

Gov. Pritzker Announces Nation-Leading Childcare Investments To Support Parents And Providers In COVID-19 Recovery

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CHICAGO - Governor JB Pritzker and Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Secretary Grace Hou today announced a series of nation-leading investments to strengthen access to childcare for parents seeking to reenter the workforce while simultaneously bolstering childcare providers and their employees.

As families across Illinois continue to get back on their feet amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, IDHS is expanding Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) eligibility to include three months of free coverage for unemployed parents who meet the CCAP eligibility requirements to help residents get back to work.

The Pritzker administration is also providing bonuses of up to \$1,000 for eligible childcare workers. These bonuses will be followed by two more rounds of childcare restoration grants, plus an additional phase of grants in 2022, with \$300 million to be made available to providers across the state.

Today's announcement builds on the administration's ongoing commitment to providing affordable, accessible childcare for all Illinois families. Earlier this year, the Governor announced CCAP co-pays would decrease for 80% of families who participate in the program. Families who meet certain income eligibility requirements, with income below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level have seen their monthly co-pays reduced to \$1.

Since the pandemic began, the State has invested more than \$700 million in COVID-19 relief funding in the state's childcare industry. Through the first round of Child Care Restoration Grants, over 5,000 providers have received monetary support, representing 85% of eligible childcare centers and 40% of licensed family childcare homes. On average, childcare centers have received over \$270,000 each and childcare homes have received an average of \$13,000.

"Childcare is an essential part of a strong and equitable economy, and I'm proud that Illinois is leading the nation in supporting families and providers," said Governor JB Pritzker. "Without safe and affordable childcare, too many caregivers – especially women – can't return to the workforce. We're taking a major step to address this problem in Illinois, and rebuild our childcare ecosystem – and rebuild it better."

Beginning October 1, 2021, parents who are unemployed and actively seeking employment will be eligible for three months of Child Care Assistance, provided they meet the standard CCAP eligibility requirements. If parents become employed or enroll in an education program before the end of the three-month period and meet all other CCAP eligibility requirements, their eligibility will continue for 12 months in total.

In addition, DHS will launch the Child Care Workforce Bonus program next month. Through the program, all staff at licensed and license-exempt childcare centers and homes will be eligible to receive up to a \$1000 bonus, provided they meet all licensing and health and safety requirements. Childcare workers will receive the payment through their employer between October 2021 and March 2022.

Application information about the program will be available for employers via the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) in the coming weeks. Employers are required to pay staff 100% of the bonus amount awarded by the state.

“Thanks to the unwavering leadership of Governor Pritzker, our administration is mobilizing federal recovery dollars to provide grants that will help Illinois businesses continue with the reopening, bring back their staff, and rebuild stronger,” said IDHS Secretary, Grace B. Hou. “At IDHS, we have taken necessary steps to support front-line workers who are the fabric of communities across the state. The childcare network is essential to rebuilding our economy.”

The administration will also launch a final round of 2021 Child Care Restoration Grants and later this year will open applications for 2022 Stabilization Grants. The Child Care Restoration Grants administered through IDHS continue to offer childcare providers access to funds that can help counterbalance losses due to COVID-19 and take advanced steps to rebuild from the impacts of the pandemic. The program has been in place since 2020 when it provided \$290 million to small businesses and childcare providers across the state. \$270 million in additional funds have been invested in providers, to date, in 2021.

“Access to early childhood has the power to change the future of our city and state. on behalf of children and families, I’m incredibly grateful to have a governor whose COVID-19 response and recovery plan includes a significant investment in early childhood. Our children’s learning needs to start early, and parents need to be back at work. The plans the Governor outlined today will make sure that’s possible,” said Libby Shortenhaus, Chief Executive Officer, Christopher House.

The administration’s comprehensive support programming has prevented the mass closure of childcare facilities across the state and provided parents with safe places to care for their children as they reenter the workforce. Of the licensed childcare centers that received a state grant in 2020, 98% are still open and serving children. Approximately 30% fewer childcare centers closed over the last year than closed on average each year from 2016 to 2018.

Currently, 93,406 children are served through the CCAP. For more information on childcare support opportunities, visit www.ilgateways.com/financial-opportunities/restoration-grants.