Spending Plan for Federal COVID Relief and Other Miscellaneous Topics

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Quality Rated

We were able to sign up for only TARO Option A or B with the ability to earn up to a two-year,
 2-star rating. We don't want to wait two years until we can try for a 3-star rating. What are our options to earn three stars in 2022?

In 2022, Cohorts 3 and 4 will be traditional live-observation cohorts with the ability to earn up to three stars. Based on slot availability, we may be able to give providers with a TARO two-year, 2-star rating the opportunity to select a slot in one of these cohorts. After programs required to be rerated in 2022 have selected their cohort slots, we will know if additional slots can be made available to other providers on a first come first served basis.

In addition, Quality Rated will be looking for programs to serve as training sites when our assessors begin training to reestablish their reliability in Cohorts 1 and 2. If you would like to serve as a training site, we will offer the opportunity for hold harmless observations that could be used to count toward a star rating if your score is high enough to generate an increased star rating. Contact the Help Desk at: QualityRated@decal.ga.gov if you would like to be considered as a training site and receive a hold harmless observation that could be used toward a new and higher star rating.

2. Will a program that is currently in the Quality Rated process be able to apply for a 2022 cohort? Specifically, can we apply for Cohort 1 or 2?

Cohort slots will be made available to providers in mid-November. A priority window to sign up for a slot will be given to programs required to be rerated in 2022. Remaining available slots after the priority window closes will be made available to all providers. We hope to have additional slots for programs that want to request a rerating, but the number of available slots per cohort cannot be determined until after the priority window closes.

3. What happens if you sign up for a cohort and miss the portfolio submission date? All providers who fail to submit a portfolio during the portfolio submission window forfeit their slot in that cohort. If there are slots remaining in another cohort, you may be able to sign up for that cohort. If there are no slots remaining, you will not be able to be rated in 2022. The consequences for not submitting your portfolio will depend on whether you are a CAPS provider. For CAPS providers this would mean that your current rating would expire, and you would be dismissed from the CAPS program.

Quality Rated/CAPS

 Does a child care provider have to have a Quality Rated rating before applying to care for children receiving CAPS?

No, you can enroll in CAPS at any time. However, if you do not have a current star rating, you will also have to apply for the CAPS/QR Provisional Status to be eligible to receive CAPS scholarships while you work on earning your initial rating. Contact the QR Help Desk for more information at: QualityRated@decal.ga.gov.

CAPS – ACCESS

1. What is ACCESS, and what does ACCESS cover?

Awarding Child Care Education Scholarship Supplements (ACCESS) is an initiative funded through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), to

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mitigate the negative financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Georgia's child care industry and to help eligible Georgia families (also negatively impacted by the pandemic) pay for child care. The purpose of ACCESS is to temporarily support CAPS families by paying for child care. Through ACCESS, CAPS will pay the provider their full published rate for the type of care provided, including the family fee, from May 17, 2021, through service period ending October 2, 2022. CAPS families will not pay the provider any tuition related fees or co-payments for child care.

2. How does the ACCESS program impact Quality Rated tiered reimbursement?

Programs that participate in CAPS and are Quality Rated will continue to receive tiered reimbursement. Tiered reimbursement will be applied to the full CAPS reimbursement rate as published in the CAPS Reimbursement Rates (Appendix C) table of the CAPS Policy Manual. Previously, tiered reimbursement would have been applied to the CAPS rate minus the family fee. This means the tiered reimbursement payment amount has increased. For example, the CAPS rate for a toddler in Zone 1 is \$144 per week. If the family was assessed a family fee, the net payment from the state would have been decreased before the tier was applied. Therefore, a family fee of \$15 would mean that the tiered rate was applied to the net amount of \$129 (\$144 minus \$15). Now the tiered rate will be applied to \$144.

3. Is tiered reimbursement applied to registration fees?

No, tiered reimbursement is not applied to the registration fees. CAPS will continue to pay up to \$65.00 for registration fees. If the provider's published registration fee exceeds \$65.00, the parent will be responsible for paying the difference.

