



## **Parent Advisory Committee Meeting Summary: November 3, 2021**

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**Attendees:** Mary Ignatius, Deborah Corley-Marzett, Yenni Rivera, Patrick MacFarlane, Lissete Frausto, Patricia Lozano, Cheryl (Cherie) Schroeder

### **1. Welcome and Introductions (Chair Mary Ignatius)**

- In her opening remarks, Chair Mary Ignatius welcomed members to the last Early Childhood Policy Council (ECPC) Parent Advisory Committee meeting of the year. Chair Ignatius described the essential role the Committee plays in representing the voices of parents of young children across the state. She thanked Committee members for their commitment to supporting California's children.
- Chair Ignatius gave an overview of the meeting agenda and topic of focus: infants and toddlers. The meeting included members of the Parent Voices Transition Parent Advisory Committee who contributed to the discussion and reported on their focus group findings related to infants and toddlers.

### **2. California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Parent Advisory Committee Focus Group Findings**

The CDSS Parent Advisory Committee shared findings from their focus group on the topic of infants and toddlers. The three main themes from these discussions included trust, compassion, and the importance of having clear and helpful information for parents when making child care-related decisions.

### **3. Accessing Infant and Toddler Care**

- ECPC Parent Advisory Committee members shared their experiences on accessing infant and toddler programs. Committee members echoed the importance of the focus group findings and emphasized the need for more mental health supports for children and families.
- ECPC Parent Advisory Committee members stressed the importance of accessing programs that meet the needs of all children and the strong need for compassionate county workers. Members also highlighted the critical need for better paid family leave and additional high-quality foster care resources for families.

A high-level, thematic summary of Committee discussion and public comments received during the meeting can be found in the following pages.



## **ECPC Parent Advisory Committee**

### **Summary of Comments and Questions by Parent Advisory Committee Members and the Public**

This summary highlights the themes from the ECPC Parent Advisory Committee meeting held on November 3, 2021. The focus of this meeting was infants and toddlers. During the meeting, representatives from the Parent Voices Transition Parent Advisory Committee presented information about the results from their recent focus groups with parents, and members of the ECPC Parent Advisory Committee shared their experiences in accessing infant and toddler care.

The ECPC Parent Advisory Committee is an advisory body to the Governor, Legislature, and Superintendent of Public Instruction on statewide early learning, care, and child development. It will provide recommendations on all aspects of the state's early childhood system, including support for the demographic, geographic, and economic diversity of the state's children and families and ways the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care and the Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) on Early Childhood Education's (ECE) final report can be updated and improved.

The following is a list of the major themes and topics from the meeting:

- Parent Voices presentation:
  - Three major themes of the work were discussed: trust, compassion, and complete information.
  - ECPC members also raised for discussion the additional topic of resources for parents to support mental health.
  - Public comments included discussion of the particular challenges encountered by migrant families and for programs serving these families.
- Parent Advisory Committee discussion:
  - The stories shared by Advisory Committee members covered a broad range of topics, including the following:
    - How to best support a child with a disability
    - Access to child care support for people who have experienced domestic abuse
    - Access to resources in the prenatal process
    - Equity in access to paid family leave
    - Considerations in selecting among child care options and priorities
    - Unique considerations for children in foster care
- Public comments included a discussion of issues related to transitional kindergarten (TK).



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### **Parent Voices Presentation**

**Three major themes of the work were discussed: trust, compassion, and complete information.**

#### **Trust**

- The theme of trust focused on the input from focus group participants that being able to trust those providing child care is essential in their choice of provider. For example, in one case, a Spanish-language parent noted that she chose Families, Friends and Neighbors (FFN) care because she could leave her child in her mom's care and not worry about safety or disruption due to unexpected changes in schedules, etc.
- An African American mother expressed her desire that her children be in the care of family members versus foster care, but was frustrated by the requirement that family members get foster care licenses.
- Finally, a Native American parent shared that given the history of abuses tribal community members have suffered in government education and care, there is inherent mistrust of any external providers of child care.

