



# Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) State Plan for Georgia FFY 2025-2027

## Executive Summary

### **Introduction**

Every year Georgia receives significant funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). Historically, the monies, which come to the state in the form of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), have been primarily used to help low-income, working families afford child care.

In November 2014, with widespread bipartisan support, Congress reauthorized the CCDBG while refocusing and expanding the purpose of the CCDF. The expanded purposes of the CCDF as identified in the reauthorization included:

- promoting self-sufficiency for low-income families
- promoting involvement by parents and families in the development of their children in child care settings
- improving the overall quality of child care services and programs
- increasing the number and percentage of low-income children in high quality-child care settings.

To continue receiving these funds, each state must submit a State Plan detailing how it will meet federal requirements. As the Lead Agency responsible for administering these funds in Georgia, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has worked with other state agencies, local governments, and stakeholders to develop a State Plan in which CCDF dollars are used wisely, efficiently, and in accordance with federal guidelines.

Georgia has implemented the new federal guidelines set forth in the 2014 Reauthorization. This summary highlights the key areas of Georgia's State Plan, for federal fiscal years 2025-2027, necessary to maintain compliance with the requirements of reauthorization. The structure of this document is aligned with the federally mandated structure of the State Plan.

### **Section 1: CCDF Program Administration**

Highlights from this section include identifying the CCDF Lead Agency, CCDF Lead Agency leadership, and the individuals responsible for implementing the program. It also identifies the partners who were consulted to develop the plan. This section will:

- Identify CCDF Lead Agency and CCDF Leaders
  - Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)
  - Led by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs
  - CCDF Co-Administrators: Ira Sudman and Woody Dover are responsible for implementing the plan.

- Identify the appropriate federal, state, and local programs and stakeholders with whom DECAL collaborated to develop the State Plan
- Share when public hearings on the State Plan will be held: May 29, 2024, and May 30, 2024

## **Section 2: Child and Family Eligibility and Enrollment and Continuity of Care**

Highlights from this section identify how DECAL defines eligible children and families and how DECAL's eligibility and enrollment policies support access for eligible children and families. This section will:

- Define terms such as physical/mental incapacity; eligibility terms, protective services, income, children with special needs, etc.
- Identify reasons for care, eligibility criteria, outreach strategies to vulnerable groups, etc.
- Explain continuity of care

## **Section 3: Child Care Affordability**

Highlights from this section focus on how DECAL determines an eligible family's co-payment, the policies in place to waive or ensure co-payments are affordable for families, and how the DECAL improves access for children and families in economically and/or socially marginalized communities. This section will:

- Explain how family fee is determined...based on the family's annual gross applicable income and family size
- Explain DECAL's sliding scale
- Determine the percentage of income a family pays for CAPS by the family's gross income as a percentage of the federal poverty guidelines (FPL). Family incomes are grouped into four tiers for determining what percentage of income is assessed:
  - the copayment is waived for families at or below 10 percent FPL;
  - families above 10 percent FPL and at or below 50 percent FPL are currently assessed a copayment of 3 percent of family income;
  - families over 50 percent FPL and at or below 100% FPL are currently assessed a copayment of 5 percent of family income;
  - families over 100 percent FPL are also currently assessed a copayment of 7 percent of family income.
- Identify situations where family copayments are waived

## **Section 4: Parental Choice, Equal Access, Payment Rates, and Payment Practices**

Highlights from this section focus on the CCDF provisions related to equal access, including access to the full range of providers, payment rates for providers, co-payments for families, payment practices, differential payment rates, and other strategies that support parental choice and access by helping to ensure that child care providers are available to serve children participating in CCDF. This section will:

- Explain how DECAL informs families of child care options and helps families make informed choices about child care that best meets their needs
- Describe Georgia's most recent Market Rate Survey (MRS) including methodology, cost analysis, and when available to the public
- Describe payment rates as influenced by MRS and identify payment practices to providers
- Explain how DECAL will address child care shortages in child care learning centers, family child care learning homes, informal caregivers, etc.

