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# COVID Relief Package Includes Some Relief for Child Care Providers

By **Christine Johnson-Staub**

After months of deliberation and delay, Congressional leaders have finally moved forward a **COVID relief package**. The package includes \$10 billion in Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds dedicated to relief for the child care sector, where providers have been **struggling to stay open** and serve children and families since the pandemic began in March. The legislation includes vital investments to support people with low incomes but comes up short in meeting the full scale of relief needed for families, states and communities, and the level of funding included to save the child care field falls woefully short of the at least \$50 billion needed.

That said, now is the time for states to plan distribution of the **\$10 billion in emergency CCDBG funding to support families and child care providers** impacted by COVID. Given the urgency around the need, special attention should be directed to the most underserved communities, and to meeting the needs of providers who are Black and other people of color who have been most impacted by the economic consequences of the pandemic and racial justice crises.

Similar to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, funds appropriated in this relief package can be used to reduce family copays and tuition, as well

as COVID-related expenses for child care providers, whether or not they are serving children receiving subsidies. The funds can cover costs of staff salaries, care for the children of essential workers regardless of income, costs related to reopening or operating at reduced capacity, and more.

State lead agencies should respond to the urgent needs providers and parents have raised throughout the pandemic to get the dollars out as quickly as possible. Some steps states can take to maximize impact include:

- Use the funds to initiate or continue policies that have helped parents with subsidies and providers caring for their children survive the pandemic, including covering fixed costs for providers that closed due to the pandemic, paying providers based on enrollment rather than attendance, covering the cost of parent co-payments, and extending parent eligibility periods;
- Encourage the use of funds to support and stabilize the child care workforce with differential pay, targeted health and safety measures, and other strategies to recognize the challenges child care workers are facing during the pandemic. Further, the legislation encourages states to place conditions on funds to ensure providers continue to pay staff salaries and wages;
- Streamline the application process for any sustainability grants and other resources to providers and ensure that they require as little reporting information as possible under the provisions of the federal law; and
- Work with providers and trusted messengers in communities where the need is the most to ensure they are prioritized in grant distribution, and that the relief dollars are reaching all settings and sizes of child care providers, including home based family child care providers, license exempt providers, and relative caregivers.

The federal Office of Child Care should move quickly to develop and deploy any necessary guidance that reflects these priorities and clarifies allowable uses of the funds. Under the provisions of the law, states have 60 days from its passage to report their intentions for using the emergency CCDBG funds and will have to report how they have spent the funds by October 31, 2022.

Although the CCDBG relief funds are insufficient to meet the full needs of the child care field, this latest round of federal support can provide much-needed assistance to a field

that meets a critical need for families and the economy. While the field continues to fight for the full \$50 billion it needs to survive, federal and state leaders should act quickly to address the most urgent needs of providers and families during this challenging time.

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