

ORDER NO. 2025-04
AN ORDER OF THE PORT OF SEATTLE COMMISSION

... to direct the Executive Director to conduct a feasibility study for increasing childcare access that is accessible, affordable, and/or flexible for SEA workers and to establish the Childcare Navigator program for Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA) workers.

ADOPTED
FEBRUARY 11, 2025

INTRODUCTION

One of the key drivers of the Port of Seattle's success in operating Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA) and meeting growing travel demand is the ability of the airport and its tenants to attract and retain a high-quality workforce. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that lack of affordable, accessible childcare is a growing barrier to those efforts. The location of the airport away from sufficient childcare facilities, the 24/7 nature of airport shift work, and the overall dearth of affordable, accessible childcare are all contributing factors to this challenge, and lead to increased risk that airport operations will be negatively impacted by lack of sufficient workforce.

To that end, Port of Seattle has conducted a preliminary study to further examine the how childcare access impacts the successful recruitment and retention of the airport workforce at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA); furthermore, it has commissioned an analysis of various options that could potentially increase affordable, accessible, and flexible childcare for SEA workers as a way to support and strengthen SEA operations.

The completed study contained recommendations for further investigation, and the Port's 2025 budget includes funding to advance this work. In particular, two options identified in the report seem particularly promising:

- 1) The development of a Port Child Care Center, or set of centers, proximate to SEA that are created explicitly to serve the needs of airport workers; and
- 2) The provision of technical assistance that offers comprehensive, in-language support to help SEA workers navigate subsidy applications and find available childcare solutions that support continued employment at SEA.

These two options have different degrees of difficulty, different timelines for implementation, and different costs. However, the abovementioned Port funding can be utilized to make progress on both items:

- The childcare center concept could be more fully fleshed out by the development of a feasibility study that looks at siting, business and financial models, market conditions, and SEA employer & employee demand.

- The technical assistance offering may proceed more quickly to begin serving SEA workers.

This Order is intended to provide guidance to the Executive Director on the implementation of these two simultaneous efforts, and to provide clear deadlines for action and reporting.

TEXT OF THE ORDER

The Port Commission hereby directs the Executive Director to 1) conduct a feasibility study for a childcare facility that would increase accessible, affordable, flexible childcare services for SEA workers and to 2) establish a “childcare navigator” program at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport for airport workers.

In particular:

- 1) **Childcare Center Feasibility Study:** The Executive Director shall conduct a feasibility study for a childcare facility, which may include, but not be limited to, the following data:
 - a. Additional data collection and engagement with employers and employees at SEA to understand the impact of childcare on the successful recruitment and retention of airport workers;
 - b. Operational models for how affordable, accessible, flexible childcare could be delivered to SEA employees, including potential partnerships with local jurisdictions and/or agreements with for-profit or non-profit childcare providers;
 - c. Best practices from other airports offer childcare services to airport workers, including the creation of a list of local and national providers who can offer such services at SEA;
 - d. Financial modeling that examines the costs of building a childcare facility on-site or off-site and/or bringing an existing building space up to licensing standards and code requirements;
 - e. Funding opportunities available through federal, state, and local resources to both build and/or operate such a facility;
 - f. Information about the physical requirements for childcare facilities in Washington state that would inform decisions about future siting at or near SEA; and
 - g. Any additional data or analysis that provides necessary insights into the feasibility of siting and operating a childcare facility on-site at or near SEA, subject to Washington state requirements and federal restrictions on use of airport funds.

- 2) **Childcare Navigator Program:** The Executive Director shall also create a program within the Port’s Aviation Division to provide technical assistance to airport workers about existing childcare resources that support continued employment at SEA, hereby known as the Childcare Navigator program. The specifics of the Childcare Navigator program shall be informed by findings of the Port’s previous childcare studies, and may include, but not be limited to, the following elements:
 - a. A centralized program or hub that provides comprehensive, personalized technical assistance which shall include in-language support; and
 - b. Employee assistance/support for SEA workers to find open childcare slots and/or complete enrollment applications that support continued employment at SEA, and
 - c. Educational and outreach materials to increase awareness of new and existing childcare programs that support continued employment at SEA, including stipends and subsidies offered by employers, nonprofits, governments, or other entities; and

- d. Technical assistance for SEA workers to develop personal childcare plans that support continued employment at SEA and that work for their families and support seeking access to existing or new childcare stipends and subsidies offered by the federal, state, and/or local government;
- e. Efforts to leverage existing state and local programs that support access to affordable, accessible childcare, including but not limited to programs offered through the State of Washington Department of Youth, Children, and Families;
- f. A list of existing childcare resources utilized by SEA employers; and
- g. Any additional technical assistance in support of continued employment at SEA to meet the accessibility, affordability, and flexibility needs of SEA workers seeking childcare.

Program evaluation of this offering shall be conducted annually.

The Executive Director is authorized to hire one or more qualified consultant(s) to assist in completing any of the above tasks. In addition, the Executive Director will report regularly on the progress of implementing this Order to the Commission Aviation Workforce Conditions Ad Hoc Committee.

