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**State of New Hampshire Planned Use of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)
Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA) Funds**

To: Ellen C. Wheatley, Ph.D. Acting Director,
Office of Child Care
From: Christine L. Santaniello, Division Director
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Presented by:

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Plan Overview:

The State of New Hampshire proposes to expend the \$19,867,522 funds appropriated in CRRSA, in compliance with the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA) funded under the CCDBG Act (42 U.S.C. 9857 *et seq.*); 45 CFR Parts 98 and 99; Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (Pub. L. 116-260).

The Department intends to use these funds to further stabilize the child care industry in NH. Child Care is essential for children, families, and business. The child care industry was fragile prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic further stressed the system and these funds will be used to continue to stabilize the field as we look to the future and what is needed for NH's families and economy.

The plan is built on the premise that the future of child care has to align supply and demand. Child care must be available and affordable to NH families at the time and location needed to meet work schedules. Child care is not affordable and in some instances accessible to many NH families who are not eligible for CCDF, which affects a parent's ability to work. It also hinders a family's ability for upward economic mobility and capacity for self-support. Ultimately, lack of affordable and accessible child care exacerbates NH's workforce shortages and hinders and economic growth. This was the situation pre-pandemic and has been heightened by COVID-19.

This plan focuses on providing resources to child care providers for continued stabilization to get through the pandemic and be available to meet the needs of families and NH's workforce. Our intention for these funds is to be as flexible with providers as possible. A provider can use funds for subsidies, operational and programming costs and other allowable purposes. In the spring and summer of 2020, there was little interest in direct family type of subsidies even with direct outreach to the grocers association, hospitals and long-term care facilities. A pilot with NH Hospital was conducted with moderate success. The feedback from providers and families was for a broader, flexible plan with the ability to address the specific needs of the program, their families and community.

The NH CRRAS Plan will include the following components:

1. Direct Child Care Services (Subsidies)

NH DHHS plans to utilize approximately 25 % of the CCRSA funding to continue and expand child care subsidy assistance throughout the state. This will be accomplished in a three ways:

- a. Continuation and expansion of the School Age Child Care Full Day billing for the New Hampshire Child Care Scholarship Program (NHCCSP) Providers** - This program allows enrolled providers to bill for school age children in full day child care settings during what would ordinarily be a regular school day. Now, due to COVID, children are in full day care during both remote and hybrid learning days. The child care provider serves as a conduit for accessing remote learning provided by the school, supporting homework and logistics, break time activities and traditional child care functions. Child care providers are not “teaching” in lieu of the elementary school teachers, but as a support to the classroom work being offered. This program has been a tool for enrolling more providers in the child care scholarship program. This has resulted in expanding NHCCSP provider options for scholarship children, particularly those with income-eligible parents in the priority work sectors such as the health care sector, first responders, farm and food service workers and others deemed essential (see more in assistance to non-CCDF providers in Section III). Further, and most critical, it assist parents with the unanticipated expense of full day child care during the regular school year due to COVID shutdowns. It also allows them to return to/stay at work without added financial hardship or leaving children unattended.
- b. Continuation and expansion of the Absent Due to COVID Billing Program** – This program allows enrolled and eligible-for-enrollment NHCCSP providers to bill for up to 10 days of child care costs (within a designated 4-month period) based on a child’s age and service level when a child is absent due to any of the following circumstances:

From the DHHS/BCDHSC Policy Statement as of December 28, 2020 –

- “The child has been exposed directly to another child or adult with a diagnosed case of COVID-19 and the parent/guardian is instructed to contact the child’s healthcare provider for COVID-19 testing;
- The child’s program is fully or partially closed down at the recommendation NH Public Health due to an outbreak/exposure;
- The child is not able to return to child care until one of the following conditions is met:
 - The child has a DHHS Public Health-approved COVID-19 test, the result is negative, and the child’s symptoms are improving. The child must be fever-free for at least 24 hours and off any fever-reducing medications.
 - For children exposed directly to someone with a positive COVID test, the family and program follow the DHHS Public Health guidance for returning to the program.
 - The child test positive for COVID-19 with or without active symptoms.

This temporary policy change *does not apply* to the following circumstances:

- The parent opts to take the child out of state and the child care provider requires the family to isolate after returning.
- The program instructs the family to contact the child’s healthcare provider for COVID-19 testing, the parent decides against having the child tested and instead chooses to keep the child home until symptom free for 24 hours and off any fever-reducing medications.
- The New Hampshire Attorney General’s Office determines that the program engaged in practices that violate an executive order.”

