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Agency of Human Services

Memorandum

To: Senate Education Committee
From: Steven Berbeco, CDD Deputy Commissioner
Date: June 2, 2020
RE: Update on Supports for Child Care Re-Opening

The Child Development Division understands that Committee members have questions about re-opening childcare including finances, facilities, health guidance and supplies. Please see the information below related to these topics:

Finances

Childcare programs have been financially supported during the closure period (March 17 - May 31) through two programs: the Essential Persons Incentive Program for providers who have been open to serve our essential workforce, and through the Stabilization Program for temporarily closed providers to sustain their financial stability so they may reopen. These programs have been voluntary, and at least half of providers open pre-closure are participating in one of these programs. To date, more than \$7.3 million has been paid to providers.

The Restart Stipend Program offers additional financial support to childcare programs that commit to re-opening. This stipend can be used to purchase cleaning supplies and other materials that are recommended by the recent Vermont Department of Health (VDH) guidance; it can also be used to hire additional staff as needed. The total Restart Program amount of \$6 million will be distributed among eligible program applicants, including summer day camps. The Department for Children and Families Commissioner's Office is administering this program.

CDD distributed a letter on the support available to eligible Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) families during June to childcare providers on May 18th; a similar letter has also gone out to families. CCFAP changed from attendance-based to enrollment-based payments during the closure period because families were only eligible for childcare if they were considered an Essential Person and wanted to ensure that the most vulnerable families received financial support to keep their child care spaces during the closure. With the announced re-opening of childcare on June 1st, CCFAP is returning to being attendance- with policies in place to support the vulnerable families in access to child care. The letters to providers and families include an important update: families who would like to have their child remain home for some additional time in June because of a COVID-19 related concern can opt to continue their subsidy payment to their open childcare provider to save their slot.



Capacity

Vermont has had a childcare capacity deficit prior to the current health crisis. Recent capacity building grants over the past year have resulted in new programs becoming licensed and programs increasing their licensed capacity, which has helped to mitigate the problem. However, programs are independent businesses and will make their own decisions about re-opening in June. They could decide to delay re-opening, have a short-term closure, or permanent closure depending on their business needs.

The childcare profession includes many individuals who are recommended by VDH not to return to work at this time because of advanced age, compromised immune systems, or other medical conditions making them more vulnerable to COVID-19. The decision whether to return to work is between a childcare provider and their employee.

CDD licensing staff are aware that some childcare providers would prefer to move their programs to another location for a variety of reasons. We have already been working with some providers to issue variances that permit this change through our regulated system.

CDD has also been supporting childcare programs to re-open through prioritization of license applications and background clearances to reduce delays. The strong childcare referral specialist network, available state-wide, will help match families with open and available childcare programs this summer and beyond.

While we believe many childcare programs will re-open over time, we also know that some programs will be closing for various reasons that preceded this health crisis. This is our understanding of the childcare program sponsored by UVM. This program was slated to close by UVM's administration prior to the pandemic due to lack of use and the financial needs of the University.

When a program closes, the community often comes together to brainstorm how to fill that capacity. Our division supports all the available options including new applicants for the same space, a current licensee expanding their own site, or the current program may move locations. The community brainstorming process has been a success in past instances, particularly with the Heartworks group of programs in Montpelier and Chittenden County where little capacity was lost. We are aware of the St. Mike's child care's intention to close – the community is actively brainstorming available options now and we are involved.

Health Guidance and Supplies

We understand that child care providers may be concerned about access to appropriate supplies. Working with the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), we are distributing non-contact infrared thermometers at no charge to programs that are open and in need of one. We are also supporting the distribution of facial coverings to child care providers and Children's Integrated Services providers at no cost to providers. CDD has recommended that child care programs approach distilleries for hand sanitizer in cases where this product is unavailable locally. We have requested gloves from the SEOC for diapering and health checks, as recommended by



VDH guidance, and we are working to make those available to programs. CDD is currently problem-solving with the SEOC on how to make cleaning supplies readily available to programs who may be limited by purchase quantity maximums at local retailers. VDH has not recommended other Personal Protective Equipment for childcare providers, such as N-95 respirators or isolation gowns.

We understand that VDH is presenting webinars daily to different groups of providers on implementing the health guidance that went into effect on June 1st. Public health nurses at VDH are available to speak one-on-one with childcare programs, and CDD is coordinating with VDH on posters, facts sheets, and policy and procedure statements that will be provided to childcare programs in the near future.

Data

Our computer system, the Bright Futures Information System (BFIS), tracks active childcare licenses and closed licenses. It cannot track temporary closures or re-openings. Due to this, we do not have concrete data on the rate of re-opening. Our best estimates are below:

- Prior to COVID, we had just more than 1167 licensed childcare providers with an active license
- We currently have approximately 1160 total programs with active licenses
- We are estimating approximately 500-550 of them are open as of June 1st
 - Restart Stipend requests tell us approximately 500 regulated programs have requested funds to open by the first week in June
 - Licensing calls with programs show approximately 550 regulated programs will be opening by the first week in June

Programs close and new programs open on a rolling basis. We cannot say how many permanent closures of programs are due to the pandemic as programs close for a variety of reasons.

If you have further questions, please contact me at Steven.Berbeco@vermont.gov.

