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MSDE's Fast Track Application and Family Portal Create Speedy and Simple Process for Families to Receive Child Care Scholarship

Applying for Child Care Scholarship Program Made Easier with New Fast Track Application Process and Family Portal; Provides Expedited Pathway for Maryland Families to Sign Up and Receive Faster Financial Assistance

BALTIMORE, MD (July 7, 2023) – The Maryland State Department of Education announces significant changes to the Child Care Scholarship program to expedite the application process for eligible families with the addition of the Fast Track Application process and the Family Portal.

"Early childhood education provides our kids with the critical foundation they need to learn, grow, dream, and achieve," says Governor Wes Moore. "Expanding access to high-quality, affordable child care in Maryland will provide our children and our families with more opportunities to thrive."

Beginning July 1, 2023, the Child Care Scholarship (CCS) program uses a fast-track application process to provide eligible families assistance with child care expenses. The new process grants temporary eligibility determination to eligible applicants within three business days. Eligible families will receive 60-days of temporary child care assistance under the CCS program and will be provided with a pathway to a full, 52-week Child Care Scholarship. Prior to the fast-track process, families would have to wait up to 35 days for their application to be fully processed to receive assistance.

“We must continue to find opportunities to support and strengthen Maryland’s child care system so every family across the state, no matter zip code or income, has access to high-quality and affordable early childhood education programs,” said State Superintendent of Schools Mohammed Choudhury. “The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future emphasizes equitable early childhood education opportunities that prepare our youngest learners for school and success, and the fast-track process ensures that families can access resources without unnecessary barriers.”

The passage of [Article II, Section 17\(c\) of the Maryland Constitution - Chapter 526, Early Childhood Development - Child Care Scholarship Program - Alterations and Study](#) in May 2022 required MSDE to establish a process for granting presumptive eligibility for a subsidy under the CCS Program. The presumptive eligibility determination is based on self-attestation by the applicant. Applicants must provide proof of residency and employment or enrollment in a training/education program to submit a fast track CCS application. Recipients of a 60-day scholarship will have 15 calendar days to complete the remainder of CCS application process to be considered for a 52-week scholarship.

“Securing child care assistance is the gateway to success for so many Maryland families. By simplifying the eligibility process, we provide an easy on-ramp for parents to find high-quality care for their children, secure employment, and ultimately achieve success and stability,” said Delegate Jared Solomon (D-Montgomery). “The presumptive eligibility policy change and the new Fast Track Application will serve as a critical lifeline for families across Maryland. We were proud to pass this into law in 2022 and are so pleased to work with MSDE to make it a reality.”

In addition to a faster application process, MSDE has also implemented a one-stop digital platform for the CCS called the Family Portal. The portal provides an efficient, online system that allows families to check their eligibility, complete the application, upload documents, check their application status, receive messages and alerts, receive personalized support, and access their benefits.

“The Family Portal has been a huge improvement for Maryland families receiving the Child Care Scholarship compared to how it was in the past,” says Ruby Daniels, president of the Maryland State Family Child Care Association. “It was an uphill battle getting this new system in place, but MSDE has been successful in this collaborative effort to launch and implement the portal. A process that once took several weeks now only takes a few days and families are able to ask questions and get answers about their applications and scholarships right away.”

The Family Portal went live in February 2023 and is available in English and Spanish. It also provides supports for several other languages. Since its launch, the portal has taken in more than 5,300 applications and registered 16,000 families.

“We have an obligation to do everything we can to support parents earning and children learning without delay,” says Laura Wheeldreyer, executive director of the Maryland Family Network. “We applaud MSDE for taking important steps to make the Child Care Scholarship more accessible to families with two new initiatives: Fast Track and the Family Portal. These are tools

to make the approval process faster, easier, and ultimately to work more effectively for families with young children.”

Prior to the portal, families were required to fill out a seven-page application and mail it to MSDE to apply for the CCS. The application process alone would take weeks to finalize, and it would be difficult for applicants to identify if additional information was needed for processing and receiving scholarship funds. The portal allows for more control over the CCS program with a smart application that directs applicants to exactly what needs to be filled out and what documents need to be uploaded for processing. The faster service has resulted in more families across the state gaining access to high-quality and affordable child care.

“One of the priorities of the Strategic Plan: Maryland Transforms is that all Maryland students are prepared socially, emotionally, and academically for success in kindergarten,” said State Board President Clarence C. Crawford. “The early childhood years are the most critical period for brain development and set the foundation for lifelong learning and achievement. We must continue to provide early education opportunities that are equitable and accessible for every child.”

The CCS program is funded through a combination of state and federal sources and provides child care financial assistance to families who meet the program’s income eligibility requirements and are working, attending school, and/or attending an approved training program.

Maryland residents can visit money4childcare.com to learn more about and apply for a Fast Track Child Care Scholarship. Families already enrolled in the CCS program must still complete the full CCS application process. First-time applicants are limited to one fast track application submission, and more than one child can be listed on a single application submission. Licensed and registered child care programs must participate in Maryland EXCELS, the child care state quality rating and improvement system, to accept Child Care Scholarships. To find child care programs participating in Maryland EXCELS, please visit: <https://marylandexcels.org/directory/>.

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