



California Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
Newport–Mesa Federation of Teachers AFT local 1794

For Immediate Release: Thursday, October 14, 2010

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Costa Mesa childcare center may close due to late state budget
State budget signed, but future uncertain for program in 33rd year; need Prop 25

Costa Mesa—Parents, teachers and other supporters of a local childcare center spoke today at a press conference about how the late state budget—even though it has now been passed and signed—may yet close the center.

Childs-pace Foundation, Inc., is holding a fundraiser hoping to keep its doors open until the state checks arrive. But it's a tossup whether the checks will come in time to keep the childcare center from folding. "If Proposition 25, with its provisions for a majority vote state budget and accountability for legislators, had been in place, this crisis wouldn't have happened for us," said John LeVere, director of Childs-pace.

Childs-pace is a private non-profit child development center that relies on state funding. Serving the community for 33 years in Costa Mesa, it provides childcare before and after school for dozens of low-income families. What happened over the summer to Childs-pace, and continues to unfold even after the state budget was signed, is an example of the harm to local communities caused by late state budgets.

When the state stopped making payments to vendors due to the stalled budget deliberations in the Legislature, Childs-pace had to borrow money to make payroll and meet other obligations, like food for its children. "We were used to this, since it has happened so many times, and we had a small line of credit available. But it was not large enough to continue all summer, and the bank refused to extend it," said LeVere.

Susan Kopicki is president of the Childs-pace Foundation board of directors. She said, "From January to June we searched for an institutional lender willing to loan us what we knew we needed to survive until Labor Day. We couldn't find such a lender, and then it turned out the delay went way past Labor Day!" Kopicki ended up with a credit union loan secured by her home, which took care of a half dozen payrolls through summer.

Facing interest payments on the loans and late fees for its employee medical insurance premiums, as well as other expenses, Childs-pace's reserves were exhausted as of September 30. Employees were sent termination notices, and families using the center—mostly Spanish-speaking, employed at low wage jobs—were told they would have to find another place for their children.

Marybeth Tabatabaeepour, one of the 20 employees of Childs-pace, described her feelings at receiving a pink slip: "I feel empty and sad that it has come to an end and we can't even help children and do what we do everyday. It's more than having to find another job; it just makes me very sad."

There is a ripple effect when a community resource like Childs-pace shuts down. Sixth grade teacher Sara Steuart, at nearby Whittier Elementary, explained: "Twenty-eight Whittier Elementary students benefit from the services provided by Childs-pace. Without the before and after school program, they could be left unsupervised. Instead of getting in trouble or wasting their time after school, they are developing their social skills and becoming strong students due to the supervised interactions with their peers, homework time, and outdoor play they experience at Childs-pace. Our students improve their chances for future success by continuing to develop before and after school. When parents work, programs like Childs-pace provide the type of opportunities that our children need during this important time of day."

Kimberly Claytor is president of the Newport Mesa Federation of Teachers. Her children, now grown, attended Childs-pace when they were young. She said, "If passed on November 2, Proposition 25, the On Time Budget Act, will keep Childs-pace and hundreds of places like it around the state from experiencing the wrenching difficulties caused by late budgets."

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