

**PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF PROPOSED CUTS  
TO RI DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
STARTING RIGHT CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**As expressed by Ready to Learn Providence community partners:  
Families, family child-care providers, and child-care center directors**

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*Vision: All children in Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn.  
R2LP is a program of The Providence Plan*



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## **Executive Summary**

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP) is a citywide initiative with the vision that all children in Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn. Given this vision and the significant investments R2LP has made in early-care education since its inception in 2002, the organization believed it was important to fully understand the implications of the proposed cuts to child-care subsidies on the families, providers and centers within its community, and, indirectly, on the many R2LP programs that rely on their involvement.

The proposed Rhode Island state budget for the 2007/2008 fiscal year would cut eligibility for child-care subsidies through the RI Department of Human Services Starting Right Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). Current law allows families with up to 225% of the federal policy level to receive these subsidies. The proposed budget would restrict eligibility to families falling below 150% of poverty. (A family of three at 150% of the federal poverty guidelines makes \$24,900 a year compared to \$37,350 at 225%.)

According to February 2007 CCAP caseload data, restricting eligibility to 150% of the poverty level would eliminate the subsidies of more than 3,900 children statewide (40% of the number currently receiving them). Twenty-one percent (21%) of those affected would be infants and toddlers, 37% preschoolers, and 41% school-age children.

Many of the 190 parents, family-care providers and center directors who participated in this R2LP study work or live in the most distressed neighborhoods in Providence, making them likely, therefore, to be affected by the proposed cuts. R2LP gathered data from these participants through three different methods. One hundred and forty-seven (147) family-care providers (including 100 Spanish-speaking providers) completed a survey – 99 in writing and 48 by phone. Directors of 19 child-care centers were surveyed by phone. Twenty-four parents attended an English- or Spanish-speaking focus group. R2LP administered the surveys and held the focus groups between April 16 and May 2, 2007.

The purpose of the focus groups and surveys was to gather the perceptions of the people most likely to be affected by the proposed cuts. Providers and center directors were asked how they believed the cuts would affect their programs and how they thought the cuts would impact the children and families they serve. Parents were asked how they thought the cuts would affect their own lives as well as those of their children.

Although the participating groups approach these issues from different perspectives, their responses were remarkably similar. Nearly every participant believes the proposed cuts will have a profoundly negative impact on child-care programs, the well-being of the children, and the ability of parents to achieve a more financially secure life for themselves and their families.

Most center directors said they believe the cuts will lead to dramatically reduced enrollments, requiring them to lay off experienced staff – or even close their doors. Most parents, they said, are already struggling to pay a reduced fee and that without a subsidy, child care won't be a viable option. Family-care providers said much the same thing, with many predicting they will lose more than half of the

children they currently serve. “All these people work very hard to survive,” one provider noted. “They’d have no way to pay me even if they do want to,” said another.

A few directors said they would be able to fill their centers with children who can pay the full fee, but that would eliminate the socio-economic diversity that currently exists in their classrooms.

Members of all three groups believe that without affordable child care, working parents will have few options. Directors, providers and parents themselves predict that many will be forced to leave work and go on public assistance.

Said one mother: “It’s a setback. We’re single parents and we got a job. We’re doing the all-American thing, going to work every day. And now they’re trying to take the subsidies from us and we have to go backwards and go on welfare. I don’t think it’s right.”

Participants noted that other options for working parents are equally troubling. Many expressed concern that children will be placed in less expensive, unregulated care that won’t offer the same level of quality, socialization or safety. Others fear that children will be left home alone or in the care of slightly older siblings. “They won’t be able to come to school where they socialize, learn, grow and have opportunities they won’t get otherwise,” said one director. “Children staying home alone is a bomb waiting to explode,” warned a provider.

Several participants saw the proposed cuts as a social justice issue. “We’re working with families who don’t have a voice, and this will serve to silence them even more,” said one director. “It puts families more into a survival mode.”

“It makes a lot of people discouraged,” said a parent. “They say you have to get a job to get child care, so you do what you have to do to get a job, and now they’re saying they’re going to cut the child care. It brings them right back to where they started.”

School readiness is an issue that surfaced frequently among providers, directors and parents. Numerous studies, including the 40-year High/Scope Perry Preschool Study, make the case that high-quality early learning experiences set children up for success in school, work and life. “We won’t be able to help the children that need the most of our services,” said one director. “I can go [to my daughter’s center] any time and they’re...getting them prepared for the time they go to school,” noted a mother.

If they are forced either to leave work or pay the full fee for child care, many parents said their families will suffer a serious financial hardship. “I’m a single mom of three,” one participant explained. “I made it. I went to school. I bought a home. Never in my life did I think I’d have a home. But now that home is in jeopardy.” “It seems they want to keep us in poverty,” another parent said. “You can only be on welfare for five years and now they’re saying we’re going to cut the child care. What other options are there?”

“They have to make up their minds: Do they want people on welfare or going to work? I’d rather work,” insisted yet another mother.

Studies show that investing in early-care education has long-term economic implications as well. “On productivity grounds alone,” says the Nobel Prize winning economist James J. Heckman, “it appears to make sound business sense to invest in young children from disadvantaged environments. An accumulating body of evidence suggests that early childhood interventions are much more effective than remedies that attempt to compensate later in life for early neglect.”

“They think they’re just cutting the budget,” noted one mother. “They may not feel it now, but they eventually will. There will be a long-term effect.”

“In the end, the children will suffer,” said another. “And if the children suffer, then the community suffers.”

Ready to Learn Providence invites all members of the community to engage in the dialogue about the findings in this document and the extent to which these cuts could impact the ability of the R2LP community to realize its vision that all children in Providence enter school healthy and ready to learn.



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## Introduction

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP), a program of The Providence Plan, is a coalition of organizations and individuals who share the vision that all children in Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn. R2LP works toward this vision by investing in early education to enhance the educational experiences of young children in the city; creating social networks among its many partners; and conducting research on the needs of children, families and early-care educators in Providence.

