



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Department of Early Education and Care

Policy	
DCF-Related Child Care Financial Assistance Program	Field Operations – All Family Access Administrators
Effective Date: October 1, 2023	

The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) works in partnership with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the state’s child welfare agency, to ensure access to high quality early education and care to families working with the Department. DCF-Related Child Care includes comprehensive, developmentally appropriate early education and care and educational services, and, when offered by the provider, transportation services. If placement is with a contracted provider of Supportive Services, funding will also be available to provide case management and social-emotional support services, as needed by children and their families.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM - ELIGIBILITY AND REFERRAL

Eligibility for DCF-Related Child Care is determined by DCF regulations and policies. All children with active DCF cases and children in families who have been approved by DCF for continued care after their case is closed may be eligible for DCF-Related Child Care services including:

- children living with a parent;
- children living with relatives;
- children living in foster care;
- children in cases being managed by a DCF contracted agency; and
- children of a Young Parent with an active case. For example, young parents may be in the foster care system or open DCF for support for supports after 18 years old.

DCF will issue a referral for a family based on the parent’s choice of a voucher or contracted slot. The referral is sufficient documentation for the listed child to be eligible for care. Family Access Administrators will verify the identity of the parent(s) listed on the child care referral. Income, asset limits, service need, and parent fee requirements do not apply to families receiving DCF-Related Child Care.

Referrals issued by DCF will be valid for 90 days from the date of issue. If a DCF parent is unable to secure child care during this 90-day period, DCF can send an updated referral for an additional 90 days. A referral from DCF will be issued to the Family Access Administrator to provide a family with immediate access to DCF-Related Child Care services through:

- **Supportive Child Care Contracts** with specific child care providers who are contracted by EEC to hold space available for care of DCF-involved children. Contracted providers offer additional supportive services to families such as transportation, mental health and service referrals, and ongoing communication with Family Access Administrators and DCF.
 - A DCF social worker will inform the family of the status of the referral and expect to be contacted by the early education and care provider directly to enroll.
- **Vouchers** for access to child care financial assistance to be used at the child care provider of the family’s choice, as long as the provider participates in EEC’s Child Care Financial Assistance Programs (i.e., has a signed voucher agreement).
 - Family Access Administrators will make the initial outreach to the family to help the family choose a provider that is appropriate for the age and needs of the child and to complete the enrollment process. DCF Child Care Coordinators and Family Access Administrators will work together to support the family by identifying, choosing, and securing a placement, as well as enrolling their child with a child care provider.

DCF-Related Child Care will be authorized for not less than 12 months. If the DCF case closes prior to the end of the 12-month authorization period, the current authorization will continue until a 12-month DCF Transitional Authorization has been issued. A child’s placement will not be disrupted while a new referral is being issued unless a change is requested by the family.

Children referred by DCF and placed in care outside of Massachusetts will remain eligible as long as DCF retains custody of the child for the duration of the child’s open DCF case.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM – YOUNG PARENTS

DCF may issue a DCF-Related Child Care referral to a family with a Young Parent to provide immediate access to child care financial assistance. The current DCF referral is sufficient documentation for the family to meet income, service need, residence, and family composition. For more information about how Child Care Financial Assistance serves Young Parents and their families, please see Income Eligible policies.

Family Access Administrators are available to inform and counsel Young Parents on their Child Care Financial Assistance Program choices, services provided, and participation requirements.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM – TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Families who receive a referral from DCF will work with their DCF social worker to determine needs for transportation. DCF staff and Family Access Administrators will work together to ensure that families that need transportation will be placed at a program that provides transportation.

All children with active DCF cases and children in families who have been approved by DCF are eligible for transportation services. This eligibility must be indicated on the DCF referral. For

more information about transportation services funded by child care financial assistance, please see: income-eligible child care financial assistance policies – income eligible – enrollment and attendance – transportation funding.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM - PARENT FEES

As long as the DCF case remains open, families will not be charged parent fees and no income information will be requested.

During the first 12 months of transitional care, families will not be charged parent fees and no income information will be requested.

During the second 12 months of the transitional care or authorization, a parent fee will be assessed using the Income Eligible parent fee schedule. Family Access Administrators will work with families to determine their parent fees. Income information will be requested, and a family's income must remain below 85% SMI to remain eligible for the second 12 months of transitional care. For additional information about continuity of care and parent fees, please see Income Eligible Program policies.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM - CHANGE REPORTING

DCF staff and Family Access Administrators will work together to ensure that families are informed of and understand any applicable change related to reporting requirements. Families referred by DCF must report certain changes to DCF staff or to a Family Access Administrator within 30 days of the change. Changes that must be reported include:

- When there is a change in the child's custody arrangements, DCF staff will notify the Family Access Administrator as soon as possible after the change, and a new DCF-Related Child Care referral will be issued. A child's placement will not be disrupted while a new referral is being issued unless a change is requested by the family.
- When there is a change in the family's contact information or a change in a custodial parent's residency, the family must report the change to a Family Access Administrator.

Families who no longer have active DCF cases, including those who have been referred for DCF-Related Transitional care, must report certain changes directly to the Family Access Administrator within 30 days of the change, including a change that results in the family's income exceeding 85% SMI. For more information, please see Income Eligible Child Care Program policies.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM – ATTENDANCE

Once authorized, families will work with their selected provider to enroll their child and establish a schedule that meets their child and family needs, and aligns with their authorization (i.e., full or part-time care). Providers will receive payment based on the family's enrollment.

