

**Board of Early Care and Learning**  
**Meeting Summary**  
**May 16, 2024**

**Attendees**

**Board Members:**

Kristy Beam, Jen Bennecke, Melissa Boekhaus, Phil Davis (Chair), Susan Harper, Joanna Hill, Kristin Morrissey, Cristina Washell, Karla Zisook

**Guests:**

Sharon Burton, Tamra Campbell, Sherri Castle, Erin Clark, Lauren Davis, Diane Early, Gaurang G., Annamaria Gibbs, Frances Gillison, Tiniki Harris, Keisha Harrison, Julie Hleap, Isabelle Keenum, Ana Magana, Lindsay McVicar, Danielle Millman, Jennifer Paschal, Charlotte Pelz, Jaime Rechkemmer, Kyle Richardson, Marnagee Scott, Sandra Shepherd, Felicia Shuman, Austin Trott, Keisha Wynn

**DECAL Staff:**

Commissioner Amy Jacobs, Rian Ringsrud, Susan Adams, Elisabetta Kasfir, Bentley Ponder, Pam Stevens, Dennis Brice, Reg Griffin, Ira Sudman, Quandra Obi, Ben Appling, Geanina Armeanu, Farouk Baksh, Sarah Benton, Lari Lyn Beyer, Kristin Blevins, Chondra Bolton, Tamika Boone, Tomisher Campbell, Kim Davis, Katie Davis, Sarah Dixon-Morgan, Woody Dover, Tyler Duggins, Iko Ezell-Blackmon, Shayna Funke, David Ginsburg, Aleisha Golden, Brian Griffin, Janice Harris, Moriam Hassan, Leigh Ann Hendrix, Melissa Herndon, Janet Herrera, Amy Hill, Shenae Holmes, Michelle Hughes, Abraham Hussain, Denise Jenson, Venu Gopala Krishnan Keshavan, Kayla Little, Laura Lucas, Christi Moore. Meghan McNail, Amir Nilforooshan, Rob O'Callaghan, Sarah Mia Obiwo, Mariana Ortiz-Padilla, Rhonda Parker, Valerie Perez, Chrissy Powell, Anne Rein, Ashley Rich, Dajuana Robinson, Mike Rodgers, April Rogers, Brittany Sams, Barbara Sanders, Angela Shelton, Jackie Shivers, Hannah Smith, Carrie Spangler, Sonja Steptoe, Jill Taylor, Briana Thomas, Deja Thomas, Tamra Thomas, Veronica Thomas, Laura Wagner, Kharla Walker, Martine Watts, Vicki Watts, Sheryl Wilhite, Liz Young

Mr. Davis called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. He announced that Debra Brock resigned from the Board because of scheduling conflicts, and he thanked her for her service. He also informed Board members that the position of Vice-Chair is open, and the Board will elect new officers at the August meeting.

The Board unanimously approved the proposed meeting agenda and the minutes from the February 15 meeting. For inspiration Ms. Harper read a poem about teachers.

Mr. Davis invited Board members to share updates about their recent activities. He mentioned that DECAL's Reg Griffin had been in his district for the Pre-K to College sweepstakes awards. Ms. Harper reported that two teachers from her district reached out to her with questions that DECAL staff were able to help her answer. Ms. Beam said she enjoyed reading the book *Saturday* to a preschool class and participating in the Feelings Friday Dance Party for Children's Mental Health Week. Ms. Hill reported that she surprised Rachel Robertson, one of the Pre-K Teacher of the Year finalists and presented her with a check. Ms. Morrissey participated in a visit to a 3-star Quality Rated child care learning center in Cummings for Child and Adult Food Care Program (CAFCP) week and was very impressed that the toddlers were eating healthy meals. Ms. Zisook reported that Pre-K teachers in the City Schools of Decatur shared data about their students' progress with the kindergarten teachers. On K Day, Pre-K children visited kindergarten classes with their parents, and kindergarten teachers were impressed with their preparedness.

DECAL leaders provided updates about their areas of responsibility.