Since 2002, R2LP has invested more than \$5.5 million in early-care education, much of it in the professional development of center-based and family-care providers. In August 2006, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings presented R2LP with two federal checks representing \$7 million in additional funding to expand our work and document the outcomes we achieve. Impressed with R2LP's model for building the capacity of early-care educators and providers, Secretary Spellings noted that "the eyes of the nation are on you" when she made the award.

Given its vision and the significant investment it has made in early-care education, R2LP believed it was important to fully understand the impact that proposed cuts to state-subsidized child care would have on the families, providers and centers within its community, and, indirectly, on the many R2LP programs that rely on their involvement.

The proposed Rhode Island state budget for the 2007/2008 fiscal year would cut eligibility for child-care subsidies through the DHS Starting Right Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). Current law allows families with up to 225% of the federal policy level to receive these subsidies. The proposed budget would restrict eligibility to families falling below 150% of poverty. (A family of three at 150% of the federal poverty guidelines makes \$24,900 a year compared to \$37,350 at 225%.)

According to February 2007 CCAP caseload data, restricting eligibility to 150% of the poverty level would eliminate the subsidies of more than 3,900 children statewide (40% of the number currently receiving them). Twenty-one percent (21%) of those affected would be infants and toddlers, 37% preschoolers, and 41% school-age children.

Nearly all of the 190 parents, family-care providers and center directors who participated in the R2LP study work or live in the most distressed neighborhoods in Providence, making them likely, therefore, to be affected by the proposed cuts. R2LP gathered data from these participants through three different methods. One hundred and forty-seven (147) family-care providers (including 100 Spanish-speaking providers) completed a survey; 99 in writing and 48 by phone. Directors of 19 child-care centers were surveyed by phone. Twenty-four parents attended an English-speaking or Spanish-speaking focus group. The surveys were administered and the focus groups were held between April 16 and May 2, 2007.

The purpose of the focus groups and surveys was to gather the perceptions of the people most likely to be affected by the proposed cuts. Providers and center directors were asked how they believed the cuts would affect their programs and how they thought the cuts would impact the children and families they serve. Parents were asked how they thought the cuts would affect their own lives as well as those of their children.

## Methods

Survey questions were developed by Ready to Learn Providence staff members and were based on a draft survey developed by a coalition of early childhood educators, advocates, and representatives from government, research, and community-based organizations<sup>1</sup>. Each of the questions was presented in open-ended “yes” or “no” format. This framework allowed for the most objective presentation of the question with ample room for providers to elaborate and provide details as they desired. R2LP specifically did not want to lead or bias responses by providing response categories. Surveys were translated into Spanish by bilingual staff members at R2LP. See Appendix B for survey instruments.

### Survey Responses

Survey respondents were selected based on their participation in any of R2LP’s primary professional development opportunities or grant initiatives.<sup>2</sup> R2LP’s community database, which tracks participation of community members in R2LP-sponsored activities, served as the basis for the contact list.

In total, 147 family child-care providers and 19 child-care center directors responded to the survey. These response rates represent 19% and 38% respectively of the Department of Children, Youth and Families certified and licensed child-care providers in Providence as of March 2007. Tables 1 and 2 detail responses from both groups.

**Table 1: Responses from Family Child-Care Providers (n=147)**

<i>Question</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>No Response</i>
1) Would the proposed cuts affect your business or your family?	141	2	3	1	0
2) Would the proposed cuts affect your assistant?	44	2	1	18	82 <sup>3</sup>
3) Would the proposed cuts affect the families and children that you serve?	136	4	2	0	5
4) If you believe the proposed cuts will impact your families, have you communicated with them about this issue?	111	24	5	2	5

**Table 2: Responses from Center Directors (n=19)**

<i>Question</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>No Response</i>
1) Would the proposed cuts affect your child care center?	19	0	0	0	0
2) Would the proposed cuts affect your agency as a whole?	16	0	1	2	0
3) Would the proposed cuts affect your staff?	19	0	0	0	0
4) Would the proposed cuts affect your families?	19	0	0	0	0
5) Would the proposed cuts affect the children in your care?	19	0	0	0	0
6) If you believe the proposed cuts will impact your families, have you communicated with them about this issue?	15	3	0	0	1

<sup>1</sup> The Advisory Committee on Child Care and Development at RI Department of Human Services

<sup>2</sup> *HeadsUp! Reading, Mind in the Making, English as a Second Language, CPR, and/or First Aid, AmeriCorps, Early Reading First, and the Early Childhood Educators Professional Development project.*

<sup>3</sup> According to March 2007 DCYF certification data, 60% of providers do not require an assistant. Additionally, the Spanish-language survey from R2LP inadvertently omitted question 2.

## **Focus Groups**

In addition to the center and family provider surveys, parent focus groups were designed to examine the experience and perceptions of parents whose children are participating in center-based and family-based child-care settings. Parents connected to R2LP partner sites participated in one of two focus groups held in both Spanish and English at the R2LP office on May 1, 2007. Twelve parents attended each group.

R2LP family engagement and professional development staff facilitated each focus group, while additional staff tape recorded and took notes throughout the sessions. The focus group sessions were later transcribed by R2LP staff, using context information from the notes taken during the sessions.

See Appendix B for Focus Group guiding questions.

## **Response Coding**

Survey responses and focus group transcripts were first analyzed by a broad committee of R2LP staff, with the help of an external consultant with specialized experience in the collection and analysis of qualitative data. A core team of three coders, including the external evaluation consultant and R2LP's data and evaluation staff, completed the analysis using the themes developed in the larger committee as a basis. Appendix C contains a full list of codes used in the analysis.

All analyses were conducted using Analysis Software for Word-Based Records (AnSWR), a free qualitative analysis software package developed and maintained by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<sup>4</sup>.

See Appendix A for a more complete discussion of the analysis and coding process.

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<sup>4</sup> Available for download at <http://www.cdc.gov/Hiv/SOFTWARE/answr.htm>.

