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“Fair Rates + Fair Wages” = \$25 Million Victory in Massachusetts

After an intensive and persistent two-year lobbying campaign, a broad-based coalition called “Fair Rates + Fair Wages = Quality Child Care” has secured \$25 million for child care program reimbursement rate increases in the Massachusetts state budget. Rather than presenting the state legislature with the usual laundry list of child care-related budget requests, the coalition of teachers, administrators, parents and other advocates decided to make rate and wage increases their top priority.

“Our hope,” says New Bedford child care teacher Maribel Da Silva,

“is that increasing workers’ salaries in publicly-subsidized programs will have a positive ripple effect through the entire child care system in Massachusetts.” The reserve—which is the largest state-funded child care rate increase ever enacted in the U.S.—will boost rates both for contracted child care slots and for child care vouchers, and could translate into significant wage increases statewide. As Pat Xavier of the Boston Child Care Alliance observes, “We’re deeply concerned about how low salaries force trained, committed teach-

ers and family child care providers to leave the field. We believe that provider rates and worker salaries must be increased in order to improve quality.”

What was originally the “Fair Rates for Fair Wages” campaign underwent a name change when some disagreement arose about how much to emphasize compensation. But an impressive array of organizations put their differences aside to launch the well-organized effort—administrators’ organizations alongside union locals and other workers’ groups, the statewide association of nonprofit programs and its for-profit counterpart, family child care associations, and the state network of resource and referral agencies.

While the rate increase is not specifically earmarked for wages, Bob French, a New Bedford program administrator, feels that “heavy legislative intent, combined with a strong level of activism from teachers and providers,” should guarantee wage increases in most programs. “One of our lessons,” adds French, “is that advocates have to set their horizons beyond the one-year budgetary process. The work we did the first year was critical in laying the foundation for our second-year effort.” Congratulations to all who took part in winning this impressive victory! ■



Friends and staff of NCECW rally at Stand for Children, June 1, 1996.

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providers, and offering training to members on grassroots organizing. In June, the Alliance organized a successful retreat on child care economics, with the goal of creating public policy to move Minnesota’s child care system past the “trilemma” of affordability, accessibility and compensation. Members are now designing pilot projects and seeking funding for implementation. For summary papers and more information, contact Margaret Boyer at (612) 721-4246.

Colorado members held a retreat in June and decided to formalize their efforts in an organization called Early Childhood Professionals for Better Wages. They received a grant from the Denver Mayor’s Office on Child Care to support some of their initial development, and are work-

ing closely with Colorado AEYC on planning and goal-setting.

The San Francisco Bay Area Campaign has successfully influenced the Berkeley City Council to set up a one-year Task Force, which will study ways for the city to address the child care compensation crisis.

And finally, welcome to our newest local group, the Alachua County (Florida) Day Care Teachers Association, which recently held a successful Worthy Wage workshop co-sponsored by North Central Florida AEYC. They report that very good discussions among parents, directors and teachers took place, and that membership is growing. We know we will be hearing more from these Florida Worthy Wagers! ■