

A message from the Early Childhood Services Bureau and Child Care Licensing Program

Background:

The Federal Office of Child Care administers the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG); the funding from this grant is commonly called "CCDF". The funds are used to support Montana's child care system including the child care licensing program, quality rating system, and child care subsidy program.

In 2014, Congress re-authorized the federal law that regulate the fund for the first time since 1996. This was an important bipartisan step in advancing safety and best practices in child care across the country and brought about many changes.

Last fall, staff from the Early Childhood Services Bureau and Child Care Licensing met with over 800 people in various communities to inform them about the 2016-2018 State Plan and to receive feedback and host discussions about how the changes might impact Montana. The Department received public comments on the State Plan; these comments were reviewed and considered along with the feedback from the community forums. Based on the feedback and public comments, the Department has made the following decisions.

What's happening in Montana?

- Legally Certified Providers (LCP) - will now be known as Family, Friend and Neighbor Provider (FFN) and will be required to attain the same background check, training, and monitoring schedule as all other providers. The monitoring process will begin prior to September 2017.
- Preservice orientation training is required within 90 days after employment for any provider or caregiver/teacher. Orientation will be available online, with the exception of First Aid and CPR.
- Background checks are required for child care providers and staff. By September 2017, the background checks will include: FBI fingerprint check; MT criminal record check; Criminal and sex offender registry and Child protective services check (for Montana and any other state the individual has lived in the last 5 years); and National sex offender registry check.
- Health and Safety training is required for all providers and caregivers. New to our requirements is the decision to offer 4 approved hours of training for First Aid and CPR. All providers and staff will be required to be CPR/First Aid certified now. Total annual training hours required will be as follows:
 - ◇ FFN : 8 hours
 - ◇ Center Director: 20 hours
 - ◇ Provider: 16 hours
- Group size is still under consideration and a work group comprised of providers and ECSB/QAD staff have proposed a draft for this requirement. One of the suggestions is that "Group size for a child care center is determined by the square footage of the classroom as outlined under ARM 37.95.610. Each facility must provide a written policy stating how children are assigned to a caregiver within a classroom. The number of children assigned to a specific caregiver cannot exceed the ratio identified.
- Inspections will be conducted before a new program opens, and at least once every year for all programs.
- New Best Beginnings Scholarship Policies:
 - ◇ Twelve month eligibility: Families are eligible for a minimum of 12 months before eligibility is re-determined
 - ◇ Grace Period: Scholarship will continue for 90 calendar days following a job loss
 - ◇ Absent Days: 24 days of care are covered for a twelve-month period
 - ◇ College Students: Families may receive assistance while one or both parents are full-time students without having to meet a work activity requirement.
 - ◇ Graduated Eligibility: eligibility up to 185% of the federal poverty level for an extended 6 month period
 - ◇ Homeless Families: 90 days of presumptive eligibility to aid in the establishment of care for their children
 - ◇ Market Rate Survey: MT has conducted a new market rate survey. The goal is to identify market rates geographically, and to determine provider reimbursement rates.

The Department is appreciative of the feedback and discussion pertaining to the CCDF Reauthorization Rules, and the 2016-2018 State Plan. The new policies and rules reflect concerns and suggestions. As policies and rules continue to be revised, the public has a right to comment, and the Department will consider each comment before proposing final rule.

If you have any questions, please contact: Patty Butler, ECSB Chief, pbutler@mt.gov