify what is required vs. voluntary.
- Documentation and rules for opening doors: Providers request clear, legal direction regarding when they are required to open doors.
- Data and records protection: Programs need clarity, in plain language, on when records can or must be shared and the limits of confidentiality and disclosure.
- Planning for detention, deportation, or unavailability: Programs need protocols and resources for authorized pickup, caregiver affidavits, trauma supports, and family stabilization while avoiding forced reliance on law enforcement or Child Protective Services.
- Attendance-based reimbursement stability: Providers want clarity and flexibility around the use of excused absence options so enforcement-related absences do

not cause lost eligibility or financial penalties. Families should not lose their child care space due to this type of absence, yet providers need coverage.

- Workforce impacts: The Council flagged the need to address long-term workforce stress and trauma linked to enforcement fears. It was shared that while much of the focus is placed on children and families, providers and educators need supports as well.
- Guidance usability and distribution: Guidance should combine legal accuracy with quick tools and be distributed through local networks plus state channels, such as AG press releases or Council dissemination.

Council Budget Priorities Letter:

As in previous years, the Council shares their priorities in a letter to the Governor and Legislature as the State Budget for the next fiscal year—State Fiscal year 2026-27—is developed. Council member **Andrea Fernandez Mendoza** presented the draft budget letter to the Council for consideration. Fernandez Mendoza provided an overview of the rationale and structure of the letter, acknowledging the difficult fiscal landscape the state is facing, including multi-year deficits and wildfire recovery costs, and the need to protect young children amid shifting federal policies.

Fernandez Mendoza explained the letter both acknowledged historic investments and emphasized ongoing needs, framing the Council’s budget priorities around four pillars:

- Rate reform and fair compensation, including (1) funding rate reform that reflects the true cost of care and economic realities, (2) providing ongoing support to attract and retain a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce, and (3) addressing rapid loss of centers and family child care homes.
- The promise of increased access, including (1) fully funding the promised 200,000 child care spaces plus the additional 44,000 slots and (2) backfilling Prop 64 revenue so no existing spaces are lost.
- Fiscal stability and resilience, including (1) protecting providers from fiscal shocks and enrollment fluctuations and (2) advancing enrollment-based models, including an 85 percent contract earning floor to stabilize operations and workforce planning.
- Health and housing security, including (1) protecting medical access through continuous coverage policies and maintaining housing grants for unhoused families, (2) recognizing disproportionate impacts on women and children of color, and (3) protecting equitable access for Black, Tribal, and immigrant families; families with low-income; and children with disabilities.

Fernandez Mendoza framed the letter as a message that California must remain a “sanctuary of stability” for children and families.

Council discussion of draft letter

Ramsey opened the floor to the Council to provide feedback with some Council members suggesting edits and additions to the draft letter. The full text of Council discussion on the draft budget priorities letter is on pages 20–25 of the [ECPC February 26 transcript](#). The following recommendations emerged from the discussion:

- Use the budget letter as an advocacy tool, with clearer “true cost of care” specifics. Members supported the letter and requested that the CDSS share the true cost figure so advocates are able to answer legislative questions.
- Strengthen the letter’s attention to immigrant families and safety-net impacts. Proposed edits added emphasis on immigrant-family well-being, legal services, and federal policy threats, including HR1-related impacts.
- Connect budget advocacy to ECPC’s broader accountability work. Suggested language would link the letter to upcoming ECPC annual report assessments and proposals to show continuity.
- Reinforce messaging around access and stability for child care spaces and health coverage. Edits aimed to emphasize maintaining or expanding spaces; the consequences of inaction, such as disenrollment or loss of access; and inclusion of “young children, families, and early educators” in health-access language.
- Request to keep the language of the policy-actionable and avoid overpromising and made adjustments to reframe commitments, such as “protecting the safety and well-being...” rather than “ensuring”.
- Prioritize brevity and readability for impact. Members suggested that a two-page letter would be more likely to be read in full and agreed that minor edits and formatting adjustments could meet this goal.

