

earlymattersgreateraustin

March 8, 2021

City of Austin Economic Development Dept: Redevelopment Division & City Council Members;

Early Matters Greater Austin is an alliance of current and retired business professionals focused on the critical relationship between access to high-quality early education and our State's long-term economic success. Due to the insufficient supply of high quality child care in Austin, we ask that the City of Austin Redevelopment Division and City Council consider prioritizing proposals (for sites adding affordable housing units) that include the consideration of affordable high-quality child care.

We also encourage the City Council and Economic Development to review the RPP procurement processes to incorporate consideration, and weighting, for the creation of additional child care capacity when affordable housing units are intended.

The Redevelopment Division and City Council will soon be reviewing two re-development site proposals: St. John's and Crestview. Both are located in child care "deserts" – meaning demand for subsidized quality child care far outweighs supply.

The ability to rent or own physical space for high-quality child care is generally cost prohibitive in Austin. The State's child care subsidy reimbursement rate for quality-rated centers covers about 75% of the market-rate cost to provide that care. High rent reduces resources that could otherwise be allocated to increasing the quality of care, including providing a living wage for early childhood educators.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Austin/Travis County already had a critical shortage of high-quality affordable child care programs. The pandemic has exacerbated this shortage. From March 2020 to September 2020 alone, Travis County lost 14.8% of its total capacity of quality rated centers that serve children with low-income. We are deeply grateful to the City of Austin for critical and generous investments last year totaling \$6M in child care emergency relief. Without those funds, the amount of capacity lost would have been far greater.

Co-location of affordable high-quality child care and affordable housing – all within walking distance to public transportation – increases parents' participation in continuing education, workforce development programs, and the workforce. We believe that prioritizing proposals that incorporate facilities for affordable, high-quality child care programs not only aligns with the City's Strategic Outcomes in Economic Affordability, it also improves one of the Council's top 10 indicators, which is: "number and percentage of children enrolled in quality Early Childhood Education programs."

Thank you for your consideration and continued committed to helping families with young children thrive in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mark" and last name "Williams" clearly distinguishable.

Mark Williams, Chair
Early Matters Greater Austin