Mills Administration Supports Child Care for Working Families with $8 Million Investment from Coronavirus Relief Fund

July 17, 2020

In combination with other federal funds, Maine's support for providers meets Bipartisan Policy Center recommendation for recovery

AUGUSTA - The Mills Administration announced today that it will invest more than $8 million from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund to further boost access to child care and support Maine's working families in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will provide an additional $8.4 million to more than 1,700 Maine child care providers for the extra costs and challenges of operating during the pandemic.

"Maine's working families are weathering the challenges posed by this pandemic while our child care providers have kept their children healthy and safe," **said Governor Mills.** "This investment will further support them and our economy as we approach the fall. But Congress must do more to help child care providers recover and ensure that families have access to quality, affordable care."

"Over 80 percent of Maine's child care providers are open, a testament to their commitment to health and safety precautions in partnership with the families they serve," **said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. "This funding will further support relief, recovery, and accommodation of additional children, although funding from Congress for sustainability and stability is needed."

Through the funding announced today, center-based providers will each receive up to $9,200 and family-based providers will each receive up to $950 to cover COVID-related expenses.

At the same time, the Department will award the remaining $2.8 million from the previously announced (//www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DHS+Press+Releases&id=2427418&v=dhhs_article_2020) $11 million in CARES Act funding for Maine, focusing on child care providers that are open and providing care by September 8, 2020. Child care centers will receive an additional $2,800 in aid and family-based providers will receive an additional $550, with grants issued in August.

Taken together, the child care reimbursement announced today from the Coronavirus Relief Fund and the CARES Act grants meet the Bipartisan Policy Center's recommended amount needed for child care providers to remain open or reopen in the face of the pandemic. In a letter to Congress, the Bipartisan Policy Center calculated that providers would need up to $12,000 (centers) and $1,500 (family-based) to re-open and make needed adjustments for health and safety precautions.

"Child care is an essential service for Maine's working parents and a cornerstone of the economy," **said Linda Smith, Director, Early Childhood Initiative at the Bipartisan Policy Center**. "The Bipartisan Policy Center applauds these re-opening funds to child care providers which will help ensure parents have access to reliable, safe, and quality child care during these challenging times. The risk of permanent closure is too great. This support demonstrates Maine's commitment to help both family child care and center-based programs survive while supporting families returning to the workforce."

Still, child care providers face new operating costs due to the pandemic that will persist beyond reopening for increased staff, personal protective equipment, facility modifications for safety, and cleaning. Governor Mills' Economic Recovery Committee recommended $45 million for child care and after school programing in the fall. Maine Attorney General Aaron Frey recently signed on to a letter (//www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=Portal+News&id=2908385&v=article-2017) to Congress supporting up to $50 billion in child care assistance.

As of today, over 80 percent of Maine's approximately 1,700 licensed child care providers are open, up from about 50 percent in April. This reflects, in part, robust support from the DHHS Office of Child and Family Services. The Office has awarded the bulk of the previously announced $11 million in CARES Act funding, available through the Child Care and Development Block Grant, providing a one-time stipend to all licensed child care providers in April, subsidy support for essential workers through June 30, 2020; and grants to resume operations by June 30, 2020.

Recognizing the ongoing needs of the public while prioritizing children's safety, it has permitted child care providers to remain open throughout the State of Civil Emergency to serve Maine families, including parents who are essential to Maine's response to the pandemic. It has distributed updated guidance (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/documents/covid-

19/Stage%202%20COVID%20Guidance%20for%20ME%20Childcare%20Programs.pdf) to promote the health and safety of children, families, child care providers, and their communities. The Office has also worked with child care partners to match (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/documents/covid-19/Essential%20Care%20Overview%20FINAL.pdf) working parents with providers who remain open.

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