**It’s Time for us to Step up for Juneau’s Kids**

We have a child care shortage crisis

In my 50-plus years in Juneau, I have not encountered a single Assembly member, or other people in Juneau, who did not state that our children are a top priority.

Now, we have a challenge. We know that we have a child care shortage crisis. It is a crisis because we know that the lack of child care is hurting families and children now, and often, negatively impacts a child’s lifetime. Our Assembly is bravely stepping up and giving this issue the attention it requires.

The City and Borough of Juneau Assembly is now considering a critical investment in Juneau’s children. The goal is to partner with private and public child care/early learning providers to achieve safe and adequate quality child care for all the families that need it.

This relatively small investment is huge for Juneau’s young families, and the entire community. Here are a few facts:

Many of Juneau’s young families cannot find child care at any cost.

According to the state, a little more than 1 out of 3 of Juneau’s kids entering kindergarten are prepared to learn. According to extensive scientific research, quality child care and early learning literally builds better brains, boosts success in K-12, and saves public money in the future far greater than the initial small investment in child care.

With adequate affordable quality child care, Juneau will retain more young families in our community.

While most people in Juneau clearly understand the need to end the Juneau’s child care crisis, there are always a few people who react negatively to any new idea that costs any money. Here are a few concerns you may hear:

*Parents should be responsible for their own families!*

In fact, most parents, especially single parents, are forced to work to support their families. If they cannot find or afford child care, it hurts the family and entire community. Plain and simple, quality child care is as necessary as K-12 education. We cannot afford to only let part of our children access child care.

*This is a new program. We don’t want any new programs!*

No, child care and education are not new municipal programs. In fact, we are simply fixing our long-held commitment to our kids and to our schools. Science and experience have absolutely proven that more education of children occurs in the first five years than any other time. Without fixing this link in our children’s development, we will continue to have an unacceptably high rate of students in K-12 who fail to become proficient in English, math and science. Here is an analogy: Not fixing our education system by fixing child care is like refusing to acknowledge the overwhelming scientific proof that smoking is dangerous to your health. This is the reason that the Juneau School Board passionately supports early childhood education and quality child care.
We cannot afford to help young families with children!

In fact, Juneau cannot afford to not end Juneau’s child care crisis. Money is tight everywhere so we must ensure that every dollar is well spent. In the next 5-10 years, an investment in child care will pay off in as much as a 20-40% boost in the number of our kids in K-12 who achieve academic proficiency in math, science, and English. In the long term, according to researchers like Nobel Laureate Economist James Heckman, “Those seeking to reduce deficits and strengthen the economy should make significant investments in early childhood education” (including quality child care).

Please support our mayor and Assembly in helping Juneau’s young families, and making Juneau a stronger community!

**Kevin Ritchie, Juneau resident, former Juneau City Manager**