**House Committee on International Relations and Economic Development**



**In support of HB 619**

March 24, 2021

*Lyn Lucas, Camp Fire First Texas in Fort Worth, for the bill*

Camp Fire First Texas is the sponsor of a new early education apprenticeship program, the very first program in Texas recognized and registered by the U.S. Department of Labor. We anticipate that other programs will follow our lead. The apprenticeship is a workforce and economic development strategy that not only builds supply for a shortage of quality early childhood teachers but also improves childcare quality.

A Department of Labor report from 2018 confirms what we in the industry already know: the early childhood workforce faces significant barriers to higher education and quality professional-development systems. Along with non-partisan organizations like the Bipartisan Policy Center1 and The Center for American Progress2, we believe that registered apprenticeships are a compelling option for states to support their early childhood workforce, especially when those apprenticeships are part of an educational and career pathway. Registered apprenticeship programs combine classroom instruction, on-the-job learning, and mentorship to create a holistic “earn while you learn” approach.

This bill supports the work we are doing to increase the effectiveness of the early education workforce. We improve the workforce because we provide a career pathway that aligns apprenticeship completion with nationally recognized best practices and with associate’s and bachelor’s degree programs. Our graduates earn a solid stand-alone U.S. Department of Labor certificate, either as a “Child Care and Development Specialist” or an “Early Educator I,” that reflects an elevation of teacher competency while also positioning graduates to move into college programs if they desire. This formal addition to the early childhood workforce pipeline adds value to the profession, and it supports early childhood teachers in recognizing and improving the important work they are doing.

We know that 85% of a child’s brain growth and development happens by age three. Early childhood teachers are instrumental in nurturing that brain growth in young children. Many families need childcare in order to work, and children need quality early learning experiences for that brain growth. It is not an overstatement to say that preparing young people for college and career begins in those first three years (0-3), when most of the brain is developing. Next to the family, a child’s teacher is the biggest influence on development and school preparedness—more so in the early years than any time after.

We need to support quality early education for our current and future economic health. The Bipartisan Policy Center advocates for developing career pathway systems in early education: in addition to addressing broader issues, implementing those systems is a responsive strategy in closing the racial equity gap in education and in career advancement and earning potential.3

Apprenticeships lift up the value of experience and early childhood as a profession. Apprenticeships increase education, career, and wage-earning opportunities, and they contribute to better child outcomes and school readiness. Apprenticeships create a quality workforce pipeline. We hope that all Early Childhood Educators in Texas can have this apprenticeship opportunity, and it is essential that we do this apprenticeship work purposefully. Supporting this bill is the best way to support this existing workforce: growing skills and increasing wages while creating a unique pathway for the emerging workforce. HB 619 would allow the Texas Workforce Commission to identify needs and create a strategic plan that is greatly needed, long overdue, and will have long-term results.

1. “Registered Apprenticeships: A Viable Career Path for the Early Childhood Workforce,” bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ BPC\_Early\_Childhood\_Issue\_Brief\_RV4.pdf

2. “6 Policies to Support the Early Childhood Workforce,” www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/02/06/298085/6-policies-to-support-the-early-childhood-workforce/

3. The racial wage gap is $0.78/hr for Infant-Toddler teachers, and the Pre-School wage gap is $1.71/hr according to The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment 2020, cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/introduction-policy-recommendations/key-findings/