

The Honorable Brian Kemp
Office of the Governor
203 State Capitol
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Dear Governor Kemp:

Thank you for your continued hard work and dedication to Georgians during this unprecedented time. We appreciate your announcement on Wednesday recognizing the importance of child care for essential workers during this pandemic and calling attention to local efforts to help address those challenges.

However, we understand that many programs like those established by the YMCA of Metropolitan Atlanta are currently at maximum capacity, serving only a fraction of the child care needs of frontline staff. We fear that, without additional and immediate funding to meet their child care needs, these essential workers will stop coming to work when we need them most.

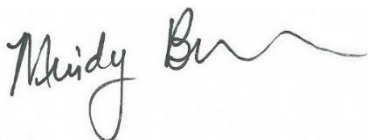
We urge you to provide emergency funding to support child care providers in serving children of essential personnel. Specifically, we are requesting \$5 million to serve the children of essential workers across the state. We believe these emergency funds will serve approximately 3,000 children for 3 months.

It is our urgent hope your administration understands the critical nature of the lack of reliable and safe child care for our frontline personnel. If these needs are not swiftly and sufficiently met, we are extremely concerned we will see hospitals and other essential healthcare facilities close their doors at a time when Georgian's need them most during this unprecedented time.

Child care leaders and advocates across the state have developed a set of recommendations that outlines the key considerations for the development of this Critical Child Care Network. We are attaching them here and copying them to Commissioner Amy Jacobs for her review and consideration.

You can contact Mindy Binderman, Executive Director of GEEARS, at 678-689-3482 or mbinderman@gears.org with any questions.

With thanks for your leadership and prayers for your health,



Mindy Binderman, Executive Director of GEEARS, on behalf of:

GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students
Black Child Development Institute (BCDI)-Atlanta
Georgia Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs
Georgia Association for the Education of Young Children
Georgia Budget and Policy Institute
Georgia Child Care Association
Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network
Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia

Kidazzle Child Care, Inc.
Little Ones Learning Center
Mental Health America of Georgia
Metro Atlanta Chamber
Peachtree Summit Child Development Center
Professional Family Child Care Alliance of Georgia
Quality Care for Children
United Way of Greater Atlanta
Voices for Georgia's Children
YWCA of Greater Atlanta

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 20th, 2020

Re: Critical Child Care during the COVID-19 Outbreak - Recommendations for Georgia

To: Governor Brian Kemp

CC: Commissioner Amy Jacobs

From: GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students, Black Child Development Institute (BCDI)-Atlanta, Georgia Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, Georgia Association for the Education of Young Children, Georgia Child Care Association, Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia, Kidazzle Child Care, Inc., Little Ones Learning Center, Mental Health America of Georgia, Metro Atlanta Chamber, Peachtree Summit Child Development Center, Professional Family Child Care Alliance of Georgia, Quality Care for Children, United Way of Greater Atlanta, Voices for Georgia's Children, and YWCA of Greater Atlanta

Thank you for your continued hard work and dedication to Georgians during this unprecedented pandemic. We recognize that the closure of many of Georgia's child care programs may be imminent – either through mandate or as a result of child care providers choosing to close (over 1,000 have reported closure as of 3/18/2020 at 5:00 PM, and we expect the actual number to be much higher). We, as child care leaders and advocates across the state, appreciate your announcement yesterday recognizing the importance of child care for essential workers during this pandemic and calling attention to local efforts to help address those challenges.

We strongly believe that additional supports, including funding, are needed to ensure that child care challenges do not impede essential workers from continuing their work without disruption. As such, we are reaching out today to strongly recommend the creation of a “Critical Child Care Network” to serve frontline staff, such as hospital workers and emergency responders.

This network would allow select child care centers, family child care learning homes, and afterschool/summer programs to reopen or remain open on a limited basis in order to serve frontline staff by providing either full time care or respite care. Without this network, child care closures might **actually impede efforts to fight the coronavirus**, as the healthcare sector has some of the highest child care obligations in the United States.¹

Recommendations for the Creation of a “Critical Child Care Network:”

1) Focus on **existing licensed** child care sites (those that wish to remain open) as the primary way to provide child care for essential workers with young children (ages 0-5), particularly infants and toddlers. Existing programs already have the equipment and physical structures, as well as trained staff, to provide the safest care to young children given their unique needs. Child care staff are already trained on many best practices related to health and safety, which are even more critical during this pandemic.

For school-age children, utilize existing high-quality afterschool or summer programs (e.g., YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, etc.), child care programs, or family child care

¹<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.09.20033415v1.full.pdf>

learning homes. When supply is an issue, temporary sites (e.g., other schools, parks & recreation centers, etc.) can be utilized for school-age children.