- Commissioner Jacobs reported that the 2024 legislative session was very successful and resulted in a historic level of funding for Georgia's Pre-K. She announced the finalists for Georgia's Pre-K Teacher of the Year, an award that is privately funded through donations to the DECAL Foundation. The finalists from private child care centers are Rachel Robertson from Oconee Preschool Academy in Watkinsville, Miranda Brewer from Young Einsteins Academy in Marietta, and Elisabeth Stratford from The Learning Treehouse in Rincon. The finalists from public schools are Elizabeth Arthur from Lincoln County Elementary in Lincolnton, Carol Underwood from Union County Primary School in Blairsville, and Heather Tomlinson from Daffodil Pre-K Center in Waycross. Each finalist receives \$500. The Commissioner also gave Board members copies of *A Magnificent Field Trip to the Governor's Mansion*, this year's Pre-K book written by Malcolm Mitchell. Two Pre-K classes visited the governor's mansion, heard Mr. Mitchell read the story to them, and met the Governor.
- Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported that DECAL's Q3 2024 expenses are on track with the budget. Although it appears that Child Care Services (CCS) has spent 80% of its allocated funds, the expenditures include federal relief funds which had to be encumbered in advance. Mr. Ringsrud reviewed the amended SFY2024 budget, appropriated in HB 915 and signed by the Governor. It includes an increase of \$19.5 million to DECAL's budget, primarily from state lottery funds which will go to Pre-K projects. The additional funds will also cover \$1,000 salary supplements for full-time, benefit-eligible DECAL employees and \$100,000 for start-up grants for Happy Helpings sponsors to establish new summer meal sites. The SFY 2025 budget, appropriated in HB 916, includes an increase of \$106 million to DECAL's budget, bringing the total to just over \$1 billion. This increase will cover a 4% cost of living salary increase for employees. It will also raise the CAPS provider reimbursement rate and fund the first year of recommended improvements to the Georgia's Pre-K program.
- Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams gave the Board an update on the five-week Summer Transition Program. For rising Pre-K students there will be 840 slots in 70 classrooms around the state. For rising kindergarteners there will be 4,564 slots in 326 classrooms. She informed the Board that the initiatives to be funded by the additional investment in Pre-K all support increasing access to Pre-K or improving quality. She will be visiting six locations around the state to give presentations about the changes to providers and teachers. Ms. Adams also gave an update about the New GAPre-K IT platform that replaces PANDA, which is being retired. She introduced Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Director Laura Lucas gave a general update about the work of the IECMH cross-agency task force. The task force has addressed or completed all of the recommendations of the Georgia General Assembly. Ms. Lucas shared highlights from Children's Mental Health Week held May 6–10 and thanked Board members Kristy Beam and Kimberly Neville for reading to children during the week.
- Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir informed the Board that the emergency CAPS payment policy waiver, which was implemented in April 2020 to enable providers to continue operating or pay teachers in case of low enrollment or temporary closure, is ending effective June 11. The nationally declared public health emergency ended in May 2023, and the federal funds used to support this policy are expiring. CAPS is reverting to the former policy which requires that providers be open for care at least one day of the service week, and that all children whose care is reimbursed attend at least one day during the service week. Providers and families have been informed of this change. If families have children who are enrolled but not attending child care, they may be billed by their providers. The ACCESS program continues through September 29, 2024.

Mr. Davis recessed the meeting for a short break at 10:30 a.m. and resumed it at 10:40 a.m.

- Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services (CCS) Pam Stevens presented four recommendations from CCS to streamline the number of license-exempt programs and increase support and monitoring for exempt providers who participate in CAPS. These are: 1) Exempt programs that do not receive CAPS, and therefore are not monitored, will not be listed on qualityrated.org 2) Exempt programs that participate in CAPS and currently receive one monitoring visit each year will receive two visits and be offered ongoing training and technical assistance. 3) The number of exempt categories will be consolidated from 14 to seven, and the category descriptions will be clarified. 4) Programs that receive CAPS and faith-based programs in religious settings will continue to apply for exemption. All other exempt programs will self-register. Ms. Stevens distributed a draft of the proposed rule changes that will enable revisions to the exempt categories. The Board will vote on the rule changes at the August meeting.
- Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder gave the Board an update about Quality Rated and the proposed revisions to the program. Of the 4,482 providers eligible to participate in Quality Rated, 2,900 (65%) had achieved a rating as of May 1. Another 18% are somewhere in the process. Dr. Ponder reviewed the results of the Quality Rated comprehensive review conducted last year, and he presented highlights of the proposed revisions to the system. The proposed changes reflect a shift toward the practice of continuous quality improvement and away from measuring quality at a single point in time. The proposed new system will have five tiers rather than three, and school-age classrooms will be included in ratings. Providers will select the rating level they want to achieve and demonstrate through required and elective components that they meet the requirements for that level.