4. What is the correct way to submit published rates if they are not accurate on a family's scholarship?

If you have questions about the rates on a scholarship, the first step is to contact Maximus at 1-877-755-6522. They will guide you through subsequent steps.

CAPS – Emergency Payment Policy

1. Is there a difference between an "enrolled child" and "child in attendance"?

Enrolled children are children who have been approved for a CAPS scholarship and have attended the child care program, at least once, since enrolling in CAPS. A *child in attendance* is actively attending a program and accounted for in the program's daily attendance records.

2. What are the requirements for billing attendance?

In the emergency CAPS payment policies waiver, providers that are "Open for Care" or are in a "Temporarily Closed" status, as approved by CAPS, can bill for absent children if the child has attended at least once since enrolling in CAPS. When billing for absent children, or billing for a service period when the program is temporarily closed, providers should bill on only one scholarship per child. The provider must bill according to the school calendar or the type of care provided to the child.

3. Can providers request payment for children who were absent due to circumstances not related to COVID-19?

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Yes. The emergency CAPS payment policies waiver allows providers who are Open for Care or are in a Temporarily Closed status to bill for absent children if the child has attended at least once since enrolling in a CAPS program. Providers bill for an absent child who meets criteria by using the COVID button in the applicable service week in the billing portal.

4. If my program has to close due to circumstances related to COVID-19, can I continue to bill for active CAPS scholarships?

The emergency CAPS payment policies waiver allows providers who are Open for Care or are in a Temporarily Closed status to bill for absent children if the child has attended at least once since enrolling in a CAPS program. However, if a program is Temporarily Closed for more than 30 calendar days, they must submit a written request to CAPS to remain in a Temporarily Closed status to continue receiving CAPS payments.

5. Can providers request for retro payments if they did not bill for COVID-19 payment exceptions in the past?

Providers can bill for service weeks within the last 60 days by following the typical billing process. Providers can submit a request for payment for any service weeks older than the past 60 days by contacting Maximus at 1-877-755-6522. Requests for payment for service weeks before the past 60 days will be reviewed and must be approved for payment by DECAL.

6. Under current CAPS emergency policies, providers are not allowed to charge families enrolled in CAPS or change their rates. How can a provider do typical routine rate increases? As a condition of the ACCESS initiative, providers are not permitted to charge families enrolled in the CAPS program any tuition related fees, which would include increasing weekly tuition rates for these families. However, under CAPS emergency policy waivers, the policy prohibiting providers from charging families enrolled in CAPS a different rate than private pay families has been waived. Therefore, providers are permitted to raise their tuition rates for their private pay families on any schedule they choose. DECAL understands the concerns providers have expressed about not being able to change rates for their families enrolled in CAPS while the ACCESS initiative is in effect and is exploring options to resolve this issue.

7. How do I handle sign-in and sign-out sheets for children not attending?

If a child is not attending, there should not be sign-in and sign-out records for that child for weeks in which they were absent. Records demonstrating the absent child being billed for did attend in person at least once, while enrolled in the CAPS program AND prior to being billed for as absent, would be sufficient to support payments for that child. If that child attended in person before the provider billed for weeks where the child was absent, there is no limit to the number of weeks for which the provider can bill for the child while absent.

CAPS Expansion

1. If families have been previously denied for CAPS scholarships, can they reapply?

Yes. If a family was previously denied for a CAPS scholarship based on their income, they may qualify after the increase to income limits goes into effect on November 1, 2021.

