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Governor Pritzker Announces Plan to Expand Child Care in Next Phases of Restore Illinois

Chicago – Building on a robust, statewide effort to ensure Illinois can safely reopen and families can return back to work, Governor Pritzker announced the state's plan for a gradual reopening of child care in Phases 3 and 4 of Restore Illinois.

"We can't have a conversation about going back to work without talking about child care – anything else leaves a large portion of the workforce, especially women who too often bear a disproportionate burden, without any way to move forward while caring for their kids," **said Governor JB Pritzker.** "Illinois must take a cautious approach that appropriately balances the need to greatly expand child care with the need to lessen the risk of spreading the coronavirus."

To date, Illinois has not seen significant transmission of COVID-19 in child care settings, which is encouraging evidence that child care can be provided safely. However, public health experts note that there is still much we need to learn about the virus, its impact on children, and how it spreads. Therefore, Illinois is implementing a cautious approach that appropriately balances the need to greatly expand child care with the need for prudent restrictions that lessen the risk of spreading the coronavirus.

Based off the advice of public health experts, the new group size limits will be roughly 30% lower than their pre-pandemic levels for centers. For licensed homes which tend to be smaller, most will be able to operate at standard capacity. Collectively, these efforts would bring Illinois to three-quarters of the previous child care capacity in the state.

Providers that have been successfully operating as emergency child care providers can move immediately to these new maximum capacities when their Region enters Phase 3. Most licensed child care homes will also be able to reopen to their licensed capacity.

Illinois is encouraging all of the currently closed licensed child care providers to reopen when their Region moves to Phase 3 to serve the many families who will be returning to work. Those providers that have been closed and will reopen must develop a Reopening Plan that ensures they have revised operational and preparedness policies in place before op
These newly reopened providers will ha sroom, for the first 4 weeks. Once they have provid health, social distancing and sanitation routines and g s, th t their full licensed capacity.

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There will be no restrictions on which families can use child care in Phases 3 and 4.

Recognizing children's need for quality early learning experiences, all providers will be expected to resume compliance with all licensing standards related to curriculum, learning environment, and staff qualifications.

The state gathered input from over 80 stakeholders in discussions on how to safely and prudently reopen child care across Illinois, from new health and sanitation protocols, to staff training needs, to what supports families will need as they return to child care. The recommendations shaped Illinois' roadmap for safely increasing access to child care as families return to work.

The state has made significant investments in its vast child care network during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as implementing a simple waiver process to allow providers to be paid for all of their enrolled children in the Child Care Assistance Program for March through June, so that child care staff could continue to be paid as normal through this unprecedented period. The state also increased the CCAP money that emergency center providers receive for each child.

Illinois is continuing to work on developing appropriate business relief funds that will help to minimize the financial impact of these necessary limitations and is working alongside the state's congressional delegation to amplify its support for our national child care landscape in an upcoming relief package.

"True to form as a long time advocate of high quality child care and early education, Governor Pritzker's plan reflects thoughtful and deliberate planning to ensure that children, providers, and their families will have the guidance needed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Naturally, the pandemic will dictate modifications to the provision of child care, but the experts and advocates who informed the plan held the science, of both child development and infection control, as the number one priority through all of their decision making," **said Goeff Nagel, President of Erikson Institute.**

"The value of child care to our workforce and economy is more evident than ever before. It's vital that we reopen child care as safely as possible to help accommodate the reopening of businesses statewide. Child care is necessary to help working parents return to jobs, their kids return to learning, and employers return to productivity," **said Kayla Edwards, Managing Partner at Express Employment Professionals of Springfield, Jacksonville and Bloomington, and a member of the nonprofit ReadyNation network of business leaders.** "These plans for renewing child care capacity are also an important component of ongoing efforts to help care providers weather this storm - protecting their health and their viability as small businesses in their own right."

"I would like to commend the Governor's Office, the Department of Human Services and the Department of Children and Family Services for creating a thoughtful plan to safely and responsibly reopen child care. Parents should feel comfortable knowing that th **lund, Center Director of Center Director at Malones**

"I am in agreement with this plan as it is precautions, and safeguards put in place for p returning to the workforce knowing they will have care available," **said Marlena Constant, Legislative Chair for**

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Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children.

"This plan follows the best available information and recommendations from local, state, and international medical and public health officials. The Governor's phased reopening approach will allow providers to reopen their centers and homes, providing parents with the child care they need to go to work as Illinois' businesses reopen?—and most importantly, doing so in the safest way possible," **said Maria Whelan, President and CEO of Illinois Action for Children.**

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