Mr. Davis adjourned the meeting for lunch and committee meetings at 11:16 a.m. and called the meeting back to order at 1:00 p.m. for the public comment period. Mr. Davis asked Ms. Obi if anyone had signed up to speak or submitted comments through the chat function. Ms. Obi responded that several people had signed up to speak. She asked that each speaker limit their comments to five minutes.

*Lauren Davis said, I'm kind of writing some things down, but please forgive me if I'm not a public speaker. But I just wanted to kind of introduce myself to the board. I've never heard about these meetings before, but I really wanted to come before the board today and really get my story out there. I don't know if DECAL or the board knows about it, but my name is Lauren Davis, and I'm the owner and founder of iCare Child Development Center. It began as an in-home daycare in 2012, and by October 2023, iCare grew to eight child care center locations throughout Atlanta and Toccoa, Georgia areas. But sadly, in November 2023, seven of iCare's locations were immediately dismissed from CAPS program after four of our care locations were audited. One of them was newly enrolled, so wasn't officially dismissed, but CAPS has failed to make payments on behalf of children attending that center. It's a bigger story surrounding the audit, but it is my sincere belief that they were done with intentional malice. The auditors showed up and asked for 13 months of substantial records to be immediately produced on the spot. They wanted enrollment records, attendance records, transportation logs, and bank statements all on the spot. I mean, that's just, to ask the child care provider to deliver all of that on the spot, I mean, that's something that DECAL doesn't even hold themselves accountable for. So I feel like it, you know, that in itself is done with a lot of malice. Reasonably, providers are usually requested with advance notice to provide these records within 15 days or even longer. Ninety percent of students at five of these locations were on CAPS. These abrupt dismissals affected over 400 children and families and over 100 employees. There was no right to an appeal. This is what DECAL communicated, no right to an appeal, no opportunity to be heard, no opportunity for answers to ask any questions, no opportunity, no results from the audit at all, nothing. No probation, no technical assistance, no overpayment claims, nothing. It's been six months since this happened. There's no overpayment claims, no communication on this issue. Before these programs were even dismissed, I filed a grievance report and nothing from anyone, even though the grievances*

are said to be given to an impartial board. I don't know who this impartial board is. I've reached out at who is this impartial board. I've been given no answers. I pleaded with everyone. I emailed. I emailed Elisabetta. I emailed Amy. I emailed Ira. I emailed Aleisha Golden. Nothing, nothing. Nobody has been willing to investigate into the matter. Amy Jacobs, I emailed you. You responded and declined to get involved. The only answer that I've been given is that ICare's programs were paid over 9 million dollars over the last one year, and ICare was being investigated alongside many other providers. Nine million dollars over the last one year, I would think somebody would be talking about what that is. I did an open records request. This request was denied by Maria Reznik saying because I was under investigation. I know zero about this investigation. It's been six months. It has come to my recent attention, I'm getting ahead of myself, but with over 400 children and 100 employees being involved, I did the only natural thing I knew to do to ensure that these families will continue to have childcare and these employees will continue to have jobs. These buildings wouldn't sit empty and abandoned, and that these programs that have been in operation for over 30 and 40 years will continue in the areas of these child care, some of these areas are child care deserts in Toccoa, Georgia. So I close my programs and I lease my buildings to other child care providers. Recently it comes to my attention that these child care providers have been denied CAPS enrollment and I'm assuming it's because I'm their landlord. I own my buildings and because of all of this and getting no answers being stonewalled, I decided to do the only natural thing that someone would know to do, so if these children and families could continue with child care, is to lease them to other child care providers until all this stuff is settled with the lawyers involved. I've been stonewalled by everybody. There's nothing else to do, and so that's when I did leased the program to other people to provide these services. This, again, since November, I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself, but again, these providers have been denied services. DECAL has communicated to these providers that the previous owner is being investigated for fraud. We need bank statements showing your payroll and other operational expenses to ensure the previous owner is not involved. It says we're not, and it's silly to me, basically they're saying we're not giving you any money, So we want to know how you, as a provider, are paying your bills. We haven't been paying on behalf of these kids attending this center. I'm sorry, you guys, but my name is Lauren. I can be reached at 404-790-5655. My email address is Lauren, L-A-U-R-E-N, at ICAREchildren, that's I-C-A-R-E, children.com. I'm begging for someone to help and to investigate And so, what is going on with DECAL?

