



## RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

### Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission

#### Recommendation Number: [20260324-011]: Budget for Early Childhood Education and Development Funding

**Date of Approval: March 24, 2026**

#### **Recommendation:**

At a moment when federal and state support for early childhood education is eroding, local governments must step up to invest in and protect this essential workforce. Childcare is not a private expense; it is public infrastructure, and it is foundational to Austin's economic health and the wellbeing of its families.

#### **Description of Recommendation to Council**

- Maintain all current investments, contracts, and maintenance agreements in early childhood programs and infrastructure, including but not limited to:
  - Maintain funding for contracts related to services for families and children within Austin Public Health and Austin Economic Development, especially funding for multi-generational bilingual programs;
  - Maintain funding for public service child care service contracts funded through Federal HUD-CDBG funds that support parenting teens and Early Head Start; and
  - Maintain funding for current city programs related to childcare and children's services.

#### **Rationale**

In the City of Austin, 30% of children under age 6 live in households with low income, and 94% of those children are children of color. In the broader Austin area, there are 63,000 children living in households below 250% of the Federal Poverty Level. The Ready Families Collaborative (RFC) directly addresses this need through a network of nonprofit partners providing home-visiting, parent education, case management, and wraparound support. Current collaborative partners include AVANCE-Austin, which creates pathways to economic mobility for predominantly Latino families through high-quality, culturally responsive, two-generation programming that ensures school readiness for young children and opportunities for parents to build social and economic capital; the Communities in Schools ASPIRE Family Literacy Program, which provides free ESL and Adult Basic Education classes, as well as early childhood and parenting education for families with

children ages 0–6 in South and Southeast Austin; the Literacy Coalition of Central Texas, which breaks the cycle of intergenerational poverty through contextualized literacy services; and Austin PBS Play to Learn, a research-based school readiness program in which adults and children participate together in learning activities spanning school readiness themes. The RFC does not stand alone. There are additional investments including Todos Juntos early childhood education program and Austin Child Guidance Center Infant & Early Childhood Services.

Every \$1 invested in early childhood programs results in a \$7 return on investment, and a child who begins kindergarten ready to succeed is set on a trajectory that predicts third-grade reading level, high school graduation, justice system involvement, college persistence, and adult earning potential. The funding environment, however, has never been more precarious. The City of Austin issued across-the-board cuts of 10% to social service agreements in FY26, additional projected cuts to social service programs are anticipated in FY27, and federal, state, and local economic recovery funds invested in early childhood programs have concluded.

The current funding level remains inadequate to meet the demand for high-quality Spanish and bilingual early childhood education and services, including case management, parenting education, literacy programming, and community support delivered in families' preferred language. Programs that serve families in their preferred language do more than deliver information. They build trust, establish networks of support, and create the conditions for lasting family stability. Maintaining and expanding investment in early childhood, with explicit attention to bilingual and Spanish-language capacity, is essential to honoring Austin's commitment to equity in early childhood outcomes.

Motioned By: Commissioner Ramos

Seconded By: Commissioner Morales

Vote: 8-0

For: Chair Afifi, Vice Chair Ramos, Commissioners Castañeda, Flores, Galvan, Perales, Morales, Ruiz

Absent: Commissioners Peña and Moya Fábregas

Attest: *Nekaybaw Watson*, Staff Liaison