#### **Compassion**

- On the theme of compassion, one Cantonese-speaking parent expressed a need for compassion for recent immigrants who face particular hurdles in accessing child care and other benefits, especially including the ability to work, access to food stamps, and other resources.
  - A Spanish-speaking parent also noted that these challenges are particularly acute for undocumented immigrants.
- Also noted was input from a Black mother who expressed a desire for mental health support for parents, noting in particular that struggles with mental health are often held against parents first, rather than there being any support or services available.
- Finally, a Spanish-speaking parent noted the need for compassion for the severe challenges experienced by parents working in agriculture during COVID-19, including illness, death, and the lack of control these workers have in balancing accessing income versus maintaining safety for themselves and their families.

#### **Complete Information**

- The theme of complete information was also shared by many families, including one Cantonese-speaking parent who shared the challenges in accessing food stamps for non-English speakers due to a lack of resources and information available in their native language.



### **ECPC Parent Advisory Committee**

- A Black parent also shared that the decision by CDSS to take a child from their parent often is reached without giving the parent full information about what they could do to avoid this outcome; be it taking a class or accessing support for food/necessities or housing, oftentimes parents are not given a path to remedying the situation before action is taken.
- Finally, a Native American parent shared that communication with county welfare departments is problematic and support from community-based organizations is necessary to get needed information. This issue was echoed by a Native American parent who noted that accessing information about available resources—such as bus passes or transportation—is provided only if asked for, which requires individuals to be aware of it in the first place.

### **ECPC members also raised for discussion the additional topic of resources for parents to support mental health.**

- ECPC members raised the need for mental health support, including Rodrigo Sotelo who noted that increases in childhood mental health issues is a symptom of a lack of understanding and capacity among parents. He advocated for more support to parents in the form of educational sessions/classes.
- Another ECPC member, Lissette Fausto, discussed the trauma of her experiences with healthcare providers treating her son, her subsequent PTSD, and the lack of compassion she felt with respect to her resulting need for child care to leave space for her to manage her own mental health. Also discussed were challenges in accessing mental health services for her children and the importance of the services her children did receive.
- Finally, ECPC member Sereeta Reid expressed support for expanding mental health services to parents and children, noting that she had to cycle through several child care providers to find the support her family needed.

### **Public comments included discussion of the particular challenges encountered by migrant families and for programs serving these families.**

- One public comment voiced support for creating a “new environment where people aren’t treated as a number,” but rather as part of a community.
- Another comment noted the challenges faced by the families of migrant workers, including those related to language barriers and the need for CDSS to adhere to policies and procedures more consistently to ensure parents are not victimized.



## **ECPC Parent Advisory Committee**

### **Parent Advisory Committee Discussion**

**The stories shared by Advisory Committee members covered a broad range of topics, including the following:**

#### **How to best support a child with a disability**

- ECPC Parent Advisory Committee member Naima Facih shared her experiences as a parent of two children with specific needs, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and fine/gross motor skills therapy. She shared that while in some cases she could access the services her children needed, availability was inconsistent and sorting out how to access the resources was often burdensome.
- Based on her experiences, she shared a few lessons learned including (1) early evaluation of toddlers is critical because without a diagnosis accessing needed services is a major struggle; (2) socialization is critical and so early opportunities for toddlers with special needs to attend school are one way to support this; and (3) parents need support to ensure their child is not overwhelmed and to support their child's mental health.
- She closed by suggesting that the system as a whole focus on how to support children with special needs and their parents.

#### **Access to child care support for people who have experienced domestic abuse**

- Yenni Rivera, another ECPC Parent Advisory member, shared her story as someone who experienced domestic abuse. She explained that her ex-husband was abusive and described her path out of that situation. This included first leaving with her child but without access to her car or her savings. As a result, she sought assistance from social services, and encountered a case manager who was incentive and put barriers in her path to accessing support. She was fortunate to have another case manager help her get the process started, but she still experienced significant delays in being approved for and receiving child care subsidies despite her clear and urgent need.
- Given her experiences, she recommended first that county welfare workers and child care case workers receive training in empathy and sensitivity. She was lucky to have someone help her but noted that many mothers in that situation would have left or returned to the abuser.
- She also called for approval for child care subsidies to be expedited so parents do not need to wait 10 months (as she did) or even three months—especially survivors of domestic violence; she pointed out that survivors should always receive priority, not just during COVID-19.
- Finally, she noted the need for investments in infant and toddler care on par with preschool and TK because waiting to provide support until preschool may be too late for some families.