Felicia Shuman said, Good afternoon. My name is Felicia Schuman. I'm the owner of Felicia's Day Care in Savannah, Georgia, for over 35 years. My issue is with CAPS. Since they changed the system over from Maximus to CAPS, I have not been paid the right rate that I'm supposed to be paid. They're paying me \$100. My rate is \$125. I've been 3-stars since I started. It's kind of hard for me right now. I just lost a husband a year and two months ago. I'm not used to having a one-income home, and it's hard. I have a daughter in college, and I would love for her to stay in college, but I need my money from CAPS. I need the adjustment pay, so like I say, I just want my daughter to stay in college and get her education like everybody else. And when CAPS is not paying me my money, it's not gonna happen. Those \$5,000 is not easy to get. So I need your help. I need to know who I need to talk to so I could receive my funds, so I could see my daughter in college.

Sandra Shepherd said, Hi. My name is Sandra Shepherd. I'm the owner of Little Shepherd Running Academy in Savannah, Georgia. My grievance is not being paid on time. I don't know why we would switch to another company that we wasn't aware of before it happened. And we have been having problems ever since, can't switch to this new company, not being able to get paid on time. We used to get paid every week. If we submitted our invoices on Sunday, by Wednesday we was paid. Now they're telling us we can submit our payments on Friday after 5 p.m., and we're guaranteed to get paid by that Tuesday, but that's not the case. It seems like we're getting paid now every two to three weeks, not every week like we used to. It's just hard for some of us. I know for myself, when I was awarded the STABLE grant, God knows that helped me a whole lot as far as finances and being able to keep my doors open. Yes, I have continued to keep my doors open because, fortunately, I have a husband that supports me, and that is how I'm able to keep my doors open. When these parents come, they don't want to pay their portion that they're supposed to pay. They don't want to help. So then, I'm still keeping

*kids that are on CAPS. Then you tell me that the only way I can continue to support CAPS kids is to go through Quality Rated. I have been through Quality Rated. I just got finished. This is my fourth time around going through Quality Rated I've been a 3-star ever since this time here. I just got a 2-star. So I just want to say that I wish that we could go back to the old system that was in place because we had no issues whatsoever, but now there are so many issues out here that we cannot me, myself personally, and other providers, we can't do anything about it, and we are not...We are calling. We are texting. We are emailing. We are not getting any response from anyone. I know that I'm not.*

*Tammy Campbell said, Good afternoon. First of all, thank you, DCAL, for the opportunity to come here and to hear us. We appreciate you for that. I want to also say I'm a family child care provider. And my question is, "Was too much put on DECAL?" Because DECAL, you're already irresponsible for fingerprinting, background checking, licensing, and all of this other stuff that you already had under your hat. So was too much put on you with CAPS? That's my question. Because obviously, there's a loose screw. So, can we figure out how to tighten the bolt? Thank you for the opportunity.*

*Frances Gillison said, Good morning, everyone. My name is Frances Gillison. I'm a community organizer with 9to5 Georgia on behalf of the child care providers that are present. We are small, but we're mighty here. And the reason that is because these meetings are during hours that they have to keep kids. And so, this is a bigger issue, and everything that has been stated earlier, it's continuing to happen across the state. But we only have these few voices that are lifting these issues. So we just ask that these issues are being taken into consideration and really looked into deeply to understand and really help our, not only Savannahians, but whoever else is experiencing these issues. Thank you.*