Payments are made based on service levels as determined by the NHCCSP for both enrolled providers and eligible programs/providers. Providers not already enrolled in NHCCSP must start the enrollment process in order to be eligible for payment. Programs and providers (licensed and license-exempt) are able to bill for up to 10 days for each child during the period of December 28, 2020 and May 2, 2021. This program may be extended depending on available funds and ongoing need. This program is also being used as a conduit for enrolling more providers in NHCCSP to expand availability of provider access to parents, particularly those income-eligible parents in the child care deserts and/or priority work sectors such as the health care sector, first responders, farm and food service workers and others deemed essential (see more in assistance to non-CCDF providers in Section III). Further, it assists parents and programs with the unanticipated expense of absenteeism and program shutdowns due to COVID especially when programs lose income and/or must charge parents despite not having care and often being unable to work or forgo payment.

c. Targeted outreach to parents in need of child care – Through the DHHS Consumer education website (“NH Connections”) email, business association and localized networking, BCDHSC will collaborate with employment security colleagues and resource and referral contractors to expand the direct outreach to employers and employees in all occupations, with particular emphasis on the identified high need workers. The goal is to provide child care solutions and awareness of/access to NHCCSP, including work site child care need surveys, employer/child care partnerships, resource and referral services, alternative care solutions and program planning tools. Additionally, public facing videos and collateral materials will be available online and through employment security, DHHS district offices, employers, children’s health care providers and schools, which present information on topics such choosing quality child care, benefits and access to CCDF, home based care, and others.

Implementation of Virus Mitigation Policies and Practices

While this is not being done exclusively with the CRRSA funds, the policies, practices, programs and activities within the CRRSA funded activities are specifically built around providing resources, supplies, technical assistance and incentive to child care providers to implement the health and safety practices and policies in line with State, local and CDC COVID recommendations. These include:

- Offering an ongoing webinar educational series, Q & A sessions and informational guides for providers that include public health information from child care licensing, the BCDHSC and external partners;
- Implementing emergency policy changes that promote safe and healthy practices, such as the Absent Due to COVID policy;
- Requiring targeted COVID 19 and Child Care training online as part of funding and program participation;
- Promoting awareness of supply chain access, group buying clubs, and supply giveaway options to ensure that adequate health and safety supplies are available;
- Providing program health and safety kits for new or expanding providers (particularly those in the family child care initiative in detailed Section III), including thermometers, gloves, disinfectant, hand sanitizer, masks and paper products; and
- Utilizing state based technology to make the field aware of available child care provider vaccinations and creating a voluntary registration process across the state.

Grants or Assistance (Other than Subsidies) to Stabilize Child Care Providers

The State will distribute 75% of the funding to eligible child care programs/providers to support their operations as they continue to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic. The State recognizes and fully appreciates that child care programs have been essential partners with NH families as a critical support throughout the pandemic. Child care programs have offered much stability and a sense of normalcy for many of NH’s children. With a variety of funding streams, DHHS has supported the needs of the industry through the pandemic. This additional infusion of funding will assist in the efforts for the continued stabilization of programs.

CRRSA Grant Program: Eligibility for funding is not limited to those programs enrolled in NHCCSP. It includes licensed, license-exempt (friend and neighbor), and child care focused summer programs serving NH children. The streamlined CRRSA grant application for assistance opens on March 1 and will be available through the NH Connections Information System to all licensed and license-exempt providers providing child care for children birth to age 12 across the state. The goal is to distribute award notifications by March 26 and disseminate funding following award notification. Funding will be paid in one to two invoices based on program type (centers or home based/family) and award size.

The funding will be allocated after application reviews utilizing two formulas – one for family child care providers and license-exempt individual providers (friend and neighbor) and another for center/facility based care.

- Family child care providers and license-exempt individual providers will get a flat award based on size and capacity along with the number of NHCCSP children being served.
- Child care centers/facilities (licensed and license-exempt) will receive an award based on the following formula.
 - Number of classrooms;
 - Number of staff directly serving children and families at least 51% of the time; and
 - Percent of children enrolled and receiving NH Child Care Scholarship.

This formula takes into account the need to support programs to meet the needs of families and NH's workforce. The formula focuses on capacity, quality and increased staff needs to meet public health guidelines, and support to families who may be vulnerable, and those who may be working in jobs critical to NH's economy: health care, long-term care, hospitality, and retail.

Programs have the flexibility to use the funds to meet the business and operational needs they may be facing in the following areas:

- Employee wages and/or one-time bonuses;
- Income loss;
- Increased operating and/or occupancy costs;
- Materials and/or supplies;
- Staff development and/or training;
- Parent fees; and/or
- Other expenses/cost that lead to stabilization and recovery.

In conjunction with the funding award a required provider agreement that details the allowable uses and recordkeeping, program participation and reporting requirements.

Access, eligibility and the application process for the CRRSA funding program has been widely publicized through individual emails to all providers (NHCCSP and others), a Governor's office press release, individual emails from DHHS and their contractors, the NH Connections website, and partner networks. In addition, informational webinars and application support services are being provided throughout the application and implementation period.