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POWER Payments

- 1. Can we require or encourage teachers to use a percentage of their POWER payments to purchase items for their classrooms?
 - No, providers cannot require or encourage teachers to use their POWER payments for any specific purpose. POWER payments are made to the individual and may be used at the recipient's discretion.
- 2. For the staff payments, do employees have to be working for 20 hours per week for all the weeks in December, or any one-week period over that month? What if your school has "holiday hours"? Also, could that 20 hours per week relate back to November?
 - Staff members must work an average of 20 hours per week. The pay stub provided must show an average of 20 hours worked during the pay period. If the pay stub does not show an average of 20 hours worked during the pay period, the POWER team will try to calculate the hours worked using the "year to date" salary and the hourly wage. If an average of 20 hours per week still cannot be determined, the POWER team may ask for an additional pay stub showing the required information.
- 3. Is there a policy related to teachers resigning after they receive a POWER payment? Eligibility requirements for POWER are made based on the eligibility of the individual at the time of application. The POWER team will not make retroactive eligibility decisions after eligibility has been determined and/or payments have been made. For the next round of POWER, if the individual is no longer working with your program, you will be given the opportunity to indicate the individual is no longer eligible for additional POWER payments at your program.
- 4. Can staff qualify for POWER payments if they are on extended sick leave? I have a staff person who has just gone out on extended sick leave, and I see this as being no fault of her own.

 Depending on the specific circumstances, there may be some considerations available for your staff member. Contact the POWER team to discuss your individual circumstance, so an eligibility decision can be made.
- 5. What paperwork will be required for staff who received the first POWER payment to complete for subsequent POWER payments? In other words, will there be new paperwork required for staff who received POWER already?
 - Individuals who were eligible for the first POWER payment who are working with the same employer will need to provide an updated pay stub. Employers will need to verify in the POWER application that the employee is still employed at the program and still meets the eligibility criteria. Individuals who were eligible for the first POWER payment who are working at a different program will need to have their new employer complete a POWER application on their behalf, provided the new employer is an eligible program.
- 6. Are staff in school-age programs that have a DECAL license exemption and are CACFP providers eligible for POWER payments?
 - Employees must work in the following programs to be eligible: DECAL licensed child care programs, Department of Defense programs, Early Head Start or Head Start programs, or Georgia's Pre-K in public schools.

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- 7. What is the process for employees who have moved from one eligible program to another? Employees who change employment from one POWER eligible program to another POWER eligible program may be eligible for a payment if they have not had a break in service of more than 14 calendar days. Providers with staff members who meet this criterion should reach out to the POWER team to request a Continuous Employment Form and to understand what supporting documentation will be required in your specific case.
- 8. What is the required amount of time staff must be employed to eligible for POWER payments? For the application period beginning in January 2022, the employee will need to be employed on or before December 1, 2021. For the application period beginning June 2022, the employee will need to be employed on or before May 1, 2022.

STABLE

For details about STABLE 4ward, read the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

STABLE Application – Availability

1. How do I apply for STABLE?

To access the application, log on to your DECAL KOALA account at https://decalkoala.com/.

2. How long do I have to apply?

For the current round, the application will be open and available to eligible providers from October 18th, 2021, at 12:01 a.m. and will remain open until November 8th, 2021, at 6:00 p.m.

3. Who can apply for STABLE?

The STABLE application is available for programs in the following categories because they have met all Office of Child Care health and safety requirements as of the date of their application submission.

- a. Licensed child care learning centers
- b. Licensed family child care learning homes
- c. Child care learning centers that have been issued a Temporary License and have had an Initial Licensing Visit
- d. Family child care learning homes that have been issued a Temporary License and have had an Initial Licensing Visit
- e. Licensed child care partners for Head Start and/or Early Head Start grantees in the categories above
- 4. Can programs that just opened apply for STABLE 4ward even though they were not open before the pandemic?

Yes, if you are a provider that meets the criteria under "Who can apply for STABLE?" during the application period, you can apply.

- 5. My program had to move locations since a prior round of STABLE funding; can I still apply? Yes, if you are a provider that meets the criteria under "Who can apply for STABLE?" during the application period, you can apply.
- 6. Does a program have to be Quality Rated to apply?

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No.

7. Can licensed exempt providers apply for STABLE funding?

No, license exempt providers cannot apply for STABLE.

8. Can afterschool programs apply for this benefit?

Yes, if you are a provider that meets the criteria under "Who can apply for STABLE?" you can apply.