## Responses from Family-Care Providers

Respondents were asked about how they thought the proposed cuts would impact the providers themselves; the families they serve; and the children in their programs. Figure 1 presents a quantitative summary of responses received from the 147 family child-care providers surveyed. The bars represent the numbers of times that an issue was referenced in a written response and coded to a particular category. Responses are charted consistent with the questions asked of respondents – the cuts’ perceived impacts on providers, families, and children – and a fourth category was added, “Impacts across groups,” which refers to concerns about the cuts that could not be attributed to one group only. For example, several respondents referred to the negative impacts the child-care cuts would have on the state and local economy.

The greatest number of responses referenced the financial impact that cuts would have on the providers (110 responses) and the families they serve (94 responses). Associated effects include parents working more or quitting their jobs (45 responses), risks to the provider’s own family with the loss of income (34 responses), and assistants being laid off (21 responses).

Perceived impacts on children were coded according to effects on the child’s social and academic development (15 responses), emotional well-being (16 responses) and risks to the child’s safety or health, such as if children were placed in lower quality settings and left home alone or with older siblings (24 responses).

### 1. Impact on providers

The providers who responded to the survey believe the proposed cuts would have a negative impact on them, their businesses, their livelihood and the well-being of their own families. Many, in fact, said the cuts could force them to close their programs. Those with larger businesses feared that cuts would force them to lay off assistants or reduce their wages. The quality of their services, many noted, would suffer. Many said their child-care businesses provided the sole source of income for their household.

Impact on enrollment      “The majority of my kids are state funded. I might lose most of them.”

“If this happens, I will be empty and I will have to close my day care.”

Impact on staff      “If I’m affected, [my assistant] is affected. First of all, she’ll lose her own child-care subsidy. And I won’t need help, so she won’t have a job.”

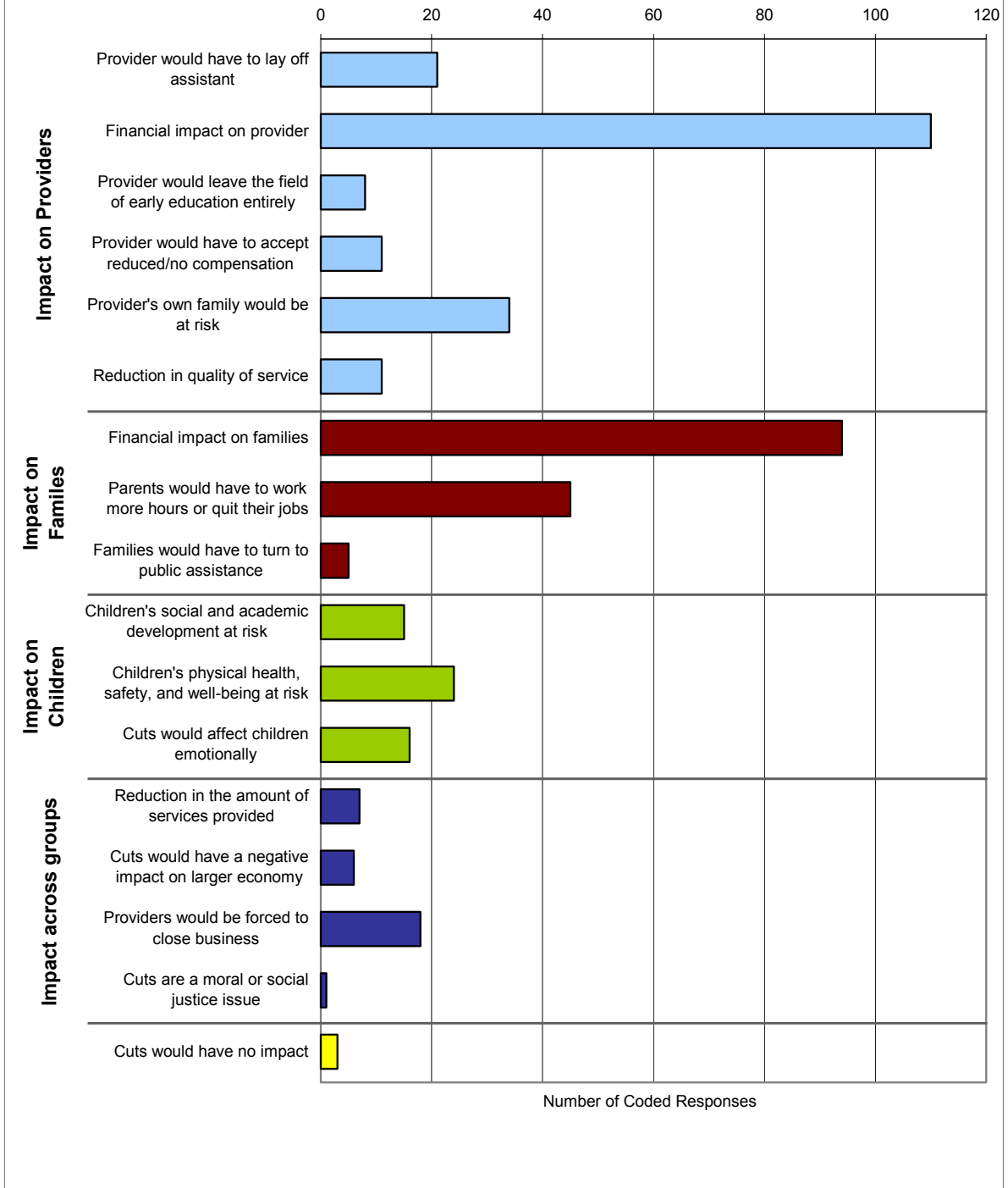
Impact on quality of services      “It will impact the quality of my program. I won’t be able to buy all of the materials that I need. Now, I buy art supplies, or when toys break or books rip, I can replace them... If these cuts go through, I can’t do that.”

“We would be obligated to make cuts to the materials used to teach the children what they need.”

Impact on a provider’s income and livelihood      “I am experiencing problems already economically, and if these cuts go through our situation would be worse.”

“I am the head of my household and I have a lot of economic responsibilities.”

**Figure 1: Perceived Impacts of Proposed Child Care Cuts as Expressed by Family Child-Care Providers**



See Appendix C for the descriptions of codes used in the analysis.

