



HOLD FOR RELEASE DECEMBER 3, 2009

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STATE BUDGET CUTS TURN 10,000 CHILDREN AWAY FROM CHILD CARE

10,000 Arizona children are now on the “turn away” list for childcare subsidies. Since February, all eligible low income working families who applied for child care assistance have been turned away. The closing of the program to new applicants was a direct result of budget cuts to the Department of Economic Security adopted by the state legislature and the Governor in January. DES has sustained additional budget cuts in subsequent budget votes for the current fiscal year, including the most recent special session of the legislature.

DES calls it a waiting list, but no one from the list has received assistance yet. Dana Wolfe Naimark, President and CEO of Children’s Action Alliance, said “The amount of funding withheld from child care is mounting each day as working parents search for help. We call on Governor Brewer to show us her full year plan and let us know when the program will be open again.”

It’s hard to imagine 10,000 children, so picture 43 school buses filled with kids; imagine all the preschool kids in Coconino County; think of all the babies born this year in Apache, Cochise, Coconino, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Mohave, Navajo and Santa Cruz counties, combined. Each of these is 10,000 kids, and each is the same as the number of children who have nowhere safe and stable to go for childcare.

A 2003 survey of Arizona families who were turned away due to previous funding shortfalls showed that this kind of budget cut disrupts businesses and lowers family income. Nearly two out of three families (63%) were forced to make some change in their employment, such as cutting work hours or quitting their jobs. Said one parent of a three year old, “I had to quit my job. We’re struggling. I got an eviction notice and had my electricity shut off.”

Many families had to leave children home alone or in other unsafe situations – simply because they could not afford the higher price of child care. A working mother with children 10 and 8 years old said, “My boyfriend has been watching them, but he does not do a good job. I really need help with childcare.”

“Child care subsidies allow parents to be productive and reliable members of the workforce. Parents earning low incomes working in a wide variety of jobs such as office clerks, medical assistants, and hotel desk clerks use the childcare voucher to choose the child care that works best for their families,” said Naimark.

State budget cuts to child care raise child care costs dramatically to thousands of working parents at a time when they can least afford it. The consequences are a less stable workforce, dangerous situations for children, and job losses in child care centers.

Children’s Action Alliance is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of all of Arizona’s children and their families through research, policy development, media campaigns and advocacy. For more information, please visit the CAA website at www.azchildren.org.

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