- 9. Does my child care program have to be Quality Rated to receive STABLE funding?

 No, being Quality Rated is not a requirement for STABLE 4ward.
- 10. The DECAL website lists the types of providers that can apply. Programs still under temporary COVID closure are not listed under either. Will they be eligible to apply?

Yes. Programs that are temporarily closed can still apply if the program meets the criteria under "Who can apply for STABLE?".

11. I am a FCCLH provider, and I am at full capacity. Does that mean I don't qualify for the stable 4ward? Do we have to have missing children to qualify?

Programs can receive funding even if they are currently operating at full capacity.

12. We are in the process of acquiring a new center. Would I be able to apply if we are not able to get the license before November 8th?

No, you must be a provider that meets the criteria under "Who can apply for STABLE?" during the application period to apply.

STABLE Application - Federal Reporting

13. If the director changes after I apply, do I have to change my application?

No, if your director changes after submitting the application, you do not have change the application. You will be able to update that information at the next quarterly report period.

STABLE Application – Affirmations

14. Regarding affirmations related to staffing, does this mean that if there is a COVID exposure in our center that forces a closure or quarantine, we will need to continue paying affected staff at their standard weekly pay?

Yes, based on the federal guidelines as this is considered involuntary. You are required to continue to pay them at least the wages and benefits that they typically received before your application or if they began employment after your application, their typical wages and benefits during normal operations. You do not have to pay them more than that amount during closures or involuntary absences. Example: If typical hours worked is 30 hours, 30 hours is their minimum that must be paid. You can't pay less, but you don't have to pay more.

15. Regarding affirmations related to staffing, do we need to pay staff who are sick and quarantining for reasons unrelated to the center closing?

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Yes, based on the federal guidelines as this is considered involuntary. You are required to continue to pay them at least the wages and benefits that they typically received before your application or if they began employment after your application, their typical wages and benefits during normal operations. You do not have to pay them more than that amount during closures or involuntary absences. Example: If typical hours worked is 30 hours, 30 hours is their minimum that must be paid. You can't pay less, but you don't have to pay more.

16. Do we need to continue paying staff in cases in which they take a leave of absence for reasons other than a COVID quarantine/closure?

No, if their leave or reduced hours are voluntary, or they asked or initiated time off, you are not required to pay those hours. DECALS recommends having the employee sign a voluntary acknowledgement form for such cases. Also, remember: If the employee is on leave for six months or more, they must redo their CRC.

STABLE Application – Attendance

17. What is the period of time for the attendance reported in the application?

Enter the total attendance for the month of September 2021. If you were not granted permission to operate in September 2021, use October 2021 attendance from the date of PTO to the application date. For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

18. When we upload September 2021 numbers, we are to report only children who actually attended, not enrolled children who did not attend at all in September?

Yes. The exception being CAPS children for whom payment was received; these children should be counted.

19. Do CAPS children who no longer attend, but for whom we are being paid under current policy, count in our September 2021 enrollment numbers?

Yes. That is specifically addressed in the instructions. Applicants must count those children in their attendance. For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

20. Should we count our SOLVE children who are attending our programs?

Yes, any child who attends should be counted according to the application instructions. For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

21. Do we have to count the children of staff that received free child care?

No, count only children for whom the program received funding from a parent or DECAL (CAPS, Pre-K).

22. For FCCLH programs, do we have to count related children who received free child care?

No, count only children for whom the program received funding from a parent or DECAL (CAPS, Pre-K).

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23. I have children in care but do not see their age group in my application. What do I do?

The age groups shown on each application are based on how the license has been managed. If an age group is missing, it is because an amendment was not submitted to DECAL telling us that the provider is caring for that age group. To add an age group, providers must submit a licensing amendment to DECAL through their DECAL KOALA account. This process can take 30 days to be completed. For STABLE 4ward, providers should submit their amendment but can go ahead and count children in the next closest age group shown in the application.