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE ORDER

SEA is governed by federal, state, local, and Port regulations, which creates a complex environment for 24/7, 365 days a year operations at one of the busiest airports in the country. SEA has over 22,000 workers employed by our tenants, and so a stable workforce is essential to airport functions. To that end, the Port of Seattle is committed to understanding how the nationwide childcare crisis impacts our airport operations.

The economic impact of childcare for employees and employers has been well documented at both the national and state level; findings from a 2020 report by the Child Care Collaborative Task Force to the Washington State Legislature found that the demand for childcare outstrips the supply of quality, licensed childcare while the cost of childcare can outpace wages for working families. Some key findings of the 2020 report include:ⁱ

1. One-third of parents/caregivers surveyed reported that their job is sometimes, often or always affected by issues with their childcare arrangement;
2. 46% of respondents reported that they or their partner had to take time off due to childcare issues in the past 12 months, with nearly 40% reporting they had to reduce the number of hours or days worked due to childcare issues;
3. Nearly one in five respondents reported that in the past year, they turned down a job or job promotion due to childcare issues;
4. Childcare access is a factor in underemployment by parents/caregivers, preventing 47% of jobseekers from re-entering the workforce part-time or full-time.
5. Statewide, only 37% of families have accessible childcare within a 20-minute drive; an estimated 118,000 families live in childcare deserts; and
6. Overall, access and affordability of childcare is a challenge for families; with single income households and families with infants and pre-school aged children paying a greater share of their income for childcare.

In January of 2024, the Port of Seattle solicited a report that would help the airport better understand the impact of childcare on the SEA workforce. The report's authors and the Port of Seattle's Business Intelligence team developed a survey of airline representatives, dining and retail tenants and workers, and union representatives to outline the diversity of childcare experiences between employees and employers.

In addition to surveying tenants and workers at SEA, the report assessed the geographic dispersion of where airport employees reside, worked to understand the childcare needs of the 24/7 employee base, and engaged with large hub airports and local childcare providers to learn best practices and explore options for the Port of Seattle.

The report was delivered to the Commission on July 9, 2024, presenting its top five recommended solutions and findings. The solutions focused on childcare affordability, accessibility, and flexibility for SEA workers, recognizing the airport's 24/7 operation nature.

The lack of adequate childcare for young children (under the age of 5) has substantial impacts to the ability of SEA employers to attract and retain a qualified workforce. There are over 100 employers inside the airport perimeter with a pool of 18,000 workers, according to PortJobs. It is estimated that 7,500 SEA airport workers have nearly 8,900 children under the age of 12. Based on a survey conducted by the Port's Business Intelligence team, the top three challenges for workers related to childcare are affordability, accessibility, and flexibility. Additionally, 100% of the top ten zip codes of airport employees' primary residences are designated as extreme childcare access deserts (areas with insufficient childcare options for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers from both low-income and non-low-income households)¹. Compounding factors such as race, ethnicity, and language may impact airport workers' ability to access childcare subsidy programs.

A survey of SEA employers found that 90% of respondents expressed an understanding of their employees' childcare concerns². Employers also noted the impact childcare issues have on their employees' retention, attendance, productivity, and the company's bottom lines.

The SEA survey further collaborates the findings from the 2021 "State of the Children: Early Learning & Care" report for King County produced by Washington STEM, Washington Communities for Children, and the King County Early Learning Coalition, and a 2022 "Early Learning and Childcare Solutions" report produced by Port Jobs highlighting the shortage of licensed childcare spots, the unaffordability of childcare, and loss opportunities for jobseekers and workers.

The Port's initial findings are also consistent with several other studies highlighting the importance of available childcare for ensuring a robust work force. For example, a 2019 report by the Washington State Child Care Collaborative Task Force—which included the state Department of Commerce among other partners—concluded that childcare challenges adversely affect employer recruitment, retention, and productivity.³ Additionally, numerous studies across the country have

¹ [Child Care Stabilization Zip Code Factors | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#)

² Port Business Intelligence, 2024

³ Washington State Child Care Collaborative Task Force, *The Mounting Costs of Child Care* (2019), available at https://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MountingCostsReport_FINAL.pdf.

shown that providing childcare services for employees improves job retention, reduces turnover, and reduces employee absenteeism (examples are cited in footnote).⁴

ⁱ Washington Child Care Industry Assessment -

<https://deptofcommerce.box.com/s/z61nky97huonpgq34of4ky68kvmtllx9>

⁴ See Early Care & Learning Council, *Why Should Employers Care? Relationship Between Productivity and Working Parents*, available at <https://childcarecouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Why-Should-Employers-Care-ECLC.pdf>; Tehsin Bhayani, *The Benefits Of A Childcare Assistance Policy In Your Employee Handbook*, AirMason Blog (Apr. 25, 2023), <https://blog.airmason.com/the-benefits-of-a-childcare-assistance-policy-in-your-employee-handbook/>; Erin Caldwell, *On-Site Child Care Would Alleviate Companies' Return-to-Office Struggles*, Seattle Times (May 1, 2023), <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/on-site-child-care-would-alleviate-companies-return-to-office-struggles/>.