

Child Care

NEWS BRIEF



Greetings from your Partners at the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Care Services Team!

Spring is upon us and time for sunshine and outdoor activities. In this Spring edition of the quarterly newsletter, we will focus on Emergency Preparedness, Enhancement Grants for safety equipment purchases, child care payment assistance supports for qualifying child and early care educators and exciting news about a third/final round of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Stabilization Grants.

As a reminder, the Department has moved to quarterly releases of the Child Care Services Newsletters. We greatly appreciate our child care provider partners and all that you do for the children and families of Tennessee.

Emergency Preparedness Reminder

The Tennessee Department of Human Services is committed to promoting environments that are safe, healthy and educationally rich. The recent tragic event in Nashville at Covenant School has heightened awareness for emergency preparedness and having a thorough plan in place.

The Child Care Services Website [Child Care Emergency Preparedness \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/child-care-services/emergency-preparedness), provides a template for developing an emergency preparedness plan inclusive of the following key elements and actions:

- Evacuation, relocation, shelter-in-place, and lockdown
- Staff and volunteer emergency preparedness trainings and practice drills
- Communication and reunification with families
- Maintaining continuity of operations
- Individualized accommodations for:
 - Infants and/or Toddlers
 - Children with disabilities, and
 - Children with chronic medical conditions

Child care providers are also required to inform parents/guardians of the Emergency Preparedness and response Plan (EPRP).

The process of developing and maintaining an EPRP along with regular practice drills makes it more likely child care providers will be equipped and prepared to protect children during natural disasters and emergencies.

It is important that any plan be discussed with families, so they are familiar with what actions, notifications and reunification plans are in place. We encourage that should you employ other security measures that alter the everyday routines for children, staff are prepared to answer questions by the children that are developmentally appropriate and are supportive of their overall well-being. There are additional tools located here [Emergency Preparedness — The Association of Infant Mental Health in Tennessee \(aimhitn.org\)](https://aimhitn.org) that support these very important discussions.

Our current rules related to police officers on-site are located below.

Tenn. Code Ann. 1240-4-1-.12(13)(d)

(d) Firearms shall not be permitted on the premises of a child care agency, in any vehicle used to transport children for the child care agency, or in the presence of a child.

1. In a private residence, deadly weapons and potentially hazardous items, such as power tools, are permitted on the premises, but shall be kept locked, out of sight, and inaccessible to children at all times. Firearms kept in a private residence shall be locked and unloaded with ammunition locked up separately.
2. The provisions of this subparagraph (d) are not applicable to law enforcement officers.

Failing to properly remove or secure firearms is a critical violation that requires parental notification (1240-4-1-.05(10)(a)(1)(i)(VII)) and is the basis for a major civil penalty (1240-4-5-.04(3)(b)(1)(iv)(XIII)).

Enhancement Grants for Safety Equipment

Under the current enhancement grant criteria, a licensed child care agency could apply for funding to support allowable security and safety equipment as long as the equipment does not fall under capital improvements. If you have not already applied for an enhancement grant or exhausted the funding limits as shown below during this Federal contract year, October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023, you may apply for funding should you wish to make security equipment purchases. We are exploring adding an additional supplemental amount specific to allowable security devices that promote safe and healthy environments in the next contract cycle beginning October 1, 2023.

As a reminder, Child Care Enhancement grants are available to licensed child care agencies to increase capacity, strengthen quality, and/or promote compliance with State licensing standards. There is a base amount available of \$4000 with additional supplemental amounts based on certain criteria:

- Physically operate in one of the economically distressed counties as may be identified by the Governor shall be eligible for an additional \$1000.00.
- Are verified by the Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network as having completed Infant and Toddler Specialization (ITCS) shall be eligible for an additional \$1000.00.
- Seeking national accreditation shall be eligible for an additional \$1000.00.
- Participation in the Child Care Certificate Program and meet all criteria under the contract shall be eligible for an additional \$1000.00.
- Are referred by the State for compliance or remediation of deficiencies shall be eligible for an additional \$1000.00.



Educator's Corner

Our Educator's Corner highlights resources, tools and tips that support our valued child care early care education workforce in promoting ongoing professional development, retention, and professional career growth.

Did you Know you May Qualify for Child Care Payment Assistance?

We are continually exploring strategies that support attracting and retaining a qualified early care and education workforce. The Smart Steps program that is currently available in Tennessee is an opportunity for qualifying child care workforce staff to receive this valued assistance so that you too may receive child care payment support while working to care for others.

Basic eligibility criteria for Smart Steps is shown in **bold** below. For more information about Child Care Payment Assistance, please visit our website: [Child Care Payment Assistance \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/child-care-payment-assistance) [Child Care Payment Assistance \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/child-care-payment-assistance)

One Parent Household

- Must be employed no less than an average of 30 hours per week

Two Parent Households

- Both parents employed an average of 30 hours per week, or
- One parent is employed an average of 30 hours and the second parent is attending a post-secondary education program

Must have a child between ages six (6) weeks through five (5) years old

Household gross income must be below the 85th percentile of the State Median Income for Tennessee

Household Size	Maximum Gross Monthly Income
2	\$4,086
3	\$5,048
4	\$6,010
5	\$6,971
6	\$7,933
7	\$8,113
8	\$8,293

Applying is a simple, automated online experience through our new One DHS Customer Portal found at: OneDHS.tn.gov/csp

NEW Stabilization Grants Information



New: Third/Final Round of Stabilization Grants

Through American Rescue Plan Act Child Care Stabilization Funds, we have been able to award over \$540 million in staff retention and operations support grants to child care agencies across the state. We appreciate all the agencies who are completing their reporting requirements and who have given us feedback about the impact of these funds on your ability to serve families in your community.

