

Solano County – CARES Act Expenditure Plan

Child Care Program Overview

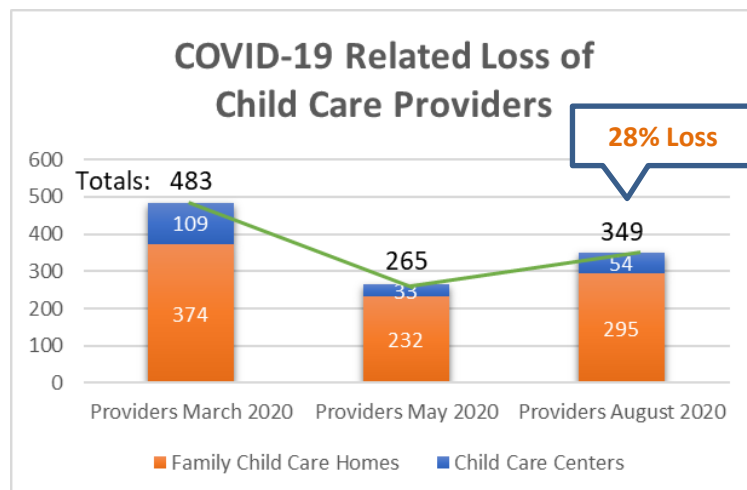
August 25, 2020

Attachment D

BACKGROUND

In Solano County, child care was already limited prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with only 24% of children ages 0-12 who had working parents having access to a space in a licensed child care facility.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, 45% of licensed child care centers and family child care homes in Solano County closed, either temporarily or permanently (May 2020). While 84 providers have reopened since May, Solano is still suffering from a loss of 135 or 28% of licensed child care providers resulting in a loss of child care for over 3,500 children (Reference: Solano Family & Children's Services). Further exacerbating the issue is education via distance learning, requiring care for 35,000 children kindergarten-5th grade either in the home or a child care setting.



APRIL-AUGUST COVID-19 RELATED CHILD CARE EFFORTS

Since April 2020, First 5 Solano has been acting as an arm of the Solano County Office of Emergency Services and has assisted with providing access to Pop Up child care for essential workers in Vallejo and throughout Solano County. Partners in this effort have been Solano County Office of Education, Vallejo City Unified School District, Solano Family & Children's Services, and Child Start, Inc. Through these efforts, First 5 Solano worked with 76 families to connect 124 children to care. Building upon these efforts, in May 2020, vouchers for emergency subsidies became available from the California Department of Early Learning and CARE Division and have provided funding for child care for 446 children of essential workers.

In addition, the First 5 Solano Commission quickly implemented an Emergency Response Fund (ERF). This fund provides a vehicle by which the Commission can support community partners to serve children and families in Solano impacted by the emergency. While the ERF is available to all community providers serving families with children 0-5, the majority of the ERF has been accessed by child care providers for equipment to support social distancing, cleaning materials/equipment, and support of personnel.

CURRENT STATUS

Many child care centers and family child care homes in Solano remain closed due to COVID-19, limiting options for working families, including families of children ages 6-12 now engaged in distance learning.

Child care providers who have remained closed cited the following reasons for remaining closed:

1. Safety of themselves and the families in their care
2. Needing additional time for training and buying equipment to support social distancing and distance learning
3. Not having enough staff to safely operate
4. Only wanting to provide care to continuing families who are not in need of care at this time.

Child care providers who have reopened also cite challenges. While limits on cohort size in child care settings have loosened, the California Department of Public Health and the Center for Disease Control still recommend keeping cohort size as small as possible to allow for social distancing and decrease the spread of the virus. Therefore, many providers are operating with fewer children in care, thereby increasing the cost per child. In addition, child care sites have to implement health screenings at check in and increased cleaning protocols, making providing care more costly.

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As part of the Emergency Operations Center, First 5 Solano is continuing to work with families of essential workers in Vallejo. As school begins, families that have been provided care at the Cooper Elementary School Pop Up will be transitioned to a subsidy-based system through December 2020. In addition, First 5 Solano continues to work closely with early care and education partners on reopening strategies. For locations which have a secure funding stream (e.g. Head Start, State Preschool, etc.), First 5 Solano will work alongside Solano County Office of Education, the local School Districts, Solano Family & Children's Services and other community partners to identify barriers to opening and assist with coordination of opening and access for parents where needed.



CARES ACT FUNDING PROPOSAL

The CARES Act Proposal dated August 11, 2020 included a total of \$599,277 in child care funding and \$405,919 in funding for First 5 Solano's Emergency Response Fund. Out of the total of \$1,005,196, \$455,196 has been allocated toward child care for essential workers and current Emergency Response Fund grants. The remaining \$550,000 CARES Act funding be used to support the following goals:

1. **Protect Current Supply of Child Care Providers By Offsetting Increased Cost of Care**
2. **Increase Capacity to Operate within COVID-19 Restrictions**

Strategy 1: Offset increased cost of providing child care. Child care providers have increased costs due to operating at lower capacity to accommodate social distancing and increased staffing for health screenings and rigorous cleaning protocols. The County can ensure the long-term viability of child care providers and encourage reopening of closed providers by assisting with offsetting these increased costs. The \$300,000 in funding under this strategy would provide a \$100/per month stipend for licensed child care providers for each child in care for the time period of September-December 2020. With an average stipend of \$4,000, this strategy could reach up to 75 providers, or 21% of the 349 open providers.

Strategy 2: Increase capacity of community providers, including child care providers, to operate during COVID-19 pandemic. Providers need to feel comfortable and confident that when they are open, they can adequately protect themselves, their staff, and the families accessing services. This strategy will assist by providing funds for social distancing equipment, individual learning supplies, cleaning supplies, etc. through the First 5 Solano Emergency Response Fund. The \$250,000 in funding under this strategy would provide grants of up to \$7,500 for the time period of September-December 2020.



CARES ACT EXPANSION OPTIONS:

Should the Board choose to expand its investment in the child care system, the Board should consider the following recommendations:

1. Provide an additional child care funding for offsetting the increased cost of providing care to reach more providers.
2. Provide additional Emergency Response Fund Grants exclusively supporting child care providers, with outreach to the 135 closed child care providers and offering support enabling them to reopen.