*Tiniki Harris said, Good afternoon. My name is Tiniki Harris and I have a family home in Savannah. My issue with DECAL is with CAPS. CAPS was, during the pandemic, funding 70,000 kids, up to 70,000 kids. And you're trying to get it back down to 50,000. It's way more kids that need assistance, and parents that need assistance. My issue was, I had a parent that applied for CAPS three times in the last year. The first time she was denied because they said she didn't turn in her paperwork, but she put it in. It didn't get it. The second time she was approved, but before she could get all her paperwork in, before the deadline, they came back and said that she was denied. The third time, which was last month, she applied again. She was denied because she only fit two of the priority groups. Her income, she worked full time, but the third question was she was not young enough. She didn't mark that she was under 21 years of age. This parent...Savannah is a hospitality city, so we also know that income is not where it's supposed to be. She's homeless. She doesn't receive food stamps or Medicaid. How can she pay child care and also feed her kids and also provide medical care for her three kids? It's impossible. I took those three kids on during the STABLE grant. That was able to help me give her that service to her and her kids. Since the STABLE grant has ended, her kids are still there. I cannot charge her because she has nothing to give me. So I make sure that the food program is something that supplements. She's on my no-comp form. So, those three kids, I make sure that they eat before school, they eat when they come from school, and they eat before they go home. It's hard to tell a parent that, no, I can't take your kid, because you cannot pay. If we make CAPS available to as many people as we can, we could help them out. I was a young parent, and I knew how it was. I was going to school for childcare, and my instructor helped me. She let me bring the kids to the daycare at Savannah Tech, but she's also the food program that I'm in now, and I've been with her for 13 years, and it's just sad. It's not fair to the parents that need it. And we talk about mental health. If the parent's mental health affects the kid's mental health, if that parent can't to go to work and be satisfied that their child is in a quality environment to teach and to learn. It's hard for that parent to go to work and be focused on their job. They say Georgia is the best place to own a business, but it's not a best place for employees to work because they got to worry about paying for child care. My rates are so low, and I'm barely surviving, but I'm surviving because I have faith in God. I have faith in 9to5 that came above and helped me to make sure that my bills were paid. Sometimes it gets overwhelming, but I'm doing this for the kids. It's in my heart. I have been doing this for over*

*20 years. I started out in pre-K. I left to go for accounting for two years, but I couldn't finish because I missed my kids that much. So I decided to open up a childcare facility in my home. I have served so many kids, and even after they leave, I still attend graduations, I attend birthday parties, I attend baby showers for my kids that I have already taught, and those parents are the ones that come back to me to say, Mrs. Niki, do you have a spot for my kids? But family child care homes are only allowed six kids. Six kids are paid at \$100, and I'm not even getting \$100. That's \$600 a week, times four, that's 24, my mortgage. I'm in Savannah, and you all know that the rates, the home value in Savannah is going up. I don't want to lose my home. I don't want to lose my kids, because they...I'm quality rated three times. The first time, 2 stars. The second time, 3 stars. The most recent, 2 stars, because they've changed a lot. It's not fair. In the reimbursement rate, the TL package is set at the base rate. Savannah is low, Atlanta is high, but Savannah is the low income. Savannah cannot make it without CAPS, because we got parents that need it, not want it, but need it. So, please just consider adding extra funds, because from my understanding, this \$16 billion of surplus that Georgia has is not being put anywhere. Give it to the child care. Help us help the kids. If we want mentally healthy children, it starts with the parents, and if that parent could go to work and say, I know that my child is taking care of them, that it trickles down to that child, because that child is happy. During the STABLE grants I didn't have not one unhappy child, but more of my parents were more happy because guess what? They could drop their child off and not have to worry about coming out of pocket. So think about that. Think about just the help and increase. And even if you can't increase to back to the 70,000, help with something because we got a lot of parents that's on CAPS that don't need it. So, look into your system, look into what could be done to help more parents. They'll all be thankful. We do our work. And if you want Quality Rated, because in order to get CAPS, you have to be quality rated. We're busting our behinds trying to make sure that everything is right and how we're supposed to have it. Thank you.*

Mr. Davis asked Ms. Obi if anyone had submitted comments through the online chat function. She read the following comment from Danielle Millman, the president at Otter Learning, *DECAL Board, I wanted to take a moment to thank you and recognize your positive impact for so many children, families, and schools.*

*In February of 2023, I shared how critical increased funding would be in the upcoming year. I asked for new federal dollars to go towards provider rate increases so we could maintain and improve our programs, continue to increase the pay of our educators, and avoid excessive increases in tuition for other families.*

*You all certainly heard the need and responded! The increases in GAPK and CAPS make a huge difference in our ability to offer quality education to all.*

*Thank you for the work you have done and the support you provide to all of us in Georgia.*

*Danielle.*

Ms. Obi also noted that 10 comments were received by email before the meeting and shared with the Board. These are appended below.