## 2. Perceived impact on the families that the providers serve

Survey respondents were asked if they believed the families they serve would be affected by the proposed subsidy cuts, and if so, how. Nearly all respondents feared that their families would be hurt financially by the cuts, and that many would no longer be able to afford child care. This, the providers said, would force parents to give up their jobs and go on welfare, work longer hours to pay for the child care, or seek less expensive child-care arrangements that may not provide the same level of quality or safety.

Finances of families

“All these people work very hard to survive.”

“They’d have no way to pay me even if they do want to.”

“[One mother’s] co-pay is \$40 and she only earns \$8 an hour. Already she has to decide between paying me and buying the medication that she needs.”

“Some of my children have [already] gotten their cases closed and their parents are not working because what they earn is not enough to pay for child care.”

Options of parents

“The kids lose out, the parents lose out. They’ll need to stay out of work and then what?”

“Their best bet will be to stay at home. A lot of parents only make minimum wage, which is only enough for food.”

“Some of my children have [already] gotten their cases closed and their parents are not working because what they earn is not enough to pay for child care.”

Social justice

“Hopefully they stop these cuts from happening because this is morally wrong.”

## 3. Perceived impact on the development, well-being and safety of the children

Family-care providers who responded to the survey expressed strong concerns for the well-being of the children they currently serve if the proposed subsidy cuts are enacted. Many respondents believe it would be emotionally wrenching for a child to leave a setting in which he or she has become comfortable and has developed important bonds. Some suggested that the children will suffer academically and socially, and will not be as ready for kindergarten as those who have participated in high-quality child care. Many also feared that children will be left at home alone or under the care of slightly older siblings, putting their safety at risk. Without child-care subsidies, some respondents noted, some parents won’t be able to work, and more children will be raised in poverty.

Emotional impact

“The first to suffer would be the children.”

“The children will be affected because they have been in my care for a long time.”

“These children have been under my care for such a long time that they have become like my own children.”

Social and academic development

“[Parents] will try to find someone to care for their children for less money and this might not be the best for the child.”

“The children are not going to socialize, they will be left alone at home, and the parents would have to take time out of work.”

Social and academic  
development impact

“The children will be alone without any adult supervision for longer time, and this will lead to bigger problems.”

“Providers give special care to the children, and they educate too.”

Safety of children

“Children staying home alone is a bomb waiting to explode.”

“The children will be alone without any adult supervision for longer time, and this will lead to bigger problems.”

## Responses from Directors of Child-Care Centers

In phone interviews with directors of 19 child-care centers in Providence, respondents were asked how the proposed cuts would impact their programs, agency and staff; the families they serve; and the children in their programs.

Figure 2 displays the number of times an issue was referred to in the open-ended responses from center directors and then coded to a particular category. Consistent with responses from family child-care providers, center directors most often referenced the financial impacts of proposed cuts to the centers (24 responses) and the families they serve (21 responses). Other oft-cited responses include changes to parents' work, such as quitting or working more hours (16 responses), employee lay-offs or changes in hours (12 responses), and overall effects to the agency (10 responses).

Perceived impacts to children were coded according to effects on the child's social and academic development (8 responses), emotional well-being (6 responses), and risks to the child's safety or health, such as if children were placed in lower quality settings and left home alone or with older siblings (12 responses).

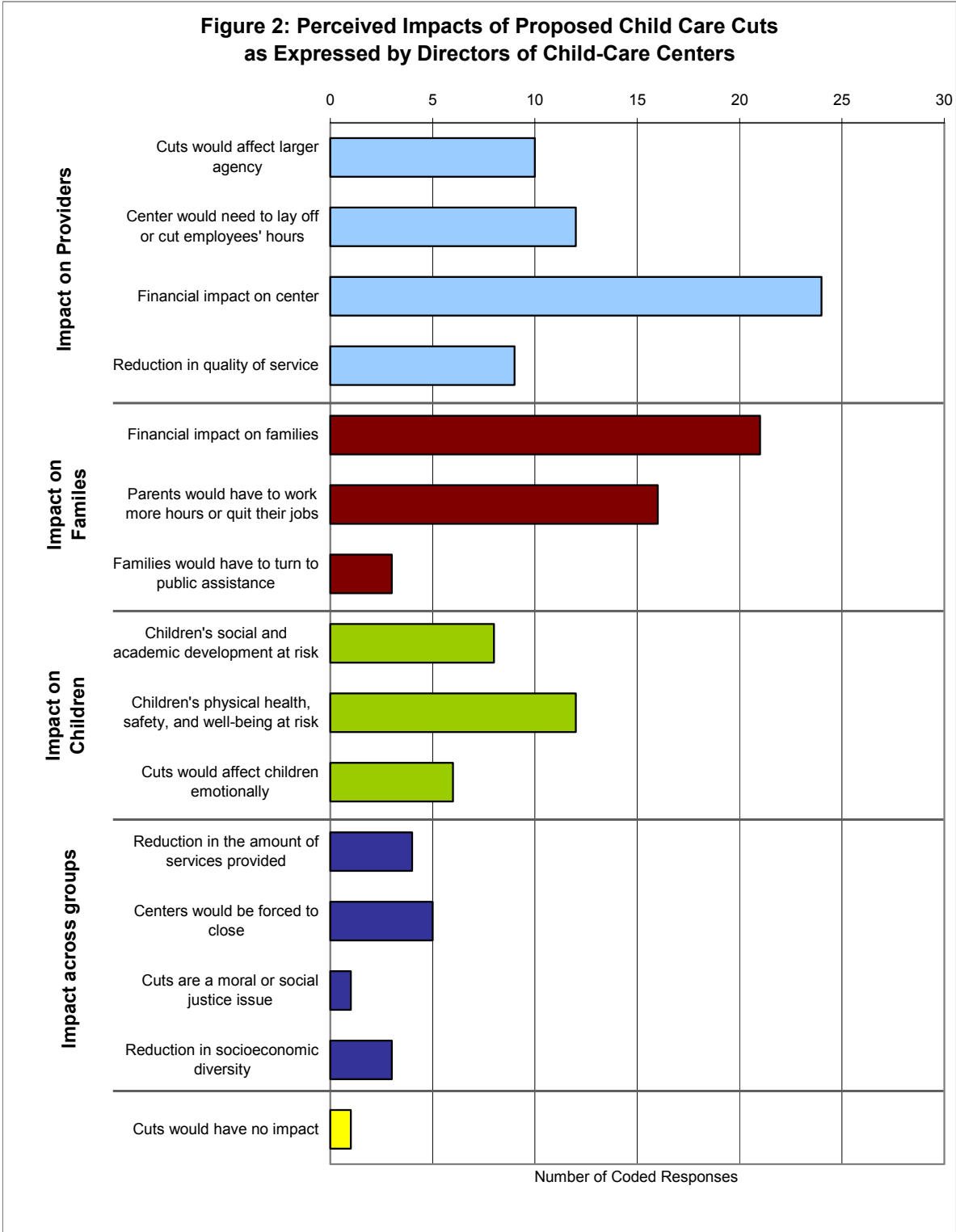
### 1. Impact on child-care center, agency as a whole, programming and staff.

