**HB 2456/SB 6351: Extending the Homeless Grace Period for Working Connections Child Care**

**Key Messages & Talking Points**

Strengths-based Messaging: Please keep the following in mind when crafting your message and assisting those directly affected by this issue in telling theirs.

* **Establish inherent strengths first:** Begin with the things that are most important to the person being discussed. Trauma/adversity can then be treated as an obstacle on the path to well-being and self-actualization, rather than a starting point.
* **Never let the trauma define the storyteller:** The individual who had the experience must make the decisions about what is shared and on what level. Focus less on the traumatic events and more on the storyteller’s resilience and experience. Avoid saying “homeless kids” or “homeless parents” when possible, and use “children experiencing homelessness” or “families living in homelessness”.
* **Give space for historical and social context:** Put a human face on statistics, and reflect on the systemic marginalization, racism, etc.

Proactive Messages:

**Continuity of care for kids:**

* Extending the grace period from to 12 months is a small change that would make a huge difference in maintaining nurturing environments for the kids that need it the most.
* Quality child care provides a safe, development-focused environment that is a proven protective factor against potential long-term impacts of trauma.
* Children of color are overrepresented in the population of children experiencing homelessness, and ensuring the have access to quality child care and supports is necessary to addressing the opportunity gap for kids of color and ensuring these kids are ready to succeed in kindergarten when they enter.
* Continuous access to a quality, caring early learning environment is the most upstream way to disrupt the cycles of homelessness and poverty. Infancy is the age at which a person in the US is most likely to enter a shelter or transitional housing, followed by ages one to five. The earlier and longer the duration of homelessness, the greater the toll it takes on a child’s health and development.

**Giving families needed time to resolve issues related to homelessness:**

* 12 months gives parents the time they need to search for housing, attend job interviews, resolve domestic violence safety concerns, and access support for health issues.
* The monthly cost of child care in WA is more than monthly tuition at the University of Washington. This bill can often be the factor that sends a family into financial crisis.
* Only having a four-month authorization places families at a competitive disadvantage when trying to find a child care provider to serve them in a highly competitive child care market.
* Families of color are disproportionately impacted by our region’s housing crisis, especially women, and black and native folks.

**The four-month window is *not* serving its intended purpose:**

* 49% of families lost eligibility for quality child care after the grace period ended.
* Of the 747 families approved for child care through HGP, only half remained eligibility for Working Connections Child Care
* 120 days is simply not enough time to find care:
  + 52% of families couldn’t find care during the four months, and were unable to use the Homeless Grace Period, according to Child Care Resources program data.
  + We have a shortage of child care across the entire system, and it is already quite difficult to find providers who are able to take subsidy.
  + This is especially difficult for families needing support with unique behavioral and health needs, care during nonstandard business hours, and access to transportation.

Reactive Messages:

**Access to child care helps families exit homelessness:**

* Child care is a crucial piece of the puzzle for people experiencing homelessness to enter the workforce. Most families are actively trying to find work, and do so within a year. This is not an incentive not to work, because you cannot eat child care.
* The state invests significantly in programs to end homelessness. In order to make those investments pay off, we need to ensure access to child care so that parents can work or pursue work and actively engage in services that will help them lift their families out of homelessness.

**Twelve months creates consistency and reduces bureaucracy:**

* A 12-month authorization is consistent with the current practice of authorizing 12 months of care for families who are eligible for Working Connections. This was a change the legislature made in 2016 based on research showing consistency was critical to building nurturing relationships with caregivers.
* A 12-month authorization would reduce bureaucratic barriers and red tape for families so that the kids this program was meant to served can access those services.
* Aligning the Homeless Grace Period with standard Working Connections practice reduces the administrative burden of implementing this program.