Mr. Davis called for committee reports. Dr. Washell reported from the Programs committee. CAPS is piloting a new process for scholarship applicants designed to streamline the decision process. CCS has awarded \$64 million in health and safety grants as of May 7 and is collecting requirements for their new IT platform which will be paperless. In January 2023 the Practice and Support Services Unit within ISS began accepting referrals from the CCR&Rs to offer additional coaching to child care programs going through the Quality Rated process. To date 80 programs have been referred and 152 early learning professionals have received coaching about how to foster supportive relationships with children and create high-quality environments. The Happy Helpings program is gearing up for the summer with 500 feeding sites and a plan to serve 2.8 million meals. The USDA recognized three Happy Helpings sponsors with Turnip the Beet awards for serving nutritious, high-quality meals. Ms. Morrissey reported from the Finance committee that DECAL's expenses are still on track with the budget as of April 30, and that the agency is operating at a 92% efficiency rate. Dr. Zisook reported from the

QIP committee that DECAL's Early Head Start grant will end June 30 as previously announced. Eight DECAL staff will be impacted, and six of them have already found jobs, five of those at DECAL. Some of the impacted children will age out of the program, and it is hoped that the remainder will be able to stay with their current providers either with the new EHS-CCP grantee or with other funding. Quality Rated is launching a six-month pilot of the Nutrition and Physical Activity endorsement at nine child care learning centers. Dr. Zisook also reported that the Thriving Child Care Business Academy continues to be very popular among providers. The website has had more than 17,000 visitors, and 56% of these have downloaded documents or accessed links. The demand for small study groups has surged; 275 providers are completing or have completed study groups, and more are being planned to accommodate provider interest. Mr. Davis thanked the committees for their reports.

At 1:39 p.m. Mr. Davis reminded members of the next meeting, August 22, 2024, and adjourned.

As noted above, 10 emails were received by the Board in advance of the meeting. Contact details have been intentionally removed.

On Wednesday, May 15, 2024 Kim Bishop wrote, *As an After School Program Owner serving Atlanta Public Schools for 20+ years, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the diligent work that the DECAL has done over the past years on behalf of the childcare providers since COVID.*

*The funding that was available to my programs through the STABLE Grant kept my staff working, allowed my families to have consistent affordable care for their children, and allowed us to continue to provide quality to the children who are at the heart of everything my programs do.*

*DECAL thought of all of the things- from health and safety, to PPE supplies, to the maintenance and improvement of the facilities and playgrounds we use and so much more.*

*To the team of decision makers- thank you. I can only imagine all of the work that went into creating the support I've receive since COVID to keep my programs open and awesome!*

*Your hard work has had a great impact and I simply wanted to share my appreciation.*

*Respectfully,*

*Kim Bishop*

On Wednesday, May 15, 2024 Chantelle Hester wrote, *Chair Quandra Obi, Hello, my name is Chantelle Hester and I am a childcare provider in Savannah, Ga. I have been in operation for 10 years now. I have a graduate degree in Public Administration along with a TCC for childcare requirements.*

*I am writing this letter in regards to various issues that not only I but many more childcare providers are facing. In my 10 years of service, I've had a few hiccups with CAPS & Quality Rated. Some of the hiccups, in my opinion can have some revisions.*

*With regards to CAPS, when I started my service, I accepted CAPS families and that was about 8-9 years ago. During that time, it was too much paperwork and hoops that I had to jump through just to get a small percentage of my weekly rate and the parents paid another small percentage and neither of the amounts added up to my weekly rate. It took days, sometimes weeks for my reimbursement to be deposited into my account. in dealing with this on a weekly basis, I decided to stop accepting CAPS families. I didn't want to do that but I had no choice because the payments and reimbursements I get is for me take care of my home. After talking with other providers today, it sounds like CAPS is still operating in the same manner as I previously mentioned. In addition, their customer service is horrible. My suggestion for DECAL is to go through the CAPS system and change some things around. The first place to start I believe should be customer service, provide some customer service training along with training on how to be more efficient & timely with childcare providers and parents.*