All but one of the directors said the proposed cuts would have a negative, even devastating, financial impact on their centers and agencies. In cases where the center is part of a larger agency, most said there would be a negative impact on other services as well. Layoffs of staff would be almost inevitable, most said, and quality might decline due to limited resources. Many of the staff at child-care centers rely on subsidies for their own children; without those subsidies, many could no longer afford to work, according to some directors. A few directors said they could fill their centers with children who can pay the full fee, but that would eliminate the socio-economic diversity that currently exists in their classrooms.

Directors seemed acutely aware of the spiraling impact the proposed cuts would have on their centers, employees and programming. Below are some statements made by directors on these issues:

Impact on center	<p>“If the cuts go through, we may cease doing preschool care.”</p> <p>“If the subsidy cuts go through as currently written, it will affect 19% of my enrollment, which is 52 children and represents a 21% loss of revenue, or \$320,000 over the course of a year.”</p> <p>“Our program is not sustainable without the subsidies. We may close our doors.”</p>
Impact on staff	<p>“If we don't have a program, we don't need teachers.”</p> <p>“Staff will leave because without the child-care subsidy, they themselves can't afford to work.”</p> <p>“Bottom line is there will be an erosion in staff. I hate to think of it, but I'd have to lay staff off.”</p>
Impact on additional services offered by agency	<p>“Child-care programs pull in money so there will be a large ripple effect: our senior center and non-clinical caseworker department rely on us.”</p>
Impact on quality of services	<p>“We're taking away a high quality program from low-income families.”</p> <p>“[The proposed cut in subsidies] kills diversity.”</p>

**Figure 2: Perceived Impacts of Proposed Child Care Cuts as Expressed by Directors of Child-Care Centers**



See Appendix C for descriptions of codes used in the analysis.

## 2. Perceived impact on families that the centers currently serve

Directors frequently noted the profoundly negative impact that they believe the proposed cuts would have on the subsidized families that rely on their centers for child care. Directors said many of their parents are already struggling financially and will be unable to pay the full rate. Many of the parents, directors predicted, will either leave work and go on public assistance or will find other child-care arrangements that may not be safe or offer the same level of quality. One director called the proposed cuts “a social justice issue.”

Added stress on families	“Our parents are struggling to make ends meet.” “It puts families more into a survival mode.”
Limited options	“Some will choose day-care providers who are not licensed.” “Some will depend upon family members for care; some will quit their jobs and go on welfare.” “If parents don’t have a consistent and safe place for their children, they may need to leave work, or be asked to leave due to poor attendance, forcing these families back into the system for food stamps, FIP, etc.” “Some parents will rely on substandard care. They certainly won’t find quality programs for the money they can afford to pay.”
Social justice	“We’re working with families who don’t have a voice, and this will serve to silence them even more. This is a social justice issue for me. It puts families more into a survival mode. They’ll take their kids out because they have no choice, and they’ll figure out what they have to do to survive.”

## 3. Perceived impact on the children currently served.

Directors expressed strong concern for the well-being of the children their centers currently serve. They frequently cited issues surrounding safety as well as social, emotional and academic development.

Social and academic development	“They won’t be able to come to school where they socialize, learn, grow and have opportunities they won’t get otherwise.” “We won’t be able to help the children that need the most of our services.” “Right now they’re getting quality care. If these cuts are passed, children will be home alone or with relatives, which is not the best quality care.” “[The proposed cuts will result in a] loss of relationships with other kids.”
Safety of children	“The decrease in funding will cause parents to place children in another, cheaper situation, not always being consistent, stable or safe.” “We’re going to have more latch-key kids, and kids who are not old enough forced to take care of younger siblings. It’s bad for kids.” “Kids will be left home alone.”

## Parent Focus Groups

Twenty-four parents participated in one of two focus groups (one in Spanish and the other in English) to discuss the impact the proposed child-care cuts will have on their lives and on their children. Nearly all of the participants said they will be unable to pay the full cost of their current child-care arrangements without help from the state. Participants said that having safe, reliable, high-quality child care for their children is essential for their family's well-being – financially, logistically and emotionally. Without it, they insisted, they are less effective both as parents and as employees.

The discussion focused on how the proposed cuts would impact the financial status of the participants' families, the well-being of their children, and the health of the community.

### 1. Perceived impact on the family

Most parents in the group said the proposed cuts would change their current work status. Some said they might have to quit their jobs and go on welfare, postponing dreams of moving ahead financially and professionally. Others said they might increase their hours to cover child-care costs, but that, they noted, would mean less time with their children. Some said that without the subsidy, they would find it difficult, if not impossible, to pay their current mortgage or rent. Several talked of leaving the state in search of better paying jobs or less expensive child-care costs.

Change in job status or professional goals

“A lot of us rely on state help just so that we can go to work and take care of ourselves and our family.”