We have exciting news to share about a third/final opportunity to apply for stabilization grants. This last round of stabilization grants is supported through a different funding stream. Because we are using a different funding stream and because opportunities to provide stabilization grants are winding down, some of the parameters for these grants are different from prior rounds. We are pleased that we can offer the same level of funding for staff retention bonuses. We recognize and value the critical role of the early childhood workforce in providing care that is safe, healthy, and educationally rich.

The base grant amount will be based upon 2 months of operating expenses rather than the 3 months we had been able to support in prior rounds. Overall, we hope all the stabilization funds have helped your agency navigate through the effects of

the pandemic while strengthening the foundation for continuing to provide quality care in the future.

Round 3 stabilization grants will be available to agencies that are regulated by the Tennessee Department of Education (DOE) and are contracted to participate in the Child Care Certificate Program as of July 1, 2023. To enroll in the Child Care Certificate Program, please submit a request to ChildCare.Certificate.DHS@tn.gov. These eligible DOE regulated agencies will be included in Cohort 7, according to the chart below.

For Round 3, TDHS in partnership with UT-SWORPS will again be administering the application process for eligible agencies to apply for the grants per the schedule below. The schedule also includes the expected timing for Notices of Award (NOA)/Grant Contracts to be distributed for the related cohorts after applications are reviewed.

Cohort	Form	Open	Close
Cohorts 1 & 2	Round 3 Applications	Monday, June 5, 2023	Monday, June 19, 2023
Cohorts 1 & 2	Round 3 NOAs	Wednesday, June 28, 2023	Wednesday, July 5, 2023
Cohorts 3, 4, 5	Round 3 Applications	Monday, July 17, 2023	Monday, July 31, 2023
Cohorts 3, 4, 5	Round 3 NOAs	Wednesday, August 9, 2023	Wednesday, August 16, 2023
Cohort 6, 7	Round 3 Applications	Monday, August 21, 2023	Tuesday, September 4, 2023
Cohort 6, 7	Round 3 NOAs	Wednesday, September 13, 2023	Wednesday, September 20, 2023

The following agencies are included in each Cohort.

- Cohort 1 - Licensed Child Care Centers (Capacity is between 101-up)
- Cohort 2 - Licensed Child Care Centers (Capacity is between 76-100)
- Cohort 3 - Licensed Child Care Centers (Capacity is between 51-75)
- Cohort 4 - Licensed Child Care Centers (Capacity is between 26-50)
- Cohort 5 - Licensed Child Care Centers (Capacity is between 16-25)
- Cohort 6 - Licensed Family and Group Child Care Homes (Capacity is between 5-15)
- Cohort 7 - Eligible DOE regulated agencies participating in the Child Care Certificate Program

Reporting and Accountability Post Receipt of Grant Funds

As a Reminder: The Department of Human Services is administering these funds in collaboration with its consultant HORNE who has a team dedicated to supporting recipients of Tennessee’s Child Care Stabilization Grants. HORNE will facilitate the reporting and accountability elements of the grant process. As listed on the application and the grant contract, agencies that are awarded funds are required to report how those funds were used and status of meeting the certifications. HORNE is supporting these requirements by communicating to agencies after funds have been distributed and helping agencies submit the necessary reports and expense verifications.

You will receive an email from the HORNE TN Child Care Stabilization Grant Support Team shortly after receiving your funds. That email will include a copy of the Expense Tracking Workbook. Detailed instructions on how to complete the workbook will be included in the file provided. You should add expenses to this workbook as they are incurred, and expenses should only be added to this workbook if you have documents supporting the expenses in your records.

To help you recognize communications from HORNE, the subject line of all email communications from HORNE will begin with the heading **CC Stabilization Communication**. When you see an email with this heading in the subject line, please review the message and take action in order to meet your grant reporting requirements.

As a reminder, award dollars must be spent on one or more of the below purposes:

- Personnel costs, benefits, premium pay, recruitment, and retention.
- Rent or mortgage payments, utilities, facilities maintenance and improvements, or insurance.
- Personal protective equipment, cleaning and sanitation supplies and services, or training and professional development related to health and safety practices.
- Purchases of, or updates to, equipment and supplies to respond to COVID-19.
- Goods and services necessary to maintain or resume child care services.
- Mental health support for children and employees.

Technical assistance is available if you have any questions. If you have any questions, please contact UT SWORPS at [TDHS CCP@utk.edu](mailto:TDHS_CCP@utk.edu) or call the tollfree number at 1-888-883-5514.

An FAQ document has been created to address questions related to the process and may be found at this link:

<https://tnchildcarehelpdesk.sworpswebapp.sworps.utk.edu/ccdf-stabilization-grant/>. The most current version is available including updated questions and answers from the Cohort rounds.

We are excited to make these dollars available to support the very critical work you provide in caring for the children of Tennessee. These funds are to build a stable and sustainable early care and education system for our existing providers, so children will continue to have access to safe, healthy and educationally rich spaces.

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