



# SMU

*Office of the President*

March 11, 2016

TO: Faculty and Staff

FROM: R. Gerald Turner, President

RE: Child Care Center

The University is deeply committed to ensuring access to high-quality child care for members of the University community. Our current Center was created primarily to serve students with children as a part of our Student Affairs function and was, therefore, located on one floor of a student residence center, Hawk Hall. The Center's small size was appropriate for the limited population of children of students needing this benefit during the 1980's. However, over time it has become more of a benefit for a limited number of faculty and staff than for students. In addition, accrediting and licensing standards have significantly increased over the years, creating greater facility and operational requirements for the University. At this time, it has become evident that, while adequate, the current Center needs significant enhancements to remain open. To undertake a significant renovation of the center, the building codes of University Park would require that all of Hawk Hall be renovated. From past experience, this would require \$8-10 million.

Therefore, the question of how to provide access to quality child care services for members of the University community has become more acute. There seem to be four options available to address this need. These are:

- (1) Relocate to another facility on campus. None exists that would not require extensive renovation and also have sufficient playground space.
- (2) Undertake the renovation of the current space in Hawk Hall as a component of renovating the entire Hall, which, as noted, would cost \$8-10 million.
- (3) Build a new child care center on the East Campus with costs of approximately \$4 million for 66 children or approximately \$6 million for 100 children.

- (4) Utilize the professional placement services of one of the companies that has emerged over the past two decades to address child care needs of universities and other organizations.

The number of children five years and younger of our employees who might seek assistance with child care is approximately 370 children, according to an analysis of employees on the University Health Care Plan. Therefore, when considering child care as an employee benefit, the first logical question would be how best to provide support for the largest number of these children and their families, as well as for all new employees that join us every year with children five years of age and under.

The families of the 25+ children in our current child facility understandably feel very strongly that, despite its limitations, the current facility is the best way for the University to assist in meeting their needs, and they have communicated this preference very strongly in different meetings. However, 90% of the remaining children, including those families on the waiting list have had to develop alternatives on their own. Therefore, remodeling Hawk Hall does not seem to be a viable option.

Because of facility costs, operational responsibility, and attendant liability for operating a child care center, there is a growing trend for universities in major metropolitan areas, where child care centers are abundant, to engage outside companies either to assist (1) all parent employees and students in placing their children in appropriate area child care centers off campus. This assistance starts when a person is hired and makes a request for such service, and continues to be available each year to support the changing needs of continuing employees. Or, (2) to have these companies contract with the University to manage its child care center with the mandate to provide exemplary child care while assuming full legal and operational responsibility for meeting licensing and regulatory standards.

We issued an RFP to several companies to determine interest in providing the referral service. However, as recently communicated by the Faculty Senate and faculty and staff leadership of the Commission on the Status of Women, there is a strong preference by the University community, beyond parents who currently have children in the Center, to maintain a child care center on campus, based upon their belief that the existence of a campus-based child care center is an important aspect of faculty/staff recruitment.

As a result, after receiving input from a number of members of the university community, we will cancel the RFP next week and begin to work with the Bright Horizons Company, the primary provider who can economically build and operate a facility on our East Campus. Based upon their experience of overseeing over 700 of such centers, they will advise the University of the appropriate size such a center should be to remain fully utilized. The University will own the facility but have a management agreement with Bright Horizons. In addition, we will expand our program with Magellan to provide placement assistance to families whose children will be in centers off campus.

This new facility will be under the leadership of Business and Finance, and be overseen as an employee benefit, as it is on most campuses having a child care center. Vice President Chris Regis will oversee the creation of an Advisory Group with membership from the Faculty Senate, Staff Council, and student leadership to assist with the transition to the new Center.

In the meantime, the current child care center in Hawk Hall will remain open until the new facility is completed, which should take approximately 18 months. At that time, Bright Horizons would seek to transition the existing staff, offering training to address any skills or credential requirements. During this 18-month period, Dr. Pamela Anthony, Vice President for Student Affairs, will continue to direct the operations of the current Center.

This solution should assure the parents of current children attending the campus center that it will remain in operation until the next center opens. Current employees will be retained through this transition period and be considered for continued employment with Bright Horizons. From the standpoint of the University, Bright Horizons will assume responsibility for personnel and keeping the facility and its operations compliant with all licensing and regulatory standards.

Thanks to all members of the University community who have contributed to this resolution toward providing opportunities for quality care for the young children of employees and students.