“You definitely need more education to get the better pay, but by cutting me off I'm not going to be able to prosper in my goals. It's going to be a setback for me.”

“We're going to have to go from working 40 hours a week to 60 hours a week just so we can pay our providers what they want us to pay...But then my daughter would be short-changed because I'd be working 60 hours.”

“I'm going to have to leave the state...If there's a cut in the program I'd be devastated.”

“You'd have to cut your hours, increase your hours, or not be able to work altogether.”

“It makes a lot of people discouraged. They say you have to get a job to get child care, so you do what you have to do to get a job, and now they're saying they're going to cut the child care. It brings them right back to where they started.”

“It's a setback. We're single parents and we got a job. We're doing the all-American thing, going to work every day. And now they're trying to take the subsidies from us and we have to go backwards and go on welfare. I don't think it's right.”

“You work hard, you achieve, you go to school, you're becoming someone, and they're ready to pull the rug right out.”

Financial threat to family

“I have lots of expenses. This is not a luxury; this is a necessity.”

“I'm a single mom of three. I made it. I went to school. I bought a home. Never in my life did I think I'd have a home. But now that home is in jeopardy.”

Financial threat to family	<p>“I’m going to have to leave the state...If there’s a cut in the program I’d be devastated.”</p> <p>“I have children of my own but I also work in a [child-care] center. [The cuts] will make it hard for us because then we won’t have a job to support <i>our</i> families... All the way around, it’s just one big losing circle.”</p> <p>“It seems they want to keep us in poverty... You can only be on welfare for five years and now they’re saying we’re going to cut the child care. What other options are there?”</p>
Quality of family life	<p>“Child care plays such a major role in being able to squeeze in things that make the home function.”</p> <p>“I get up at 6. I get one child on a bus, walk my other to school and then walk to work. At 2, on my break time, I have to pick up my son and daughter, get them to my mother’s house...and get back to work until 5:30. When I had child care I didn’t have to pick them up. It’s hard.”</p> <p>“The family is going to suffer because the stress that this produces is very intense.”</p> <p>“I work hard and sometimes I do not have enough time to be with my daughters. If I have to get another, what is going to happen?”</p>

**2. Perceived impact on their children.**

Parents in the group worried that their children will miss the socialization they currently enjoy in child care. Some fear that without the academic preparation found in child care, their children won’t be ready for kindergarten. Less expensive child-care arrangements, many said, will be inferior in terms of safety, personnel and resources. Some parents predicted that cases of abuse will increase with the financial stress created by the cuts, and when children are left with unlicensed caregivers. Television, some said, will be used as a babysitter, and others expressed concern for young children left with slightly older siblings. Several warned that unsupervised children are more apt to get into trouble with the law.

School readiness	<p>“If the child doesn’t get attention, then the TV becomes the parent.”</p> <p>“I can go [to my daughter’s center] any time and they’re doing something and getting them prepared for the time they go to school.”</p>
Socialization	<p>“I have two children and they’re now with my mother [for child care]. There are no other children around. They had tons of friends [at the child-care center] but I can’t afford to pay for two children to go [there].”</p> <p>“This may interfere with the social and emotional development of children because they would have to spend much time alone.”</p>
Children at risk	<p>“Are [the people making these cuts] going to look for an increase in abuse? Are they going to look for an increase of children who are 12 or 13 who are left home with younger siblings?”</p>

Children at risk

“In the end, the children will suffer. And if the children suffer, then the community suffers.”

“The quality of child care will be impacted and it will hinder a parent’s ability [to seek] facilities with higher standards.”

This cut will contribute to the increase in delinquency because we will be spending more time working and the kids will be spending more time home alone.”

“The stress around us affects our children.”

### 3. Perceived impact on the community

Many of the parents believe the community will ultimately suffer as a result of the proposed cuts. They predicted that parents will return to public assistance, poverty will increase, and unsupervised or poorly prepared children will fail to become productive citizens.

Community’s financial health

“They have to make up their minds: Do they want people on welfare or going to work? I’d rather work, but it is a setback.”

“Working with adults who haven’t attained their GED, [I’ve found that] a lot of times the barrier was the child care. The whole point of the child-care system is to help assist you so you can get more skills and attain enough income to get off the program.”

“The proposed cut] encourages poverty instead of pulling the community out of it.”

“It seems they want to keep us in poverty... You can only be on welfare for five years and now they’re saying we’re going to cut the child care. What other options are there?”

Long-term social implications

“They think they’re just cutting the budget. They may not feel it now, but they eventually will... There will be a long-term effect.”

“Parents [at the center where I work] are on a waiting list just to learn English. They’re so proud of their children in school and they’re doing wonderful things for themselves. Now they’re told, no, you can’t come to school; no, your kids can’t come to day care.”

“Working with adults who haven’t attained their GED, [I’ve found that] a lot of times the barrier was the child care. The whole point of the child-care system is to help assist you so you can get more skills and attain enough income to get off the program.”

“In the end, the children will suffer. And if the children suffer, then the community suffers.”

Social justice

“We have to get involved because they are discriminating against us.”

“They’re forgetting about the humanitarian part... We must vote for those people who fight for our rights.”

## Conclusion

With a vision that all children in the city of Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn, Ready to Learn Providence believes it has a responsibility to examine the impact of state policy on communities that are striving to change the outcomes of young children. Given the enormous investment R2LP makes in early-care education, we felt we had a particular need to explore the impact of proposed cuts to state-subsidized child care on the families, children and providers in our community, and, ultimately, on the many R2LP programs that rely on their involvement.

We are deeply thankful to the nearly 200 parents, family-care providers and center directors who made this study possible by sharing their thoughts on this subject through surveys and focus groups. Their responses give us a much clearer understanding of how the proposed cuts might impact families, children and early-care education in the most distressed neighborhoods of our city.

In an attempt to foster a dialogue on this issue, we will be distributing the results of this survey to the Ready to Learn Providence community, state and local officials, community leaders, and other organizations committed to advancing the well-being of children and families in Rhode Island. We invite you to call us at 401.490.9960 with any questions or concerns.

