

March 13, 2020

Shannon Christian
Director, Office of Child Care
Administration for Children and Families
Mary E. Switzer Building
330 C ST SW, Room 4502
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Director Christian,

The national partners and organizations signed below are writing to request immediate and clear guidance from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to state Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) administrators and lead agencies regarding policy choices that can help child care providers and the families they serve remain operable, financially stable and, to the degree possible, open during and after the ongoing COVID-19/coronavirus crisis.

While we are simultaneously urging Congress to invest additional, significant, emergency, and flexible funds to support child care and early learning programs at this time, we believe states must hear clearly and directly that within **existing** federal policy they can make a set of practical policy decisions that help protect all types of child care providers, including family child care and community-based centers, from economic crisis and closure, and help provide continuity of care for children and families.

In addition to highlighting options under previous guidance such as the 2017 IM [Flexibility in Spending CCDF Funds in Response to Federal or State Declared Emergency Situations](#), we ask that you explicitly encourage states to:

- **Adjust payment policies so they are based on enrollment of children rather than actual attendance**, as allowed under Section 98.45(l)(2) of the final rule. This will allow sick children and parents to stay home without disrupting revenue for providers who already experience precarious operating budgets.
- **Waive any state policies that terminate child eligibility based on a specific number of absent days, within their 12-month eligibility policy.** While we understand that the final rule under § 98.21(a)(5) allows termination for this reason only for “excessive unexplained absences,” given the variety of state policies in this area and the unpredictable nature of this public health situation we feel it is reasonable to give families and providers as much flexibility as possible without terminating eligibility. This will allow parents to make the important decision to keep sick or exposed children home, curtailing the spread of the virus without jeopardizing their eligibility for child care assistance.
- **Temporarily suspend redetermination of family eligibility for child care services**, and work with partner agencies to do the so for WIC, SNAP, Medicaid, and TANF to ensure that temporary changes in family workforce participation, earnings, or other factors due to COVID-19 do not impact family eligibility.
- **Consider the use of CCDF quality, state dollars, or transferred TANF dollars** to help providers cover the costs of maintaining their operations safely during this time, including necessary sanitation equipment, supplies and services; substitute caregivers; paid leave for affected staff; copayments for coronavirus tests; grants to cover operational costs in the event of closure; and other expenses providers and educators will occur as the result of coronavirus spread. Note that we are not suggesting TANF dollars be used at the expense of meeting families’ need for cash assistance.
- **Deliver information to providers and parents, in all appropriate languages, about the [availability of the USDA Summer Food Service Program \(SSFP\) or Seamless Summer Option \(SSO\) meal service](#)** in the event of program closure.
- **Allow providers to waive co-pays** for families impacted by changes to their own work schedule and income, and adjust reimbursement rates accordingly.

- **Work with partner agencies to implement “express lane eligibility”** for Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP, and other programs, based on information from CCDBG eligibility to support families during this period.
- **Use their consumer education resources to share up-to-date and accurate information** about COVID-19 with providers and the families they serve and ensure these resources are available in all relevant languages.
- **Ensure that licensing staff are well-trained on best practices for safety and hygiene** and can help providers meet those requirements.

As you know, working families benefit from the predictable availability of affordable child care, and children benefit from continuity of care. Child care providers and staff need reliable employment and supports to meet their needs as well. To help keep families and providers economically stable and healthy through this challenging time, states must ensure their child care assistance policies are responding to the realities and needs of families, providers, and staff.

We appreciate your urgent attention to this matter and are available to help spread the word and support these recommendations in any way that is helpful to you and to the states.

Sincerely,

All Our Kin, Jessica Sager, CEO

Center for American Progress, Simon Workman, Director, Early Childhood Policy

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), Katherine Gallagher Robbins, Director, Child Care and Early Education

Child Care Aware® of America, Anne Hedgepeth, Senior Director of Federal and State Government Affairs

Early Care and Education Consortium, Radha Mohan, Executive Director

Educare Learning Network, Cynthia Jackson, Executive Director

First Five Years Fund, Sarah Rittling, Executive Director

National Association for the Education of Young Children, Lauren Hogan, Managing Director, Policy and Professional Advancement

National Women’s Law Center (NWLC), Catherine White, Director, Child Care and Early Learning

Ounce of Prevention Fund, Diana Rauner, President

Save the Children Action Network, Roy Chrobocinski, Director, Federal Government Relations

ZERO TO THREE, Myra Jones-Taylor, Chief Policy Officer

cc:

Secretary Alex Azar II, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Andrew Williams, Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families

Richard Gonzales, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families