*When it comes to Quality Rated, I would say it isn't needed. Although it comes with grants and gift packages that's beneficial to my daycare, the process to get any stars are ridiculous. There's entirely too much nit-picking that goes on to get any stars. It's like an observer is going through a provider's operation with a fine-tooth comb to give scores. Many of the expectations just isn't necessary.*

*For example, a provider has to go through their whole business to make sure they have all that is expected. Some requirements are to have various pictures with multi-cultural faces, kids doing different activities, having nature pictures, etc... In addition, when it's time for "potty time", providers have to sanitize the toilet seat and sink after each child. Now it's nothing wrong with that but it's not realistic and it takes up entirely too much time during that part of the daily schedule. If a child is home, the toilet seats or sinks don't get wiped down each time they use it.*

*QR has to consider family home providers who have a full house with different ages, they have a system that works for them in their daycare and having to go in and make some changes unnecessarily isn't beneficial for that provider. I don't have a problem with making changes and revising things within my daycare, but not to the point where it causes stress and anxiety because I want my daycare to be "perfect" in order to get any kind of stars. When you don't receive what you're expecting it causes disappointment. I experienced that on this last attempt to gain 3 stars. I have 2 stars and with the assistance of my TA, I knew I was supposed to gain 3 stars because I did everything she suggested. When I didn't get 3 stars, I became very upset and disappointed in the program, not myself.*

*So with QR, I would say it's not needed and if it stays, let up some. Stop trying to make providers create "perfect" programs in order to gain stars. Right now QR is a choice, PLEASE DO NOT MAKE IT A REQUIREMENT!!! We already have to go through state observation and that's enough anxiety because we want to make sure we are in good standing. Being cleared through the state is quality in itself. Think about this, with or without Quality Rated, for years childcare providers have been successful in their business with little to no major illnesses or germs spreading in their daycare and if it does, providers know how to sanitize and clean to get rid of viruses, germs, etc. just as parents do. They have had little ones leave having learned more than what's expected with our without the various pictures & specific toys. If there's no absolute major issue regarding child endangerment with providers, rate us on how well we run our program and how well the children interact with the provide r and their classmates. Providers are like parents and parents trust us with their little one(s), that too is quality in itself.*

*I hope this letter does not fall on deaf ears but the board is open to the concerns that childcare providers experience on a daily basis. In addition, I hope the board is willing to make revisions where it'll be beneficial and less stressful to family home childcare providers.*

*Thanks for reading & listening.*

*Chantelle Hester*

*On Wednesday, May 15, 2024 Hows King wrote, I want to express my appreciation to the DECAL Board and the Management Team under Commissioner Jacob's leadership for your tireless efforts in advocating for early childhood education in Georgia.*

*As a provider and member of Governor Deal's Early Education Steering Committee in the early days of Commissioner Jacobs tenure, I witnessed her balanced approach in building consensus across the various Georgia childcare stakeholders. The positive impact of this early foundation building cannot be overstated, the results too lengthy to enumerate here.*

*The legislation you championed during the 2024 Budget cycle has been a game-changer for Georgia PreK and the providers who are committed to quality outcomes. By reducing class sizes back to 20 students, and*



*recognizing Assistant Ga PreK Teachers through increased pay, you have delivered a critical boost to teacher retention.*

*I also want to highlight the positive impact that increases in classroom operation funds coupled with the impending increase in CAPS reimbursement rates will have on all Georgia children. Providers will be given a reprieve from the difficult choices we faced in how to absorb the financial losses from underfunded GA Prek and CAPS scholarships.*

*I am privileged to have been a childcare provider over the last 18 years and to have seen firsthand the positive impact on enduring quality outcomes for Georgia children that DECAL has fostered under the Leadership of Commissioner Cagle and Commissioner Jacobs.*

*Regards*

*Hows King*

Ms. Ellen Reynolds and Ms. Jaime Rechkemmer of the Georgia Child Care Association were copied on the above message.