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### **Access to resources in the prenatal process**

ECPC Parent Advisory Committee member Patrick McFarlane shared the importance of access to prenatal care, especially including supporting employers to ensure that workers are able to access the flexibility required to go to doctor's appointments and classes, etc. Relatedly, he noted that the importance of being able to access parent education in the prenatal phase, especially including accessing information about program eligibility or paid family leave options.

### **Equity in access to paid family leave**

- Patrick also touched on access to paid family leave and told a personal story about not being able to take leave until six months because of job tenure requirements. So, despite a prolonged and difficult labor and delivery, he was only able to provide limited help to his wife in the first few very difficult weeks.
- Additionally, he noted the inconsistency in what proportion of wages one is able to recover while on parental leave. It is at the discretion of the employer whether to allow someone to apply sick leave to cover the portion of wages not covered by the state. In his case, his employer had a policy not allowing this and so he could not recover full wages. This adds a financial burden at a time when new expenses are being added. In addition, he shared another policy from his employer that disallowed taking paid leave until all vacation leave was used; which left him with no vacation after returning from leave.
- He noted that policies such as these are not consistently in place, and so some people do not encounter these barriers. He suggested that a minimum standard should be applied (at least to employers receiving government funds) to improve equity.

### **Considerations in selecting among child care options and priorities**

- Finally, Patrick shared his family's process for deciding on child care for their child. He noted that family child care was initially the best choice for them because of the trust they had in their family member and the flexibility it provided to he and his wife in terms of schedule, given that they were both working.
- He noted that there is a stigma about FFN care as being low quality. However, when he and his wife toured a center-based program (which is often thought of as the highest quality) they decided against it because of the number of children being cared for and the limitations on how attentive providers could be compared to one-on-one care provided by FFN care. On the other hand, the FFN provider they selected was flexible, and as a member of their community and same cultural background, they offered opportunities for their daughter to learn about her culture as well. In the end, he shared what mattered most was "what feels like family."



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### **Unique considerations for children in foster care**

- Lastly, Cherie Schroeder and Theresa Arias shared information and personal stories about young children in foster care. To start, Cherie went over some facts about children in foster care, including that infants are the fastest growing age group in the U.S. She noted that these children may be in foster care due to family mental health problems and a have high victimization rate due to their vulnerability. She noted that this can begin even before they are born through prenatal substance exposure or through child abuse, malnutrition, or other traumas, including removal from their family; these experiences can create toxic stress. Finally, she noted that even very young children can be negatively affected by the emotional trauma that some may think they will not remember or understand.
- Theresa, a foster parent or “resource parent,” then shared a personal story about her experience fostering. She began by sharing that very few, if any, daycare sites that provide reimbursement will accept children in foster care (and reimbursement is often delayed and only a portion of the cost), so resource parents often must pay large amounts out of pocket for child care. She added that many facilities lack staff with proper training to care for these children. She noted that the Care Bridge Program opened a lot of doors to people who would otherwise have not been able to be resource parents due to affordability. This program also coordinated across medical providers and child care providers, and the resources stayed with the child; so when the child returned home (which is always the goal) the subsidy and services remained.
- Finally, both Cherie and Theresa underscored the goal of foster care is reunification with the family and that using family members as resource parents is always the first choice. They also noted that efforts are being made to keep the birth parents involved as much as possible.

### **Public comments included a discussion of issues related to transitional kindergarten (TK).**

Public comment included a note about the disruption that can be caused by transitional kindergarten and the need for it to be part of a mixed-delivery system.