



February 22, 2016

Belvie Herbert, CCDF Administrator  
Division of Social Services  
1901 North DuPont Highway  
New Castle, Delaware 19720

Dear Ms. Herbert:

Thank you for presenting on Delaware's Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) Plan for 2016-2018 at the Delaware Early Childhood Council on February 16, 2016. We appreciated your time and your ongoing effort to collaborate with us on this important Plan for meeting the needs of Delaware's most vulnerable children and families.

I am writing this letter in partnership with Madeleine, Bayard, Co-Chair of the Early Childhood Council, to follow up as promised with some specific opportunities for strengthening the current draft CCDF Plan for Delaware. These opportunities are summarized from our Council meeting last week. We have also shared a similar letter with Secretary Landgraf and copied Ray Fitzgerald, Debbie Gottschalk, and Tom Hall so that everyone is aware of recommendations. We will also send a copy to Council members.

Delaware's early learning community recognizes that this year marks an important national transition of the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which was reauthorized in 2014 with significant changes designed to improve access to high-quality, stable early education for children with high needs. This change is captured in the opening statement in the CCDF Plan instructions, which was read by one of the participants at the Council meeting on February 16:

***" We encourage all States and Territories to take time to think systematically and consider large-scale changes to advance a coherent vision for their child care programs and achieve the goals of the reauthorization – that is, to improve the health, safety, and quality of child care and to improve low-income working families' access to child care assistance and care that promotes child development."***

As we discussed, the CCDF Plan is an opportunity our state should not miss to set the future course for access to quality care for young children. Our early learning progress has been the result of a shared vision and the leadership, dedication and collaboration of a wide range of public and private partners across the state – and we can build upon this foundation in our Plan.

Key recommendations for strengthening the CCDF Plan for Delaware are to:

1. Promote collaboration and shared leadership by naming the Office of Early Learning (OEL) as co-administrator in the Plan, which oversees much of the state's early learning work and staffs the advisory and governing entities for Delaware's early childhood system as required in Delaware Code – the Council and the Interagency Resource Management Committee. The new CCDF Plan allows states to name more than one administrator, recognizing that parts of the early learning system are not always in the same agency.

2. Increase alignment of activities to improve the quality of care for Delaware's young children with high needs by outlining a shared decision-making process that will be used to determine the use of the newly required increased quality set aside funds, including partnership with OEL, the Council and the IRMC.
3. Ensure the health and safety of young children and efficient use of public funding by defining a process by which license-exempt programs receiving Purchase of Care become licensed, over time, in partnership with the Office of Child Care Licensing. **There was significant concern over the proposal to establish an alternative monitoring system for the 18 programs currently receiving CCDF funds without any quality standards or monitoring in place.** The new CCDF law requires that states license or establish alternative monitoring for any program receiving CCDF dollars. We understand that the 18 programs that are not currently licensed may need time and support to comply with licensing standards, but establishing an alternate path opens the door to a two-tiered monitoring system and erodes Delaware's efforts to ensure that all children are in safe, healthy learning environments.
4. Ensure continuity of care for young children by defining a process for reviewing and adapting policies and practices to ensure we fully comply with the requirements for a 12- month eligibility period, a graduated phase out of assistance, and eliminating the cost of care in the co-payment calculation.
5. Ensure that Delaware continues to address the needs of the states most vulnerable children as recommended in the Plan by:
  - a. Defining a process for better meeting the needs of homeless and immigrant children;
  - b. Defining a process for developing a policy, guidelines and training on preschool expulsions;
  - c. Defining a process for examining the education, training, compensation and caseloads of licensing consultants; and,
  - d. Addressing the need for a progressive professional development pathway and compensation for the early childhood workforce.

We know these are ambitious goals that will take time to plan for and implement. However, if we lay tracks now in our Plan, we can set a path for incremental progress that will improve the lives of our state's young children and families with high needs.

As we also discussed, we are happy to support you by providing specific language for revising the Plan if helpful. Please let us know how we can take next steps as we realize there is a tight timeline unless an extension is possible.

Sincerely,



Mary Kate Mouser, Chair



Madeleine Bayard, Co-Chair

Copies to: Ray Fitzgerald, Director, DSS  
Deborah I. Gottschalk, Chief Policy Advisor, DHSS  
Thomas Hall, Deputy Director  
Secretary Steven Godowsky, DOE  
Susan Perry-Manning, Executive Director, OEL