



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Trustees

**FROM:** Marcia Hayes-Harris, Program Committee **BOARD ACTION REQUIRED**

**DATE:** January 10, 2025

**SUBJECT:** Expand Access to Telehealth/Mental Health for City Childcare Workforce

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### BACKGROUND

The FY25 budget includes \$359,133 in the Early Childhood Emerging Needs category that was carried forward as unobligated/unspent from FY24. At its November 21, 2024, Board Meeting, the MHB Trustees approved an award to reallocate \$150,000 of that unobligated/unspent amount to the Gateway Early Childhood Alliance for its Rapid Response Fund to provide emergency funding to City childcare providers impacted by delayed payments of Missouri State Childcare Subsidies. Thus, leaving a balance of \$209,133 available for emerging needs as well as an additional \$100,000 in the FY25 budget that is currently unallocated.

### EMERGING NEED FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR

During the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, childcare workers were lauded as essential workers. Federal, State, and Local funders rallied around childcare centers who struggled to stay open during unprecedented challenges to workplace health and safety. As the pandemic dragged on, the resources and support waned and the struggle to stay afloat intensified as the state subsidy system failed to provide timely payments to childcare providers for nearly a year. Childcare centers experienced significant workforce challenges that resulted in understaffing and in many cases closure. It was not uncommon for childcare workers to go weeks without being paid, which resulted in many individuals leaving the sector. Owners and operators of childcare centers often did not pay themselves in order to pay their staff. The instability was stressful and created significant strain on the workforce. A compounding and equally important factor was the expectation that childcare workers could compartmentalize their own stress and mental health needs to effectively care for and support the social and emotional development of children in their care. It is not surprising that as a result of unstable employment and emotionally demanding work, the childcare workforce experiences mental health challenges at a higher rate than other professions.

Nationwide, approximately 50% of childcare providers experience moderate-to-high levels of anxiety symptoms, including feeling nervous or restless/fidgety, according to Stanford Center on Early Childhood data. Depression symptoms were also prevalent among providers: 50% of providers experienced moderate-to-high levels of feeling like everything was an effort. About a third of providers reported moderate-to-high levels of sad, hopeless, or worthless feelings. Altogether, half of the providers surveyed experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, in Missouri, 89% of childcare professionals are female and 15.7% of that population are uninsured. Nationwide, only 20.7% of childcare workers have employer-sponsored health coverage. 51.4% of childcare providers in Missouri live in poverty with 36.7% living two times below the poverty level, making it difficult to afford insurance, medicine, office visits, or mental health consultations. The proposed project will impact both the physical health and the mental health of childcare providers.

## **TELEHEALTH/MENTAL HEALTH FOR CHILDCARE WORKFORCE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

Child Care Aware of Missouri proposes to expand access to its telehealth/mental health program for St. Louis City childcare providers. The proposed 18-month pilot project will allow Child Care Aware to double the number of childcare providers who have access to affordable mental health support. The success of this project in contributing to stabilizing the childcare workforce will demonstrate the importance of investing in mental health supports for childcare providers. It is envisioned that at the conclusion of the pilot project, childcare owners/operators will be motivated to continue to purchase this service as an ongoing benefit for their staff. In the City of St. Louis there are 208 licensed and licensed-exempt childcare programs that can serve 11,229 children. It is estimated that there are over 2,200 childcare providers working with those children. Child Care Aware currently serves 100 childcare providers in the City of St. Louis, which is less than 5% of the population needing this benefit.

There are three primary goals for this project:

1. Provide health and mental health care for childcare professionals who may have high co-pays or may not otherwise have access to health/mental health support allowing some childcare professionals the ability to remain employed in childcare;
2. Create an affordable employment benefit for the childcare workforce who typically have no or insufficient health care insurance thus demonstrating the return on investment for childcare center owners/operators;
3. Support a healthier and more reliable childcare workforce that can provide more stability to the children in their care.

MHB funds will provide telehealth/mental health coverage to **225** City of St. Louis childcare providers as well as a Show Me Child Care Resources (SMCCR) subscription to the childcare program that employs the childcare provider. The telehealth/mental health coverage, at \$15 per month per childcare provider, covers the childcare provider and their dependents. This policy allows for 24/7 access to Missouri certified doctors with a \$0 copay, removing economic barriers and encouraging earlier treatment and diagnosis. Prescriptions can be sent to local pharmacies at a discounted rate through this program. In addition, included in the \$15 per month, are ten mental health sessions annually at no charge, available to the childcare provider and their family. Mental health visits can be for an individual or a couple (adult/adult, child/adult, child/child). After the ten free sessions are used, additional mental health visits with the same professional are offered at a substantial discount of \$90 per hour.

## **FUNDING REQUEST**

Child Care Aware of Missouri is requesting \$107,468 to provide monthly subscriptions at no cost to up to 225 City of St. Louis childcare providers (approximately 10% of childcare providers caring for St. Louis City children) over an 18-month period (January 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026). This funding would support the mental health and wellbeing of childcare providers who care for approximately 1,125 children from birth to age five attending childcare centers in the City of St. Louis.

## **MHB EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

The Executive Committee met January 14, 2025, to discuss the request to repurpose a portion of the remaining \$209,133 CCSF – Early Childhood Emerging Needs funding to be used to increase access to mental health supports for childcare workers. The committee recommends providing up to \$107,468 for the Child Care Aware Missouri Telehealth/Mental Health Access Program. This will leave a balance of \$101,665 available from the unobligated FY24 carryforward for future emerging needs as well as \$100,000 in the FY25 budget that is currently unallocated.

**CITY OF ST. LOUIS MENTAL HEALTH BOARD OF TRUSTEES (MHB)**

**REPURPOSE EXISTING EARLY CHILDHOOD FUNDING COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT  
TELEHEALTH/MENTAL HEALTH ACCESS FOR CITY CHILDCARE WORKFORCE**

**RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, the City of St. Louis, Missouri has levied taxes pursuant to the laws of the State of Missouri to fund the Community Children’s Services Fund (CCSF); and

**WHEREAS**, the Board agreed to administer funding generated from a November 2020 ballot initiative that increased the Community Children’s Services Fund tax levy by \$0.06 from \$0.19 per every \$100 assessed property value to the maximum allowed by statute of \$0.25 per every \$100 assessed property value; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board agreed to dedicate the new funding generated by the additional \$0.06 tax levy approved in November 2020 to support early childhood programs and services for St. Louis City children from birth to age 5; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board agreed to set aside \$575,000 in FY23 to address unanticipated and emerging needs identified as a result of implementing the FY23 Community Children’s Services Fund—Early Childhood (CCSF-EC) funded projects; and

**WHEREAS**, a portion of that commitment totaling \$209,133 is unallocated; and

**WHEREAS**, the Child Care Aware of Missouri proposes to increase access to Telehealth/Mental Health services for the childcare workforce to meet emerging needs for childcare providers facing unmet mental health needs; and

**WHEREAS**, this Board is desirous to implement its responsibilities to ensure high quality early childhood programs for residents of St. Louis City.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:**

The Trustees authorize and direct the Board Chair and Executive Director to enter into a contract with Child Care Aware of Missouri in the amount of up to \$107,468 to expand access to telehealth/mental health services for childcare providers located in the City of St. Louis.

**APPROVED THIS 16<sup>th</sup> DAY OF JANUARY 2025:**

Board Chair/Officer Name (printed):	Signature:
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**ATTEST:**

Board Officer Name (printed):	Signature:
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