CRRSA Family Child Care Initiative: This program will specifically focus on the establishment and expansion of family child care providers across the state, and specifically in areas where infant and toddler care, along with care in general, is at a premium. The program will include:

- Outreach to prospective and existing providers with resources for funding, materials, and support;
- Streamlined training, background checks and program set-up and marketing;
- Simultaneous licensing approvals and NHCCSP enrollment;
- Start-up/expansion kits including materials/toys for programming and health/safety supplies along with a tablet for communications and recordkeeping;
- Creation of localized cohorts and a one-on-one mentor system between established seasoned family child care providers and newbies to the field; and
- Options for participation in a “back office” operation for bookkeeping, billing, taxes and hr as needed.

Assistance to Providers Not Participating in the Subsidy System Prior to the Pandemic

Ensuring that all child care programs/providers across the state have access to funding, resources and support has been an ongoing mission of DHHS throughout the pandemic. Outreach efforts occur regularly to the over 1,100 early childhood and school age programs providing child care options across the state. These efforts have and will continue to include:

- Inclusion of NHCCSP enrolled and non-enrolled, but eligible, child care programs/providers in all correspondence including but not limited to, being registered in the NHCIS and in the master email distribution lists for the Department and its contractors;
- An ongoing outreach effort directly by phone by the Department’s Resource and Referral contractor to programs with incorrect or missing email addresses or contact information;
- Invitations to participate in informational webinars and virtual office hours to field questions on funding and resource options;
- Utilization of localized child care collaboratives and networks to make programs/providers aware of funding and resources available throughout the pandemic;
- Mapping of program scholarship and non-scholarship programs across the state and active solicitation of new enrollees to broaden families’ options;
- Open enrollment in trainings, webinars, informational calls to provide knowledge, resources, and peer support as it relates to child care in general and COVID challenges specifically;
- Level funding options for Absent Due to COVID for enrolled and eligible programs/providers;
- Direct outreach through publicity, partners and one-on-one relationships to programs ensuring their aware and able to participate in funding initiatives, support services and resource access along both geographic and program type lines to ensure statewide participation; and.
- Awareness campaigns for families that include ways to engage their child care providers in available services, funding and resources.

Other

In addition to the previously listed activities, the Department will also be utilizing a small portion of the funds for the following:

1. Establishment of a web-based grant application, communication and funding application within the NHCIS. This will expedite distribution of funds, information, updates and support. This is being built by the NHCIS contractor with a focus on utilization well beyond the grant period.
2. Funding staff to work exclusively on the implementation of the Department's COVID Recovery and Relief Supplemental Assistance (CRRSA) program and activities in close coordination with the BCDHSC/CRRSA Program Lead and other Department staff members, with the following accountabilities:

CRRSA Grant Support:

- Assisting the BCDHSC with the distribution, submission, and tracking of CRRSA applications through the NH Connections Information System (NHCIS) and obtain necessary clarifications and/or additional documentation from programs to determine eligibility and the amounts of awards.
- Providing timely email, telephonic and virtual support to CRRSA eligible awardees throughout the entire process.
- Assisting in the preparation and distribution of all award letters and accompanying documents to the CRRSA awardees and solicit all acceptances and invoices through the NHCIS.
- Tracking all CRRSA outreach, applications, awards, agreements, invoicing and reporting and provide that information on a predetermined schedule.
- Reviewing, approving and submitting CRRSA invoices to the Department for processing.
- Responding to CRRSA-related questions received from external stakeholders and partners.
- Coordinating any webinars and virtual office regarding the Department's COVID-related activities in tandem with the Department's designated staff.
- Providing administrative support for CRRSA and COVID-related projects as needed, including but not limited to, creating reports and visuals from the NHCIS data.
- Working with the Department to create a mid-cycle and final report and the associated protocol for CRRSA awardees to complete the reports and ensure their timely submission.
- Processing in coordination with the Department, all Absent Due to COVID invoice spreadsheets.

CRRSA Family Child Care Program - A staff person or persons will create and launch the Family Child Care Initiative as part of the CRRSA Program, which includes the following activities/accountabilities:

- Assisting in the design, planning, and implementation of a project to increase the supply of family child care in targeted counties across the state through the expansion of existing programs and launching of new ones.

- Supporting the Family Child Care Project participants and partners with administrative and technical support as needed including, but not limited to, inquiries, applications, coordination of training, connecting to resources, and funding.
- Creating and implementing an outreach program in coordination with the Department too include, but not be limited to, webinars, live or virtual outreach activities, and publicity.

Child Care Workforce Employment Support:

- Providing outreach services to support a Child Care Career Exploration Project (CCEP) designed to connect individuals with job and career options in early childhood or school age child care centers or home based operations.
- Providing employment support to existing and prospective child care center employees, family child care providers, particularly those referred from the TANF program.
- Information and outreach may include email, webinars, printed materials, telephone and virtual appointments to assist current/prospective providers to learn about the child care industry, potential advancement, available educational and career development resources.