Maine DHHS awards CARES Act funding to support essential workers and child care providers in response to COVID-19

June 12, 2020

More than 500 essential workers and 1,600 providers receive financial relief, additional grants to be issued through mid-July

AUGUSTA – The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) announced today that 525 essential workers have received financial help for child care and more than 1,600 child care providers have received stipends as part of the award of nearly $11 million in federal CARES Act funding to Maine. Additional grants will be awarded to child care providers through mid-July.

Maine DHHS announced the award (//www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DHS+Press+Releases&id=2427418&v=dhhs_article_2020) of the federal funds on April 22 and has since distributed over $6 million, with the remainder to be distributed by mid-July under a plan (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/documents/covid-19/CARES%20Act%20Grant%20Memo%2006012020.pdf) that supports Maine families and child care providers in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Throughout this pandemic, child care providers have kept children safe while their parents work on the frontlines to maintain critical services for Maine people. I am deeply grateful for those efforts," said Governor Mills. "This additional funding is going directly to our frontline workers to offset the costs of child care and to child care providers, allowing them to serve more families who are now returning to work and supporting our efforts to restart Maine's economy."

"Maine families and child care providers have risen to the considerable challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic," **said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. "We are pleased to distribute this financial support and we welcome the reopening of additional providers."

"We are proud to support hardworking Maine people by expanding access to high-quality child care and to support our dedicated providers throughout Maine," **said Todd Landry, Director of the DHHS Office of Child and Family Services.**

As of today, over 75 percent of Maine's approximately 1,800 licensed child care providers are open, up from about 50 percent in April. Recognizing the ongoing needs of the public while prioritizing children's safety, Maine DHHS 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. The DHHS Office of Child and Family Services 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.

Maine received $10,953,470 for child care under the CARES Act in late April, through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families' Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program. The CCDBG program helps eligible low-income and working families to afford child care and supports providers in delivering high-quality care.

DHHS has distributed these funds in two ways:

- **Child care subsidies for essential workers:** Under the CARES Act, child care subsidies typically available only to low-income families became temporarily available to essential workers, regardless of their income. This includes health care workers, first responders, emergency medical services personnel, state employees, grocery store staff, environmental services professionals, and others. Since late April, 525 essential employees in Maine have received a child care subsidy under the CARES Act, supporting 793 children. This assistance supports households where all parents/guardians are essential employees who are reporting to work outside the home. The subsidy amount is based on the child's age and child care costs in their area and is paid weekly on parents' behalf directly to their child care provider. Additional applications for this expanded temporary assistance are pending and the deadline for new applications, as previously announced, is today. Families who are eligible under the standard income limits, including essential workers, may apply for subsidies at any time. Those interested in learning more may visit the Child Care Subsidy

section of the Office of Child and Family Services COVID-19 response page (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/COVID-19-response.shtml) .

- **Stipends for child care providers:** Child care providers affected by the pandemic received assistance through the CARES Act to help them address immediate expenses. Since late April, Maine DHHS has paid one-time stipends to 1,650 providers, based on their capacity and the extent of their current operations. The stipend totals $75 per licensed child care slot for all providers and an additional $100 per licensed child care slot for providers who were open and providing care.

DHHS is now preparing to distribute the remaining CARES Act funds to support child care providers in resuming or continuing operations.

- **Grants for child care providers:** All licensed providers who are currently open or will be opening by June 30, 2020 will receive grants to help them serve children and families as the economy gradually reopens. Maine DHHS opened the grant application process (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/documents/covid-19/CARES%20Act%20Grants%20for%20Licensed%20Child%20Care%20Providers%20060420.pdf) on June 8 and will accept applications through June 21, 2020. Eligible child care centers will receive a one-time grant of $3,000 while family child care providers, which have lower enrollment limits, will receive a one-time grant of $750. Grant awards will be issued as soon as possible and no later than mid-July.

This federal funding builds on the strategies Maine DHHS has implemented to support Maine families and child care providers in response to the pandemic, including:

- Paying the parent portion of costs in the child care subsidy program;
- Paying the child care subsidy on behalf of children when providers are closed due to COVID-19;
- Extending all current child care subsidy awards for three months to allow families additional time to submit documentation;
- Implementing emergency, temporary child care licenses to meet the needs of essential employees;
- Regularly distributing guidance to child care providers about appropriate health and safety precautions.

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