## **Appendix A – Survey Methods and Coding**



Survey questions were developed by Ready to Learn Providence staff members on April 12, 2007. Questions were based on a draft survey developed by a coalition of early childhood educators, child advocates, and representatives from government, research, and community-based organizations<sup>5</sup>. That survey, initially designed for parents, was repurposed to address the unique perspectives of both center directors and family child care providers and specifically to assess the perceived impacts of the proposed cuts to the child care subsidy program (CCAP). Each of the survey questions was presented in open-ended “yes” or “no” format. This framework allowed for the most objective presentation of the question with ample room for providers to elaborate and provide details as they desired. R2LP specifically did not want to lead or bias responses by providing response categories. Surveys were translated into Spanish by bilingual staff members at R2LP as were all responses received in Spanish, as well as the transcript from the Spanish focus group.

See Appendix A for a more complete discussion of the analysis and coding process. Survey instruments are included in Appendix B.

### **Survey Sample and Collection Procedure**

To best assess the perceived impact of the proposed cuts on the R2LP community, survey participants were selected based on their participation in any of R2LP’s primary professional development opportunities<sup>6</sup> or grant initiatives, including AmeriCorps outreach, Early Reading First, and the Early Childhood Educators Professional Development (ECEPD) project.

R2LP’s community database, which is designed to track participation of community members in R2LP-sponsored activities, served as the basis for the mailing and contact list. Many of the participants in R2LP’s activities are from R2LP’s eight target neighborhoods, where research indicates that investments are most needed and where they will have the greatest impact.

R2LP collected surveys by mail, by phone, and in person at the Rhode Island Early Childhood Conference (RIECC) held on April 28, 2007. A total of 324 hard copy surveys were mailed in both English and Spanish on April 19, with a stamped return envelope. Members of R2LP’s professional development staff conducted the phone surveys in both English and Spanish using a phone script to ensure unbiased presentation of the survey questions (See Appendix B).

#### Family Child Care Providers

In total, 147 family child care providers completed the survey. Forty-five (45) surveys were received via mail, an additional 48 family care providers were contacted by phone, and 54 providers completed the survey at the RIECC.

Of the 147 responses, 83 written responses were received in Spanish, 16 written responses were received in English, 33 phone surveys were conducted in Spanish, and 15 phone surveys were conducted in English. Spanish written responses were translated into English in their entirety by a bilingual staff member at R2LP prior to the analysis.

The 147 responses received represent 19% of the 774 family care providers certified by the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) as of March 2007.

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<sup>5</sup> The Advisory Committee on Child Care and Development at RI Department of Human Services

<sup>6</sup> *HeadsUp! Reading, Mind in the Making*, English as a Second Language, CPR, and/or First Aid

### Center Directors

Nineteen child care centers who are either existing Early Reading First or AmeriCorps partner sites or potential partners for R2LP's new ECEPD program were surveyed in English by phone. These 19 centers represent 40% of the 47 DCYF licensed providers in Providence that serve preschool-age children<sup>7</sup> (as of March 2007).

### Focus Group Participants

In addition to the center and family provider surveys, parent focus groups were designed to examine the experience and perceptions of parents whose children are participating in center-based and family-based child care settings. Parents connected to R2LP partner sites were invited to register for focus groups, which were held in both Spanish and English at the R2LP office on May 1, 2007. Twelve parents attended each group.

R2LP family engagement and professional development staff facilitated each focus group, while additional staff tape recorded and took notes throughout the sessions. The focus group sessions were later transcribed by R2LP staff, using context information from the notes taken during the sessions.

See Appendix B for Focus Group guiding questions.

### **Coding Procedures**

Survey responses and focus group transcripts were first analyzed by a broad committee of R2LP staff, with the help of an external consultant with specialized experience in the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Using an interactive process in which we identified themes as they emerged during reading, segments from each response group were initially divided into categories (codes) based on *a priori* concepts or frequency of words, minimizing prior assumptions about importance as much as possible. Themes emerged from combinations of categories and similar patterns of responses.

A core team of three coders, including the external evaluation consultant and R2LP's data and evaluation staff, completed the analysis using the themes developed in the larger committee as a basis. All analyses were conducted using Analysis Software for Word-Based Records (AnSWR), a free qualitative analysis software package developed and maintained by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<sup>8</sup>.

A subset of responses was coded by all coders for a reliability check. Only minor differences were identified, and discussions about the differences resolved any discrepancy in coding categories. Combinations of codes were combined to form themes. Sometimes the categories that emerged were similar to one another and were merged to form a single code, sometimes new codes emerged at each review of the transcript by coders.

Subsequent readings of responses already coded were re-coded into larger thematic contents, and links among themes were examined and identified. After reviewing all coding and thematic constructs, analysts reexamined each category and theme with the goal of identifying simplified concepts and unifying themes.

See Appendix C for a full list of individual codes. Themes are described in the results section for each primary response group.

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<sup>7</sup> The 47 centers are those that specifically serve preschool-age children consistent with R2LP's school-readiness vision. In addition, many of them also serve infants, toddlers, and school-age children.

<sup>8</sup> Available for download at <http://www.cdc.gov/Hiv/SOFTWARE/answr.htm>.

## **Appendix B: Survey Instruments**



April 18, 2007

Dear Family Child Care Provider,

The newly proposed state budget includes significant cuts to the state's Child Care Assistance Program which helps low-income families pay for child care. Ready to Learn Providence is collecting data to determine to what degree, if any, our community partners may be affected by the proposed budget cuts. It is possible that your family child care home serves families who would no longer be able to get state help to pay for child care if the proposed budget goes into effect. We are asking you to complete this survey to find out what the proposed cuts would mean to your business and your families.