An absence is defined as any day that a child is authorized to attend an early education and care program but is not in attendance. When a DCF child is absent from care, the family must let the provider know. During a DCF family's authorization the Family Access Administrators should establish ongoing communication with the DCF social worker and the provider. The DCF social worker should inform the provider of any information relevant to the child's attendance or other needs. Family Access Administrators should report any concerns related to attendance to the DCF Area Office Child Care Coordinator or DCF Social Worker.

A family's financial assistance for child care should not be terminated without contacting the DCF social worker and receiving approval for EEC.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM - APPROVED BREAK IN CARE

Families may request an Approved Break in Care to suspend their financial assistance for up to 90 days with the approval from DCF. Family Access Administrators must contact the DCF Social Worker and Area Office Child Care Coordinator before offering a family an approved break in care.

Once approved, Family Access Administrators may offer a family an Approved Break in Care if their child will not attend care due to an event of more than two weeks in length, including, but not limited to:

- An extended illness or medical procedure;
- A visit to a non-custodial parent; and
- An extended vacation.

Parent(s) have the right to opt out of an Approved Break in Care.

Providers are not required to hold a child's slot at the program during an Approved Break in Care. If a slot is no longer available at the family's provider of choice, a Family Access Administrator will support the family's transfer to a new provider of their choosing.

Families returning from an Approved Break in Care during their current 12-month authorization do not need to reauthorize prior to returning to care and will not need a new referral from DCF, unless the 12-month authorization expired during the Approved Break in Care.

If a family does not return from an Approved Break in Care within the established time period, the family's 12-month authorization will end, and the family's child care financial assistance will be terminated.

If a child has been absent from care and the provider has not been able to communicate with the family for more than 30 consecutive days during a 12-month authorization, or more than 20 consecutive days during a 12-week provisional authorization, and the family has not requested and received an Approved Break in Care, the family's child care financial assistance may be terminated.

A family's financial assistance for child care should not be terminated without contacting the DCF social worker and receiving approval for EEC.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM - REAUTHORIZATION AND CONTINUITY OF CARE

If a family's DCF case remains open, DCF may reauthorize the family for an additional 12 months of DCF-Related Child Care. Families do not need to complete a reauthorization in person. Virtual and telephonic options must be made available. A child's placement will not be disrupted while a new referral is being issued unless a change is requested by the family.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM – TRANSITIONAL CHILD CARE AND CONTINUITY OF CARE

DCF families are eligible for access to Transitional Child Care for up to 24 months following the closure of their DCF case. DCF may authorize a family by referral for the initial 12-month transitional period following the closure of the family's case, and the family will not be required to pay a parent fee. The DCF referral is sufficient documentation for the family to meet income, service need, and residential requirements during the initial 12-month period. Families who seek access following the initial 12-month period will receive priority access to child care financial assistance for one additional 12-month period through continuity care. The Family Access Administrator will assess the family according to income-eligible guidelines, and the parent may be required to pay a fee.

A child is eligible to receive DCF-Related Transitional Care even if the child has not previously received DCF-Related Child Care. DCF Families, who are within the 24-month period after their case closure, are also eligible for Transitional Child Care and should not be placed on the waitlist. DCF families are only able to access Transitional Child Care within the 24 months after their case closure.

During the Transitional Child Care period, if a Family Access Administrator becomes aware of the reopening of a DCF case for a family, they must inform the family of their possible eligibility for DCF-Related Child Care and direct the family to contact their DCF social worker to discuss their eligibility and referral if the family is interested:

<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-department-of-children-families/locations>.

Following the conclusion of a family's transitional care, the family will be eligible to receive continuity of care access to Income Eligible Child Care Financial Assistance provided the family meets eligibility requirements.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM – DENIAL AND TERMINATION OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Families who wish to appeal the termination of DCF-Related Child Care services have the right to do so through the DCF Fair Hearing Process, in accordance with DCF regulations and policies. Families who wish to appeal the denial or termination of their Income Eligible Child Care Financial Assistance, including families experiencing homelessness and Young Parents, have the

right to request an EEC review, in accordance with the Income Eligible Denial, Termination, and Request for Review policies.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM – COMMUNICATIONS

Family Access Administrators will notify families and the DCF Child Care Coordinator (if the DCF case is still open) at least twice that their authorization period is ending. At least one of these notifications must be in writing and provided no fewer than 60 days prior to the end of a family’s authorization period.

Family Access Administrators will send all notifications to families through at least two forms of communication, including phone, text, email, and/or US mail.

DCF-RELATED CHILD CARE PROGRAM – DCF TEMPORARY CHILD CARE PROGRAM

EEC and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) have partnered to offer the DCF Temporary Child Care Program. This program allows certain designated Family Child Care and Center-based programs to serve children who are in DCF custody and require a short-term child care placement. Programs participating in the DCF Temporary Child Care Program are licensed by EEC and contracted with and approved by DCF. For additional information or to access the DCF Temporary Child Care Program, contact eeccsubsidymanagement@mass.gov.