Some providers are already considering implementing child care for essential workers, such as the YMCA of Metro Atlanta and Childcare Network. Where applicable, these models could be scaled to serve more children across the state.

2) Create a **definition** for “**essential workers**” in order to better identify who is eligible to receive this Critical Child Care. This may include: healthcare workers, grocery and pharmacy employees, nursing home employees, first responders, military, and mail/delivery personnel, and child care workers themselves. Allow the designated Critical Child Care sites to determine eligibility for the recipients instantly, onsite. Where possible, align this definition to other programs and services the state is implementing in response to this pandemic.

3) Require **all** child care programs to utilize **KOALA** (the online “hub” for Georgia’s child care providers managed by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning) to report the following in a reasonable, but quick period of time (e.g., 48 hours):

- Partial or full closures
- Open seats by age group
 - Child care providers remaining open are asked to efficiently survey existing families to determine how many seats would be available

This information is critical to helping essential workers find child care quickly and accurately, and helping DECAL and state advocates identify and address gaps in child care for essential workers across the state.

4) Leverage the existing **Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) network** across the state to: (a) reach out to programs as appropriate for participation in the “Critical Child Care Network;” (b) provide additional training and supports to assist child care providers in complying with additional health and safety guidance; and (c) assist programs in meeting staffing needs by connecting child care staff from closed programs to other child care locations in their region as desired by the staff member and as needed due to capacity. CCR&R agencies cover every county in the state through six regional networks and already have relationships with existing child care providers to effectively support this initiative.

5) Support DECAL’s and Quality Care for Children (QCC)’s efforts to utilize QCC’s **statewide child care referral service**, 1-877-ALL GA KIDS, to implement **enhanced** child care referrals to essential workers linking them to programs in the “Critical Child Care Network” with age-appropriate vacancies. Enhanced referrals may assist parents in securing child care by coordinating with child care programs to check status and vacancies and support the registration process.

6) Ensure **Family Child Care Learning Homes (FCCLHs)** can continue operations, as desired, across the state, and encourage such providers to participate in the “Critical Child Care Network.” FCCLHs play an essential role in responding to this pandemic given lower enrollment numbers (up to six children are allowed in FCCLHs in Georgia), ability to serve multiple ages, and higher likelihood of providing care during non-traditional hours.

7) Distribute clear and consistent **health and safety guidance** to child care providers that remain open, particularly those in this “Critical Child Care Network.” Such guidance should include best practices and

protocols *specific to child care settings* (e.g., greeting parents at front door) and reflect current public health guidelines.

8) Ensure that “Critical Child Care Network” programs participate in the **Child and Adult Care Food Program** and explore using that program as a vehicle to ensure that families have meals at home.

9) **Ensure Adequate Funding** for this “Critical Child Care Network”

Georgia should use state and/or federal emergency funding to support child care providers in serving children of essential personnel.

Adequate funding to program operations and staff is essential to ensure that these programs can remain open, particularly during a period of lower enrollment. Although DECAL may be able to leverage some existing funds for this network (the CCDF guidance in response to COVID-19 states that “lead agencies may use CCDF quality dollars to provide temporary grants or assistance to impacted providers to retain the child care supply during periods of closures”), **additional funding will be necessary**, particularly since we don’t know when this pandemic will end.

Important Considerations:

- Adequate funding for this network should include guaranteed payment for a minimum number of slots for a minimum of 4 weeks to ensure the location can provide the care, regardless of the number of children attending. In addition, child care staff who choose to work at/operate Critical Child Care sites should receive **a substantial increase** to their pay to acknowledge the role we are asking teachers and staff to shoulder during the pandemic, which is akin to that of frontline emergency personnel.
- Wherever possible, Georgia should use existing channels (e.g., CAPS) to distribute crisis funds to child care programs, in coordination with leadership at DECAL.
 - When using existing channels, consider ways to increase access for school-age children, such as allowing Exemption Category 12 (programs operated by or affiliated with national membership organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club) to accept and utilize CAPS.
- Consider ways for employers, philanthropic entities, and state or local governments to reduce the cost burden of child care for essential workers by sharing in their child care fees.
- The state must help providers in this “Critical Care Network” obtain necessary materials such as cleaning supplies to help ensure that children and teachers are safe.

We recognize that additional resources and guidance will be necessary to ensure the future sustainability of the state’s child care system. We look forward to continued participation in the discussion on how to address the state’s child care challenges during this unprecedented time and deeply appreciate the continued leadership of DECAL on this issue.

Thank you for your service to the state of Georgia.