*Please use the enclosed envelope to send  
this form back as soon as possible to:*

Ready to Learn Providence  
945 Westminster Street  
Providence, RI 02903

- 
1. Would the proposed cuts affect your business?  No  Yes  
If yes, please explain:
2. If you have an assistant, would the proposed cuts affect your assistant?  No  Yes  
If yes, please explain:
3. Would the proposed cuts affect your family?  No  Yes  
If yes, please explain:
4. Would the proposed cuts affect the families and children that you serve?  No  Yes  
If yes, please explain:
5. If you believe the proposed cuts will impact your families, have you communicated with them about this issue? If yes, please explain:  No  Yes
-

Abril 18, 2007

Querida proveedora de cuidado de niños,

Los recientes cortes en el presupuesto del estado incluyen cortes significantes a la plan de asistencia de cuidado de niños que ayuda a familias de bajos ingresos ha pagar por el cuidado de niños. Ready to Learn Providence esta colectando unos datos para determinar a que nivel si alguno nuestros socios en la comunidad pueden ser afectados por los cortes en el presupuesto. Es posible que usted como proveedora de cuidado le provea servicios a familias que ya no reciban ayuda de el estado para poder pagar para el cuidado de sus niños debido a los cortes en el presupuesto. Estamos preguntando que completen el siguiente encuesta para averiguar que significaría los cortes del propuestos para so negocio y las familias.

*Por favor use el sobre incluido para  
devolver este formulario para atrás lo  
más pronto posible:*

Ready to Learn Providence  
945 Westminster Street  
Providence, RI 02903

-----  
1. ¿Los cortes en el presupuesto afectan su negocio o su familia?  No  Si  
Si contestas si, explique:

2. ¿Si tienes algún asistente, los cortes en el presupuesto afectaran a su asistente?  No  Si  
Si contestas si, explique:

3. ¿Le afectara a las familias y a los niños que sirves si pasan los cortes al presupuesto? Si contestas si, explique:  No  Si

4. ¿Si usted piensas que los cortes al presupuesto afectaran a las familias, se ha comunicado con ellos para informales sobre este tema?  No  Si  
Si contestas si, explique:

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Name of Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Survey Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to R2LP: \_\_\_\_\_ ERF Site \_\_\_\_\_ Possible PD Partner \_\_\_\_\_ AmeriCorps Site

The newly proposed state budget includes significant cuts to the state's Child Care Assistance Program which helps low-income families pay for child care. Ready to Learn Providence is collecting data to determine to what degree, if any, our community partners may be affected by the proposed budget cuts. It is possible that your center serves families who would no longer be able to get state help to pay for child care if the proposed budget goes into effect. We are asking center directors to complete this survey to find out what the proposed cuts would mean to your center, your staff and your families.

- 
1. Would the proposed cuts affect your child care center?  No  Yes  
If yes, please explain:
2. Would the proposed cuts affect your agency as a whole?  No  Yes  
If yes, please explain:
3. Would the proposed cuts affect your staff?  No  Yes  
If yes, please explain:
4. Would the proposed cuts affect your families?  No  Yes  
If yes, please explain:
5. Would the proposed cuts affect the children in your care?  No  Yes  
If yes, please explain:
6. If you believe the proposed cuts will impact your families, have you communicated with them about this issue?  No  Yes

## Guiding Questions for Focus Groups

1. Would you be able to pay the full cost of your current child care arrangements without help from the state?
2. Would you make changes in your current child care arrangements? *If no, why not? If yes, what would you do?*
3. Would you make changes in your employment? *If no, why not? If yes, what would you do?*
4. Would it have an impact on your child/children? *If no, why not? If yes, how?*
5. Would it have any other impact on your family? *If no, why not? If yes, how?*

## **Appendix C: Coding Categories and Description**



<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>CodeID</b>
Cuts would affect larger agency	For centers, potential changes in child care would affect larger agency (financially).	AffectsAgency
Reduction in the amount of services provided	Cuts would mean having to discontinue some services (e.g., after school pickup, field trips).	AmtServicesProvided
Centers would be forced to close	Centers would have to close due to cuts.	CentersClosing
Children's social and academic development at risk	Cuts would pose a threat to child academic and social-emotional development.	ChildDevelopmentRisk
Children's physical health, safety, and well-being at risk	Cuts would create dangerous situations or pose a threat to children's safety (unsafe care/latchkey kids).	ChildRisk/Safety
Cuts would have a negative impact on larger economy	Financial impact of cuts will influence larger economy.	Economy (State/City)
Cuts would affect children emotionally	Children would be affected emotionally (by disruption of caring relationships).	Emotional_Impact
Center would need to lay off or cut employees' hours	Teachers would lose hours or be laid off.	EmployeeJobStatus
Provider would have to lay off assistant	Providers would be forced to lay off their assistants.	AssistantJobStatus
Financial impact on center	Financial impact on centers (from decline in enrollment)	FinancialCenter
Financial impact on families	Financial impact on families (without subsidy cannot afford childcare)	FinancialFamily
Financial impact on provider	Financial impact on providers (from decline in enrollment)	FinancialProvider
Providers would be forced to close business	Providers would have to close their business due to cuts.	HomeChildCareClosing
Provider would leave the field of early education entirely	People would choose to leave the field of early childhood entirely (i.e., "just not worth it")	LeavingtheProfession
Cuts would have no impact	The cuts would not have an impact (on center, provider, or families served).	NoImpact
Parents would have to work more hours or quit their jobs	Parents would have to quit or cut back hours to care for their children or work more to afford to pay out of pocket.	ParentJobStatus

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>CodeID</b>
Provider would have to accept reduced/no compensation	Providers would have to accept less compensation when parents cannot afford to pay.	ProviderCompensation
Provider's own family would be at risk	Cuts would pose a threat to family child care provider's family and children (food/housing).	ProviderFamilyatRisk
Families would have to turn to public assistance	Families would turn to public assistance (welfare) to survive (could no longer afford to work/pay for child care).	PublicAssistance
Reduction in quality of service	Cuts would mean a decline in the quality of service centers and providers could offer.	ServiceQuality
Cuts are a moral or social justice issue	Some see these cuts as a moral or social justice issue (i.e., "the poor get poorer").	SocialJustice
Reduction in socioeconomic diversity	Cutting subsidies for low income families would mean less diversity in childcare settings.	SocioeconDiversity