

PRESS RELEASE

Child care program owed \$4 million for operating Federally-funded Tribal child care program closes doors after not getting paid for two years

Bartlesville, OK – On March 31, 2022, the Washington County Child Care Foundation, a non-profit child care program serving the Delaware Tribe of Indians in northeastern Oklahoma for nearly 25 years, will be shutting their doors. The reason? The Delaware Tribe owes the Foundation \$4.3 million dollars for operating the Tribal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program from July 1, 2020, to June 1, 2021. The Delaware Tribe's child care program is funded through the Cherokee Nation's Tribal Child Care and Development Fund program.

The loss of child care to the communities served is astronomical. One community will see an 83% drop in child care slots available. Another community will see a ten percent drop. These losses come at a time when child care in the United States is increasingly difficult to find. For Native children and families, the loss will be resounding. The Foundation served 34% of the Native children across Washington County, providing child care and early learning services for nearly 200 Native children and families in 2020 alone.

For the past 25 years, the leadership of the Washington County Child Care Foundation has served the Delaware Tribe of Indians, providing child care for thousands of children and families and leading their infrastructure development on the Lenape Addition in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

Sherry Rackliff, Executive Director of the Washington County Child Care Foundation, began her work with the Delaware Tribe in 1997 as the first Tribal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Program Manager. From there, she grew the Tribe's child care and early learning program from \$600,000 to over \$10 million annually as of 2021, operating CCDF, Early Head Start, Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership, Resource & Referral, the Child and Adult Food Care Program, Family Services, and Home Visiting. The program and services have been highlighted as a best practice in child care and early learning internationally and nationally.

In a letter to families and the community, Rackliff states, "Providing nationally renowned child care and early learning services to your children and families has been the pinnacle of my 35-year career in education...I am honored to have created this program and deeply saddened that it has been dismantled in this way. While I am saddened to be closing our doors, I am walking away from this part of my life's work with gratitude for the opportunity to serve our children, families, and communities and with appreciation for the strides we made in the field of child care and early learning."

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