24. How is pre-pandemic attendance determined?

To ensure that all providers were treated equally, DECAL created a formula based on each program's total capacity to estimate its pre-pandemic attendance on which to base their STABLE 4ward amount. For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

25. If my center was not open before the pandemic, how will my pre-pandemic attendance be determined?

For child care learning centers that were not open before the pandemic, the pre-pandemic attendance is determined by the current capacity for the program, and funding is calculated in the same way as programs of similar size that were open prior to the pandemic. For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

26. If my attendance changes after I apply, do I have to submit those changes?

Yes, but only through the quarterly reporting process. STABLE 4ward funding will not change based on future changes to attendance if the provider is in continuous operations. If a provider remains closed for a significant period or reports no attendance, DECAL has the right to reduce or cease funding.

STABLE Application – Budget Questions

27. Do I have to budget STABLE 4ward funds to all budget categories?

No, you do not have to use all categories.

28. Can I budget 100% of STABLE 4ward for workforce expenses?

Yes, an applicant can budget 0-100% to the Workforce Support category.

29. Do I have to budget STABLE 4ward funds in the Tuition Relief category?

No, an applicant can budget 0-100% to the Tuition Relief category. While providers are encouraged to budget funds to this category, they are not required to do so.

STABLE Application – Funding Amount

30. How is STABLE 4ward funding determined?

For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

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31. If I am a Quality Rated provider, does that impact how my funding is calculated?

No, a provider's Quality Rated level does not have any impact on the STABLE 4ward calculation. For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

32. If you reported a number higher than your licensed capacity in round 1 of STABLE, will they use that number or your licensed capacity to determine the impact funding amount?

For each previous round, attendance over capacity was not factored into any payments. For STABLE 4ward, it is necessary to estimate pre-pandemic attendance for all applicants. DECAL is using a formula, supported by data, that is an accurate way to determine a close approximation of actual pre-pandemic attendance for most providers. Providers who did not exist before the pandemic are treated like similar sized programs. For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

33. Is STABLE a grant or a loan?

STABLE is a grant and not a loan. Repayment would be necessary only if DECAL's auditing and compliance processes determine that funds were not used according to guidelines.

34. Are STABLE funds taxable?

Yes, STABLE payments are considered taxable income. Maximus Inc. will send a 1099 to each program where CAPS and/or STABLE payments are greater than \$600 for the calendar year. For questions about your 1099, contact Maximus Inc. by email at ECT2@maximus.com or by phone at 1-877-755-6522. If you do not have a provider PIN when calling Maximus, you may dial 9 to be connected to a representative.

35. Will programs be allowed to increase their licensed capacity during the grant period and, if so, will that affect grant amount?

STABLE 4ward does not prevent a provider from changing their capacity. However, once they apply and begin receiving payment, a change in capacity will not change their STABLE 4ward payment amount.

STABLE Application – General Questions

36. If a child care operator has more than one location, operating under same tax ID #, can we apply for STABLE for each center?

Yes, an owner may submit a STABLE application for each location that meets the criteria under "Who can apply for STABLE?".

37. I made a mistake on my application. Can I edit it or make a change?

Yes, the same link for the application can also be used to edit your submitted application. Once your changes are made, you will need to submit again. Be sure that you receive the confirmation for the new application. You can edit and submit as many times as necessary during the current application period.

38. If I apply for STABLE 4ward in the first round, do I have to apply again in a future round?

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No, once you apply and have an approved application, you will not need to apply for STABLE 4ward again.

STABLE Payments

39. When will payments begin?

STABLE payment disbursements will not begin until the application period has ended and each application is approved. Upon approval, payments will be made monthly throughout the funding period which ends on September 30th, 2023. For the first round of STABLE 4ward, payments to approved applicants will begin before the end of November 2021.

40. We have a new bank account. How do we go about getting our account information updated? To update your bank account, contact Maximus Inc. by email at CAPSCOVID-19Compliance@Maximus.com or by phone at 1-877-755-6522. If you do not have a provider PIN when calling Maximus, you may dial 9 to be connected to a representative. You will have to complete an update direct deposit form for the new account.

