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There are significant, low-wage industries that are systemically under-funded but provide *essential services* and represent *large numbers* of low income workers, women of color, first generation and non-traditional college students, female heads of household, immigrants, people for whom English is not a first language, and folks from under-represented, under-resourced, and historically marginalized communities. Making economic security and mobility accessible to these populations requires career pathways that make the ultimate goal of family sustaining wages achievable through initiatives that effectively put equity at the center of program design and delivery.

Equity means more than a sufficiently diverse collection of apprentices. Equity means programs designed to provide the support and services necessary to ensure participant *success*. One field-tested approach that meets that criteria is stackable apprenticeships that provide a path to family sustaining wages, even though that might not be achieved upon completion of the first apprenticeship in the stack.

If we agree to ensuring participant success, we must also agree to recognizing equity and access as strategic drivers of that success. Unfortunately, however unintentionally, requiring that the first rung of a career ladder must result in family sustaining wages will turn out to be unworkable, unrealistic, unfair, and, however unintentionally, will result in inequitable and discriminatory outcomes.

The economics of our capitalist system create inequities that are *illogical* in terms of what would best serve the common good, and *unfair* in terms of those most impacted by those inequities. The consequences of those inequities cannot be overcome by policies that punish industries and workers on the losing end of an economic equation that is neither of their own making nor within their control.

The economic conundrums of the ECE industry will not be resolved until early childhood education is publicly and sustainably funded, like K-12, community colleges, and public universities. In the meantime, ECE is an *essential* industry upon which the economy relies, requires highly skilled workers with college degrees, but offers miserably low wages, particularly for entry level positions. This situation is untenable and has created a crisis level shortage of child care workers that impacts not only children and families, but the economy at large and millions of workers - particularly women - who cannot participate in the world of work without child care.

To be clear, jobs in ECE are *quality* jobs in every respect except funding - and that battle is being waged in local communities, state by state, and at the federal level. The large ECE workforce that exists, *despite* the economic challenges, reflects the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of people - 94% of whom are women, 68% of whom are people of color - who *want* to work in this industry, who find it meaningful, rewarding, and an accessible and welcoming pathway to better wages and expanded career opportunities.

We have demonstrated registered apprenticeship to be an excellent model through which to provide career pathways leading to family sustaining wages and benefits for ECE workers. One of the reasons the model works is because it allows new and entry level workers to move through stackable apprenticeships that allow them to maintain a work/family/college balance, while providing full-time wages, benefits, and a schedule of wage increases from day one.

To eliminate the legitimacy and existence of such pathways and stackable earn-and-learn programs by requiring family sustaining wages by the end of the first tier of RAPs is to make it impossible for hundreds of thousands of workers to be trained, paid, and increasingly eligible for better jobs that offer better compensation, in a field our economy relies on and a workforce we desperately need to expand and strengthen.

Some have asked, "why can't you offer one registered apprenticeship that ends with a BA degree and teacher certification, with jumping off points along the way?" While that may be a logical question, it reflects a lack of understanding of the academic and professional challenges facing the population we engage, and what it takes to ensure their success.

It is unrealistic to expect folks who never went to college, don't speak English as their first language, are parents of young children, or don't have strong professional or academic track records, to be willing to enter a program that could take 5-6 years to complete. That is a marketing strategy doomed to failure.

But what is realistic is to offer a program that takes 12-18 months to complete, during which participants are paid and fully employed, earn industry credentials, receive at least one wage increase, and become eligible for the next level apprenticeship.

One reason ECEPTS has been so influential in the ECE apprenticeship arena is that we have a deep understanding of our workforce, their needs, strengths, and challenges. Based on that understanding, I am certain that requiring family sustaining wages at the end of every apprenticeship - even those geared to new, relatively unskilled workers - will result in the exclusion of a large, diverse, and *essential* workforce from reaping the benefits of the registered apprenticeship system.