

Alexandria City Council Statement  
April 16, 2016

Good morning. I'm Rob Dugger.

Two years ago, research I led showed that high-quality prenatal counseling for at-risk mothers reduces Medicaid costs enough to pay for the counseling. South Carolina just announced they're scaling-up their main prenatal home visiting program and they're paying for it this way.

Four years ago, similar research I led showed that high-quality 3 and 4-year old prekindergarten reduces public school special education costs enough to pay for the pre-k. Last year, Salt Lake City increased its pre-k by 600 kids and is paying for it this way. More than twenty other states are looking into how they can do the same.

Ten years ago I founded ReadyNation. It's now the premier business early-childhood advocacy organization in the US.

Here's our problem. America has organized its workforce so it's virtually impossible for low and moderate-income moms and dads to maintain an adequate living standard without both working. They've got to have good infant through pre-k childcare. But we expect these parents under enormous stress to raise school-ready children who'll graduate from high school and be productive citizens, with virtually no help from the rest of us. Do you think the stress these parents are under doesn't affect their children? The research is clear. High stress parents are less productive at work and their children are less academically successful.

Nationally and here in Alexandria, education-enriched child care is what's most urgent.

Now -- think economically. What do all those for-sale or lease signs showing up everywhere in our city mean? Does Alexandria have problems? I think so. They're the reason I joined the board of Hopkins House.

Fact is, nothing raises per capita income better than high-quality childcare. Research from America's leading economic development institute shows there's no sports stadium, office park or tax give-away that's better for regional economic development than good childcare.

Parents are less stressed and immediately more productive. Businesses find it's easier to attract and keep good employees. Children are more ready for school. With better prepared kids, the schools are more productive. Graduation rates are higher. And crime rates, drug use and teen pregnancies are lower.

Forget about this warehouse plan. It'll just hurt kids and increase parent stress. Instead, immediately convene all the city's non-profit, for-profit, public and church childcare providers and develop a plan for how these early care and learning professionals can accommodate or open new facilities to handle the 400 kids that concern you today and the roughly one thousand five hundred that are right behind them.

You've budgeted \$3 million dollars. Use that money to structure a financing plan that expands quality childcare in Alexandria, strengthens our economy, helps parents do what we need them to do, and helps kids arrive at school ready-to-learn.

Thank you.