41. Do you have to use STABLE 4ward funds right away?

Yes. Programs are required to use STABLE 4ward funds to maintain continuous operations to the greatest degree possible. Therefore, 50% of each monthly STABLE 4ward payment amount must be used within 90 days of receipt. Programs that do not meet the minimum spending will be at risk of having their STABLE 4ward payments reduced or cancelled.

42. Is it necessary or recommended to get a separate account for the STABLE 4ward payments?

No, it is not necessary. STABLE 4ward will be paid to the account that is provided to Maximus Inc. At this time, this will be the same account they use for CAPS payments.

43. Will the STABLE 4ward payments be a separate deposit or lumped in with CAPS?

Unlike previous rounds of STABLE payments, deposits for STABLE 4ward will be separate from CAPS deposits.

STABLE Reporting Requirements

44. Will I be required to report how I have used STABLE 4ward funds when doing the quarterly reporting?

Yes, providers will have to tell DECAL how much of the funds were used in each budget category for the time period associated with each report.

45. Do I need to save receipts for quarterly reconciliation and reporting?

You will not be required to provide receipts when completing quarterly reports. However, providers should maintain accurate records for how they used STABLE 4ward funds to complete quarterly reports. Also, accurate records will be necessary in the event your program is audited by DECAL.

46. Will details of reconciliations and reporting requirements be provided in advance?

Yes. All STABLE 4ward recipients will be provided details and requirements of quarterly reporting in advance.

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Using STABLE Funds

47. What is the time frame for spending STABLE 3 funds?

Programs may apply costs incurred from March 11, 2021, through June 30, 2024. Also, programs must spend at least 50% of all funds within 90 days of deposit and spend 100% of funds received by no later than June 30, 2024.

48. Can 100% of STABLE 4ward funds be used for workforce expenses?

Yes.

49. How does the "workforce support" category apply to FCCLH programs? As sole proprietors, are we able to pay ourselves to satisfy this category?

Yes. As owner and sole employee, FCCLH programs may use STABLE 4ward funds to pay themselves salary.

50. Are providers required to provide tuition relief to families?

No, while providers are encouraged to provide tuition relief to families, there is no requirement that they do. If a provider chooses to provide tuition relief, the provider has the discretion to determine amount and to whom it is provided. Providers must keep detailed records for how they provide relief to families.

51. Can STABLE 4ward funds be used for playground repairs?

Yes, recipients may use STABLE 4ward funds to improve playground equipment or areas. This type of cost should be budgeted for in the Facilities Cost category. The Facilities Cost category is subject to budget and spending limitations. For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

52. Can STABLE 4ward funds be used for new equipment?

Yes, recipients may use STABLE 4ward funds to add or replace equipment necessary for operating. This type of cost should be budgeted for in the Facilities Cost category. The Facilities Cost category is subject to budget and spending limitations. For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

53. Can STABLE 4ward funds be used for facility upgrades?

Yes, recipients may use STABLE 4ward funds to make improvements to the facility necessary for operating. This type of cost should be budgeted for in the Facilities Cost category. The Facilities Cost category is subject to budget and spending limitations. For a detailed explanation, see the STABLE Application Guidance on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/Stable.aspx.

Change of Ownership

54. If I purchase a child care program, will their STABLE payments transfer to me?

No, STABLE is a benefit of having a child care license, and all STABLE awards are tied specifically to the program that applied for and received the funding. This benefit cannot be transferred to

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another owner because the change of ownership creates a new licensed owner that has yet to apply.

55. If I sell my program, what happens to my STABLE payments?

If a child care program is sold to a new owner, STABLE payments will cease once DECAL receives the Change of Ownership notification. All unspent funds must be returned to DECAL after ownership ends.

Information about Previous STABLE Payments

56. Where can we get a copy of all our previous STABLE applications?

You can email stable@decal.ga.gov to ask for summaries of previous STABLE rounds.