

# Our Recommendations

## Child Care and the COVID-19 Challenge



On March 9, Governor DeSantis declared a State of Emergency in Florida to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Since then, schools have closed, public spaces have emptied, and restaurants have pivoted to take-out and delivery operations only. Families and small businesses are feeling the squeeze.

Many “essential personnel” are still reporting to work: first responders, health care workers, food service teams, and—crucially—the early learning providers who care for their children.

While Florida schools are closed and learning continues online at home, scant guidance has been provided to early learning/child care providers on balancing the need for care with the need to keep families, children, and their employees safe. They have been asked only to limit group sizes so no more than 10 people are in any one space and to enhance sanitation practices.

The Children’s Movement of Florida urges the Department of Education, Department of Health, and Department of Children & Families (DCF) to increase collaboration and issue clear public health guidance to all child care providers statewide, and to make temporary changes on early childhood policy to provide the stability parents and small businesses need during this emergency.

- ➔ **Issue clear public health and emergency support guidance to child care providers**  
Many child care providers are closing at least temporarily to curb the spread of COVID-19, while others are remaining open to serve the children of those who cannot work from home. The latest health and safety protocols and policy updates should be shared with all providers via regular webinars/conference calls, with consistent messaging across agencies.
- ➔ **Pay providers a premium to expand child care for essential personnel**  
Center-based and home-based providers that remain open to serve families do so at increased risk to their staff and are required to maintain lower ratios to meet CDC guidelines. Specific funds should be allocated to Early Learning Coalitions to offer incentives for providers to stay open and financial assistance to procure supplies for sanitation and additional health screenings.
- ➔ **Support families seeking care and providers offering services**  
The statewide Child Care Resource & Referral lines should be used to match families’ needs with open providers. Early Learning Coalitions can collaborate with local municipalities and emergency operations to anticipate potential shortages and offer incentives to providers who help meet these needs. All providers should receive notice of the opportunity to serve families; family child care homes may be very well placed to offer care in the small groups recommended by the CDC.

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- **Expedite background checks to help providers cover staffing shortages**  
DCF should provide expedited background checks so child care centers can hire temporary employees as needed during this emergency. Required health and safety trainings and CPR certification should be offered online.
- **Ensure continuity of payments for providers**  
State funding for children in Voluntary Prekindergarten and School Readiness should continue based on enrollment on March 1—plus additional capacity added by those who remain open—so providers are not penalized if parents choose to keep their children at home, or if a provider determines he or she must close temporarily.
- **Protect subsidy eligibility for families**  
Parents who choose to keep their children home and parents who lose their jobs during this emergency should not lose their eligibility for School Readiness. Eligibility redetermination deadlines should be amended accordingly and family copays waived for continuity of care, if needed.
- **Clarify the implications of cancelled assessments**  
The Department of Education has canceled all remaining assessments for this year. For School Readiness and Voluntary Prekindergarten, these screenings and assessments are used to determine tiered payments and program quality. Providers should be advised that payments will continue at current levels, and those on probation will continue in their current status for 2020-2021 to allow time for their improvement plans to show results.
- **Share information on small business loans directly with all providers**  
Unlike public schools, child care providers do not know whether they can continue paying their staff and keep the lights on if they need to close during this emergency. State agencies should communicate directly with all providers about the application process for Florida Small Business Emergency Bridge Loans and other financial assistance that may be available, and offer assistance to directors for completing any documentation required.

Child care providers are crucial in our society and a substantial part of our economy. Recognizing their contributions and supporting these small businesses is fundamental in supporting children and families during the COVID-19 emergency.

Dave Lawrence, Chair

Vance Aloupis, CEO

Madeleine Thakur, Chief of Staff

# Some Context

## Child Care and the COVID-19 Challenge



**1.1**   
**million**

Children under the  
age of 6 in Florida

### School Readiness

- Provides subsidized, educational child care for families that work or go to school
- \$760 million program funded with 80% federal dollars

### Voluntary Pre-K

- Constitutionally available for every 4-year-old child in the state

**62%**

Florida children in School Readiness Program



**75%**

Florida 4-year olds enrolled in VPK

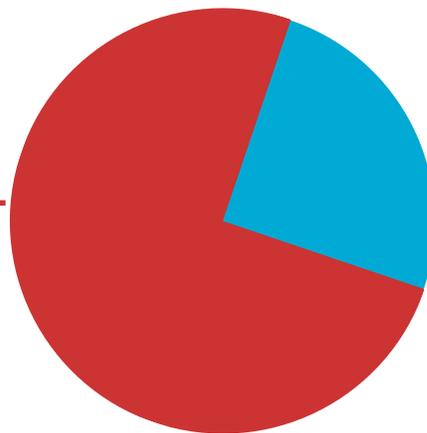


**11,759**  
**PROVIDERS**

Child care programs in Florida include schools, child care centers, home-based providers, and religious providers. **Together they have the capacity to serve 937,312 children.**

**65%**

 of Florida providers serve VPK and School Readiness children



# Some Context

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## Who are "essential personnel?"

- Staff and providers of child care and education services (including custodial and kitchen staff and other support staff) who do not work remotely
- Providers of health care including but not limited to workers at clinics, hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs); nursing homes, long-term care and post-acute care facilities, respite houses; designated agencies, emergency medical services
- Criminal justice personnel including those in law enforcement, courts, and correctional services
- Public health employees
- Firefighters, National Guard, and other first responders
- State employees deemed essential for response
- Staff at Emergency Operations Centers
- Active duty military staff
- Pharmacy staff
- Foster families with children through grade 8
- 2-1-1 call center staff
- Critical infrastructure/utility workers - electrical, plumbing, telecommunications, water/wastewater operators and staff
- State, municipal, and commercial public works or sanitation crews
- Grocery and food supply workers
- Supply chain, postal, and delivery drivers
- Manufacturers of medical devices, equipment, testing equipment, and supplies
- Fuel distribution workers