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(Jackson, Miss.) – As part of the $2.2 trillion economic stimulus package passed by Congress in March 2020, the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) has dedicated $47 million to assist child care centers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Child care providers were hit hard by the onset of the novel coronavirus, causing most centers to suspend operation during the crisis and left many unsure if they would be able to restart. MDHS' Division of Early Childhood Care and Development (DECCD) took immediate action to help those affected survive the shutdown. One means of doing that was using funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, otherwise known as the CARES Act.

"I often say child care represents the backbone of the workforce," said Dr. Chad Allgood, Deputy Director of DECCD. "Without child care we couldn't work. It is extremely important that we understand how important child care is, and the funding we receive is just part of the support that we can throw behind our child care providers."

Three ongoing avenues of support are:

- $8.2 million in Emergency Certificates that allow essential and emergency personnel, to receive assistance in paying for child care.
- $13.9 million in enhanced rates and enrollment-based payments designed to help ensure child care centers survive the pandemic.
- $7.3 million to pay co-payments for parents to further stabilize provider income streams while eliminating an extra expense for families

In addition to these incentives, $4 million has been designated for providing health and safety personal protective equipment for child care centers. MDHS had previously provided personal protective equipment and other supplies to the 12 hardest hit counties in Mississippi.

MDHS is planning to use $13.6 million as one-time cash assistance for child care centers, and that project is in the final implementation phases.

"Parents need to be able to work and contribute to the economic recovery of Mississippi without worrying about whether their children are going to be safe," said MDHS Executive Director Robert G. "Bob" Anderson. "Every day we see businesses filing bankruptcy as a result of this

pandemic. We are committed to using all resources at our disposal to ensure child care centers survive and thrive."

To learn more about the Division of Early Childhood Care and Development and how to apply for child care assistance, visit https://www.mdhs.ms.gov/early-childhood-care-development/.

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