Council endorsement of budget letter

Karin Bloomer conducted a roll-call vote, reading each council member’s name aloud:

- Aye (9): **Natali Gaxiola; Karla Pleitez Howell; Sonia Jaramillo; Robin Layton; Socorro Martin; Andrea Fernandez Mendoza; Tonia McMillian; Kay Ruhstaller; Donna Sneeringer**
- Abstain (5): **Shanna Birkholz-Vasquez; Stephen Propheter; Diana Ramos; Claire Ramsey; Ristyn Woolley**
- No (0): None
- Absent (4): **Miren Algorri; Lissete Frausto; Mary Ann Hansen; Mary Ignatius**

As the budget letter was endorsed by roll-call vote, the Council also discussed preparing another letter to respond to the upcoming May Revise budget proposal for the 2026-27 State Budget.

Subcommittee for May Revise letter

The Council agreed to establish a subcommittee to plan a May Revise budget letter. Fernandez Mendoza volunteered to serve on this subcommittee, and other Council members were given additional time to consider volunteering.

Moving on from presentations, the Council then discussed their operations for 2026. Specifically, recently passed legislation—AB 563—amended the California Welfare and Institutions Code that governs the Council and discussion was needed on how to align the work of the Council in 2026 to these changes.

Council Process and Topics That Align with Legislation:

Overview of Assembly Bill 563 provisions and Council process

Claire Ramsey explained that AB 563 now adds that the Council shall develop policy proposals and budget requests related to facility needs, workforce needs, and family access. This creates a second opportunity for the Council to submit recommendations to the Legislature.

Ramsey proposed a process to produce a set of recommendations by the November 2026 meeting, supported by input from subcommittees and advisory committees. She suggested establishing up to three two-member subcommittees, to abide by state open meeting requirements. Each subcommittee would take on one area of concern—facility needs, workforce needs, or family access—to identify specific issues, define the gap, draft recommendations, and bring iterative updates to each quarterly meeting, with the goal of a final recommendation package for a vote in November.

Ramsey emphasized this would be a new process for the Council, and implementation would be evaluated after the first year.

Council questions and discussion

Ramsey opened the floor to the Council. The full text of Council discussion on the overview of Assembly Bill 563 is on pages 31–42 of the [ECPC February 26 transcript](#). The following themes emerged from the discussion:

- Legislative pathway and purpose of AB 563 recommendations: Members clarified that AB 563 recommendations have the potential to be adopted as legislation.
- Avoiding duplication of prior work: Concerns were raised about the need to ensure this new process adds value rather than repeating existing work. Participants repeatedly stressed that the process should produce actionable,

meaningful recommendations, not additional discussion that does not lead to change.

- Keeping “true cost of care” central: Multiple comments emphasized that funding the true cost of care should remain the Council’s highest priority. Members expressed concern that new recommendations could distract from or delay rate reform progress.
- Federal policy impacts and systems resilience: Council members called out the need to address rapid federal policy changes affecting immigrant families and program stability. A proposal was made to center this work either in family access or a dedicated subcommittee.
- Clarity on advisory committees vs. council subcommittees: Confusion surfaced about the role of the newly proposed subcommittees and the existing advisory committees. The following clarification was provided: Council subcommittees are made up of two Council members who retain full participation in Council meetings, while advisory committees are separately convened and the Council would seek their input on topics through their respective Chairs.
- Flexibility within AB 563 topic categories: AB 563 names facility needs, workforce needs, and family access as target topics. However, members discussed being creative in connecting recommendations to those categories, especially when issues cut across multiple areas, as with immigration.
- Participation constraints for providers: Provider voices were identified as essential, and the group acknowledged a real barrier - limited time for teachers and providers to participate during the day in extra committees while working directly with children.

Determine subcommittees

The Council agreed to use the already-endorsed budget priorities letter as the starting point for developing AB 563 recommendations, rather than creating a new, unrelated set of priorities. **Bloomer** and **Ramsey** discussed whether finalizing subcommittees should occur during the meeting or wait until there was an opportunity to coordinate with advisory committee. **Bloomer** recommended establishing at least two subcommittees during the meeting, with the understanding that adjustments could be made later.

