

My name is Jeremy Lapham, I am a parent of an incoming 2nd and 5th graders at Bach elementary, a 20+ year resident of Ann Arbor, and a nurse. I am also a union leader with the Michigan Nurses Association and the Huron Valley Area Labor Federation, and I have worked as a family nurse practitioner in the school-Based Health setting for the past five years. I am here tonight encourage the Board to reopen the RecEd SACC programs at all AAPS elementary campuses; to offer living wages and competitive benefits to workers; and to engage in a meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders and organizational actors in order to reopen these programs as soon as possible.

The RecED SACC program provides affordable and trustworthy childcare to working Ann Arbor families like my own. While I applaud the efforts AAPS has made to keep the program open at the five title one schools in the district, I am concerned about the impact closing them at the other sites will have on children and working families. Latchkey kids; unsupervised playgrounds before and after school; lost job opportunities and incomes due to a lack of care; and further economic segregation within the district as families switch their enrollment to meet their childcare needs are among many concerns, I have about surrounding the decision to cut the SACC program.

The pandemic has highlighted how critical safe, quality, affordable care is for children, families, and our economy. The closing of schools due to COVID posed significant challenges to the countless families who were still required to work from home such as essential workers in health care. Many of these families did not have the luxury of working from home or flexible work schedules or the ability to pay for alternatives like in-person virtual courses at childcare centers like the YMCA. Without consistent access to childcare, their children have lost out on valuable opportunities to learn and grow, while countless parents— in particular, mothers—have been forced to leave their jobs. Even for families with childcare, when problems with care arise,

parents must scramble to find alternative options—or miss work to care for their children. For millions of parents, that insecurity can mean working fewer hours, taking a pay cut, or leaving their jobs altogether. The decision to end an essential program like SACC will only exacerbate these issues.

Unfortunately, many families and communities across the County and State were experiencing a child care crisis long before the pandemic due to increased cost of care and lack of availability. Programs like SACC made full-employment possible. Now and then I have heard from working moms and parents across Washtenaw County who have had to quit their jobs because they can't find or afford childcare— for women of color and for low-income families these challenges can be even more difficult. The decision to close essential programs like SACC in this context and without an alternative plan in place makes it even more difficult for women to provide for their families and grow their careers.

Childcare workers, the majority of whom are women, are also undervalued, earning poverty wages, and often turning to public assistance to help make ends meet—and Black women and women of color disproportionately comprise about 40 percent of these workers. The pandemic has only made this crisis worse—in fact an estimated 20,000 childcare centers have closed since the pandemic began, more than 1 in 5 childcare workers have lost their jobs, and countless women have disproportionately been pushed out of the workforce because they lack childcare. Increasing pay for workers and reopening this essential program will not only attract more candidates but will also lift up women and families of those the program employs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a stark reminder that access to affordable childcare is essential for children, families, and our economy. Without access to childcare, parents cannot go to work, businesses lose workers and customers, and children miss out on invaluable early learning opportunities. As we work to build back a stronger, fairer economy, we must recognize

that investment in childcare is essential— Thus reopening SACC is not only the right thing to do for working families and workers, but it's a smart investment in our children, our future, and our local economy.

In conclusion I'd like to encourage the board to support to take the following steps:

- Immediately identify and convene a group of stakeholders and organizational actors to develop a plan to best meet the challenges of reopening and operating the RecEd SACC program. This will ensure that working families can continue to get high-quality, affordable childcare that they know and trust.
- Ensure that childcare providers in the SACC program are paid/offered at least a living wage and earn parity with elementary school teachers with similar credentials and experience. This will enable those who dropped out or were forced out of the workforce – particularly the approximately two million women who left due to COVID – to rejoin and stay in the workforce.
- The board should reconsider and accept the American Rescue Plan dollars offered by the Washtenaw County Board of commissioners to subsidize the salary and benefits offered to attract workers to apply for the SACC program.