

February 24, 2021

Ellen Wheatley, Acting Director Office of Child Care
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Mary E. Switzer Building
330 C St. SW, 4th floor
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Ms. Wheatley:

Please find below our Planned Use of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA) Funds Report.

Introduction

The State of Kansas Department for Children and Families has sought to strategically use emergency CCDBG funding to support the state's child care infrastructure amid the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, DCF extended eligibility of the child care subsidy program to essential workers earning up to 250% of FPL through the Hero relief program in 2020. Additionally, the department provided over 2,500 sustainability grants to both center and home-based child care providers to offset potential revenue losses and increased costs due to mandated virus mitigation policies such as lowered capacities and more stringent sanitation requirements. Through provider surveys and family feedback, DCF is continually improving its understanding of what the child care ecosystem needs to recover over the next year and beyond.

As DCF considers how to allocate a historic increase in child care funding provided in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), the department is taking into account the persistent and emerging needs of relevant stakeholder groups through public engagement. DCF recognizes the opportunity to strategically use this one-time funding to balance immediate relief and long-term investments for lasting impact.

Plan to prioritize and select impactful investment opportunities

DCF is following a step-by-step process to source ideas for potential investment opportunities from its stakeholder community and will determine which opportunities are most promising. The short-listed ideas will then be evaluated to ensure they bridge assessed need gaps, constitute eligible activities, are feasible within the drawdown period, and align with an impactful use of the one-time funding. Representatives from DCF, The Kansas Children's Cabinet, and Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) will collaborate to select the final investment opportunities to be pursued and approve a roadmap for implementation covering the duration of the funding availability by May 2021.

Direct Child Care Services (Subsidies)

DCF will continue to provide direct child care services (e.g., flexible subsidy eligibility) to essential workers, including health care workers, first responders, food and agriculture workers, judicial workers, National Guard, and child care workers through the Hero relief program. DCF intends to expand the Hero program in several ways to increase access for families in need. DCF is considering increasing income eligibility to 275%+ of FPL for families of essential workers, expanding eligibility to Government employees, and increasing eligibility to 12 months rather than 6 months (ending September 2022).

To promote equity, DCF is planning to implement changes to the current eligibility system to allow for differential payment rates for underserved populations based on identified needs of special populations (e.g., higher costs of care for infants and toddlers).

To improve the state's understanding of families' preferences and utilization of licensed child care, DCF may launch a survey to gain insight into the consumer decision-making process to better design its programming.

Implementation of virus mitigation policies and practices

In 2020, DCF partnered with KDHE to continue to provide health consultants to child care providers to help establish safe operations and practices with funding from the CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) dollars awarded to the state. Supply grants were also provided to assist with the costs of cleaning, sanitation, and other virus mitigating activities. DCF is considering the continuation of funding for health consultants and supply grants to all licensed child care providers in need of help implementing safety protocols utilizing CRRSA funds.

DCF may also plan to use funding to distribute clear masks to all licensed and DCF enrolled providers, which would allow infants and toddlers to observe expressions and non-verbal cues from caretakers to help develop communication and social skills.

Grants or assistance (Other than Subsidies) to stabilize child care providers

DCF currently plans to expand the impact of its provider sustainability grants to cover provider costs of operations and potential revenue losses, with stipulations for all licensed providers to use a portion of funding for payroll expenses for staff. As part of this program, DCF may create additional grant tiers for providers serving underserved areas or award larger amounts with proper documentation.

Due to the increased need for care at non-traditional hours by essential workers, DCF is also considering incentives (e.g., differential rates) for Child Care Subsidy enrolled providers during non-traditional hours to increase available capacity and reduce concern around operational costs.

Assistance to providers not participating in subsidy program prior to the pandemic

Beyond accessibility to sustainability grants, DCF will use funding for Technical Assistance to all licensed and DCF enrolled child care providers to connect them to resources that support sustainable business operations and other funding opportunities.

To increase the capacity of licensed care, DCF is considering covering a portion of the start-up costs for new licensed providers, especially in areas defined as "child care deserts" or that serve underserved populations.

Lastly, DCF is considering offering one-time grants to licensed providers for equipment or supplies for existing classrooms or home-based facilities (e.g., new carpet, games, books, educational toys, multicultural toys,

technology for classrooms, playground equipment), which can make a lasting impact on care experiences beyond the pandemic.

Other

To support workforce development, DCF is considering offering training scholarships for licensed child care providers and DCF enrolled providers and relevant trainings to navigate care in the COVID-19 environment. Based on a recent survey to providers, DCF plans to offer trainings on such topics as “Strategies for Working with Mixed Ages”, “Caring for Yourself to Care for Children”, and “Communicating and Working with Families.”

Anticipated changes and fund reservation

The Department for Children and Families intends to obligate all funding to planned investment opportunities by May 2021. DCF currently plans to implement the programs described above subject to further detailed implementation planning and stakeholder feedback. As programs are implemented and continuous feedback is gathered from stakeholders, there may be opportunities to reallocate funding from underutilized investments to other impactful child care investments. Further guidance is requested if any of the plans mentioned above are not allowable under the CCDF CRRSA guidelines. DCF would like further guidance on if the CCDF CRRSA funds may be used to support home visitation models, as input from stakeholders has shared a need to expand this in Kansas. Unless otherwise noted, most of these funding opportunities will be made available to all licensed child care providers to support their needs while they are operating as a child care setting.

Please let me know if you require additional information or clarification of information provided.

Sincerely,

/s/

Carla D Whiteside-Hicks, TANF and Early Childhood Programs Director
Kansas Department for Children and Families

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