With general agreement that a subcommittee structure made sense if it stayed anchored in existing budget priorities, **Bloomer** proposed two groups:

- Workforce subcommittee: Andrea Fernandez Mendoza and Natali Gaxiola
- Family Access and Federal Policy subcommittee: Karla Pleitez Howell and Sonia Jaramillo.

The proposed members offered tentative agreement but asked for clearer expectations and support as the work moved forward. The Council also confirmed that advisory committee chairs would be engaged as part of the process.

Suggested priority topics

In discussing what should be integrated in the development of AB 563 recommendations, members did not lay out a new comprehensive list beyond the budget letter, but emphasized several cross-cutting priorities:

- centering true cost of care and rate reform as the foundational solution
- addressing immigration enforcement impacts, including safe-space implementation supports and access to legal and mental health resources
- responding to federal policy changes affecting family access and overall system resilience.
- addressing practical implementation constraints, including barriers that limit practitioners' and teachers' participation in governance and committee work

General Public Comment:

Before the meeting adjourned, **Bloomer** invited verbal comment from the public on any of the items shared during the meeting. The text of public comments is on pages 53—60 of the [ECPC February 26 transcript](#). Selected comments included the following:

- “It is very important to name that clearly from a values' perspective... our child care providers should not be immigrant police.”
- “Providers need protection from fiscal shocks... moving towards enrollment-based funding models, specifically an 85 percent contract earning floor, will help ensure operational stability regardless of attendance and enrollment fluctuations.”
- “If we use something simple like Maslow hierarchy before we can focus on quality improvement, workforce development, alignment or innovation, we have to survive when enrollment drops because new seats are added nearby with without coordination, providers fall back into survival mode and when a whole sector is pushed into survival mode, it cannot meaningfully engage in system building. We are talking about fiscal stability and resilience minutes, but expansion without alignment is stabilize the very providers who have been serving communities for decades case. So I want to ask honest question. If the mixed delivery system is our state stated goal, why does implementation feel like zero-sum growth? Is the long-term direction one where family child care continues shrinking until it disappears? Because from the provider perspective, that is what it feels like. The damage is not theoretical, sites are closing.”

- “Good morning everyone...I have a personal request and then some policy suggestions that I want to bring up. Well, in particular I wanted to share first a little bit about our school. We have been open for 50 years in the city and in 2024 our founder and director, she passed away and with her our license went as well. And just in September we renegotiated the lease for the space. We've started hiring a world-class director. We've been paying our insurance, paying rent, submitted everything to CDSS but haven't heard anything. We've been very proactive in reaching out. We've called, we've emailed, we've visited our regional site in San Bruno and we've heard that things are still in process. It's been 118 days with no [licensing] update beyond 'still in process.' We've spent about \$95,000 and are burning \$15,000 a month on rent, the director's salary, and insurance - with no income or opening date. Families keep asking when we'll open, but we can't commit while our lease and payroll have started and the license for 75 children still hasn't come through.”
- “As family child care home (FCCH) providers, we are eager to serve on committees and contribute our frontline expertise to the community. However, the '80/20 rule' - which requires licensees to be physically present for 80 percent of our operating hours - is a significant structural barrier to our involvement. This regulation doesn't just limit our personal lives; it systematically excludes us from the very decision-making tables where the future of childcare is decided...”
- “From the family child care provider perspective: we are seeing real harm from UPK implementation. Sites are closing steadily. Yes, there are projections, but expansion has not been aligned with existing community supply. Without mandated collaboration and transparent local data, growth becomes destabilizing. Providers operate in survival mode before we can even talk about quality (Maslow). If mixed delivery is the goal, we need adjustment mechanisms - because right now, the damage is already happening.”

Adjourn

Claire Ramsey thanked public commenters and councilmembers for their participation.

Meeting adjourned.