ND Emergency Commission approves extending Child Care Emergency Operating Grant program through mid-August to support economic recovery

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The North Dakota Emergency Commission approved the North Dakota Department of Human Services' request for $9.6 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to extend the state's Child Care Emergency Operating Grant program through Aug. 14, 2020, pending approval from the Legislature's Budget Section next week.

The grant program was implemented March 30 to support child care providers impacted by the pandemic. Providers had to adjust to a drop in the demand for child care while implementing new state and federal COVID-19 guidance that limited child group sizes and added new child and staff health screenings, cleaning and sanitizing requirements and other modified operating practices.

Through June, North Dakota has invested about $19 million in the emergency operating grants, which have helped over 775 licensed and self-declared child care providers remain open and caring for over 16,250 children.

The department is making some changes to the emergency operating grant program that will be effective July 4, 2020. The grant payment rate, per child, per service period will be halved. Rates vary by a child care provider's license type and capacity. The updated rate information is online at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/child-care.html.

Participating providers will also no longer be required to prioritize serving children of health, safety and lifeline worker households, and the fees child care providers typically charge families to hold a spot during extended child absences will no longer be required to be capped at $50.

Jessica Thomasson, the department's Executive Policy Lead for Family Stability, explained the reason for the program changes. "Our goal has been to help stabilize and strengthen this industry, which is so critical to workforce, to North Dakota's Smart Restart, and to children and families. We will continue to offer the operating grants at a lower level, as we move to less restrictive grant requirements, see economic activity grow and as child care program attendance continues to stabilize," she said.

Because the coronavirus pandemic has not ended, all modified operating practices remain in place, including group size caps to support the health and safety of children, families and caregivers.

A list of participating providers is on the department's website at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/child-care.html. Providers who choose to participate can find information online there.

Parents looking for child care can visit the Child Care Aware Resource and Referral online database at www.ndchildcare.org or can call Child Care Aware, which provides personal consultation free of charge to identify quality child care options that work for individual family needs.

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