## **Section 5: Health and Safety of Child Care Settings**

Highlights from this section focus on CCDF health and safety requirements, DECAL's licensing requirements and exemptions, and comprehensive background checks. This section will:

- Identify types of providers subject to licensing and describe licensing requirements
- Discuss licensing exemptions and ration and group sizes for different types of CCDF providers
- Identify teacher/caregiver qualifications for different types of CCDF providers
- List Georgia's health and safety rules and regulations for different types of CCDF providers
- Discuss how DECAL monitors and enforces licensing and health and safety rules and regulations for different types of CCDF providers
- Explain DECAL's requirements for ongoing health and safety training for different types of CCDF providers
- Describe background checks required of all Georgia child care providers and staff

### **Section 6: Support for a Skilled, Qualified, & Compensated Child Care Workforce**

Highlights from this section focus on DECAL's efforts to support the child care workforce, the components and implementation of the professional development framework, and early learning and developmental guidelines. This section will:

- Detail ways DECAL will strengthen recruiting and retaining qualified child care professionals
- Describe supports for child care professionals to enhance their credentials
- Describe efforts to revise/enhance Georgia's Workforce Knowledge and Competencies
- Describe Georgia's Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS); training offered on the GELDS; and how the GELDS inform classroom practices

### **Section 7: Quality Improvement Activities**

Highlights from this section focus on DECAL's quality activities needs assessment and identify the types of quality improvement activities where CCDF investments are being made using quality set-aside funds. This section will:

- Describe the efforts of DECAL's Research and Policy Analysis Unit that continually oversees and conducts program- and system-level evaluations of DECAL's work. Findings will be used to inform quality improvement and efficiency.
- Explain process to revise and improve Quality Rated, Georgia's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS)
- Detail use of quality set-aside funds to:
  - Increase supply and quality of training on serving school-age children and on enhancing language/literacy skills
  - Continue to expand trainings through the Online Learning Library Initiative (OLLII)
  - Offer mini-grants to early learning professionals to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in their classrooms
  - Increase early learning professional's skills in working with infants and toddlers

### **Section 8: Lead Agency Coordination and Partnerships to Support Service Delivery**

Highlights from this section focus on who DECAL collaborates with to implement services, how match and maintenance-of-effort (MOE) funds are used, coordination with child care resource and referral (CCR&R) systems, and efforts for disaster preparedness and response plans to support continuity of operations in response to emergencies. This section will:

- Identify the state agencies/entities with whom DECAL will collaborate to implement the State Plan

- Explain DECAL’s relationship with Georgia’s six CCR&Rs and other private non-profit entities that will have roles in implementing the State Plan

### **Section 9: Family Outreach and Consumer Education**

Highlights from this section will focus on how DECAL addresses their consumer education practices, including details about their child care consumer education website, and the process for collecting and maintaining a record of parental complaints. This section will:

- Explain DECAL’s processes for how parents/families can submit complaints regarding issues with service delivery, staff, etc.
- Describe DECAL’s website where parents/families can find searchable information; eligibility information; and best practices on child development, social emotional health, policies on preventing suspension/expulsion from child care programs, and developmental screenings

### **Section 10: Program Integrity and Accountability**

Highlights from this section will describe DECAL’s internal controls and how those internal controls effectively ensure integrity and accountability. These accountability measures will address reducing fraud, waste, and abuse, including program violations and administrative errors and applies to all CCDF funds. This section will:

- Describe how DECAL will ensure CCDF program integrity and accountability by identifying the department’s organizational structure, assigning duties, and designating who coordinates communication and activities relating to implementing the State Plan
- Describe fiscal management practices and internal control activities
- Explain DECAL’s strategies to identify fraud and, when necessary, to recover payments

### **Conclusion**

The information highlighted in this summary is not exhaustive. Georgia’s comprehensive State Plan includes many more details concerning how the state plans to use the resources provided through the CCDF. But Georgia is currently fulfilling most of the requirements that must be met to receive these funds.

The proposals in this document highlight the efforts the state will make to continue to comply with federal guidelines as identified in the legislation reauthorizing the grant.

Georgia’s State Plan is now available for interested parties to review and to provide comment. Comments can be made in writing and submitted to DECAL or can be made publicly at one of two public hearings on Wednesday, May 29, 2024, from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. or on Thursday, May 30, 2024, from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. Instructions for commenting on the plan can be found at:

<http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/CCDFPlan.aspx>.