On Wednesday, May 15 Barbara Aaron wrote, *Chair Quandra Obi,*

*Good afternoon, my name is Barbara, Aaron and thank you for this opportunity. I'd like to know more about 9 to 5 working women. I work in the Gwinnet county. and the Dekalb school system. I had an invitation to come to one of your meetings, which was very informative. However, I have not received any information so I can pass on to the schools.*

*I meet with some parents on a monthly basis. Discuss early childhood education along with education For adults.*

*The graduation ceremony was beautiful.*

*Thank you again for this opportunity. Have a blessed day and job well done.*

*Barbara Aaron*

On May 15 Courtney Smart wrote, *Chair Quandra Obi,*

*Caps not paying the full amount for childcare and children in the system that doesn't attend the daycare . Payment Delay causing us to be late on our bills and more.*

On May 14 Jaime Rechkemmer wrote, *To Commissioner Jacobs and the entire team at Georgia Department of Care and Learning:*

*I am writing to express our sincere gratitude for your unwavering commitment and tireless efforts in advancing early childhood education throughout our state. Your recent initiatives to allocate CCDF funds to increase CAPS reimbursement to the 60th percentile demonstrate your dedication to supporting childcare providers and ensuring access to high-quality care for children and families across Georgia.*

*Furthermore, your earnest determination to secure additional funding to elevate the salaries of Georgia PreK teachers and assistant teachers is truly commendable. Recognizing the invaluable role these educators play in shaping the future of our children, your advocacy for their well-deserved compensation is a testament to your prioritization of excellence in early care and education.*

*Moreover, your proactive approach to addressing increasing operational expenses underscores your comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by childcare facilities. By striving to provide adequate resources and support, you are not only fostering a nurturing environment for our youngest learners but also empowering childcare providers to thrive professionally.*

*Your leadership and advocacy in these critical areas of early childhood education are making a profound impact on the lives of countless children and families across Georgia. On behalf of all those who benefit from your dedication, Georgia Child Care Association members extend our heartfelt thanks.*

*With deep appreciation,*

*Jaime Rechkemmer*

*Interim CEO, Georgia Child Care Association On behalf of our members*

*On Tuesday May 14 Charan Singh wrote, I'd like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone at Decal for their tireless advocacy and support for the childcare industry. Their dedication has led to historic increases in funding for CAPS and Georgia Pre-K programs, despite facing numerous challenges which will assist tremendously in stabilizing the Childcare industry in the state. I also want to appreciate the commitment of the Commissioner and all Decal staff for their unwavering efforts on behalf of providers throughout the state.*

*Thank You*

*Charanjeev (Vick) Singh*

*Owner*

*Chroma Early Learning Academy*

*Ms. Jaime Rechkemmer and Ms. Ellen Williams Reynolds of the Georgia Child Care Association were copied on the above message, as was Mr. Bernard H. Reynolds of True-North, Inc.*

*On Tuesday, May 14, Robert Hill wrote, Dear DECAL Board Members,*

*I trust this note finds you in high spirits—or whatever color best reflects joy in a room full of unsung heroes! I'm Robert Hill, the President-Elect of the Georgia Childcare Association, writing with a heart as buoyant as a preschooler's nap mat, yet filled with gratitude as substantial as our educational manuals.*

*First and foremost, a huge thank you to everyone at DECAL for truly embodying the spirit of partnership following our appeal to the Board in early February 2023 to enhance provider reimbursement rates for CAPS and Georgia Pre-K. Your dedication to open communication and fostering an environment where everyone feels included and part of a unified group, rather than adversaries, is truly motivating. You have perfected the art of collaboration and have established a high standard for how we support each other in our common goal.*

*Additionally, we must acknowledge the valiant, behind-the-scenes work of your team, who have been fervently advocating for improved provider rates in CAPS and Georgia's Pre-K programs. Because of your efforts, we're doing more than just simulating real-life scenarios; we are genuinely creating a better future for all the young learners across our state. Your diligent work is seen and greatly appreciated.*

*Thank you once more for all that you do, which includes plenty of responsible adult actions so that our children can enjoy being children. We are excited to continue working hand-in-hand with such committed individuals. Here's to further enhancing our productive and wonderful partnership!*

*Warmest regards,*

*Robert Hill President-Elect, Georgia Childcare Association*

*On Tuesday, May 14 Sharon Foster wrote, Hi Quandra,*

*Please accept the following as testimony for the Board Meeting:*

*I am a large child care provider serving more than 1600 children daily. Many of those children receive CAPS assistance. 120 of those children are enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K classes. I am tremendously appreciative of the effort put forth by DECAL to secure the largest increases in funding for those two programs that I have ever seen in 23 years of operations. With the end of ACCESS looming on the horizon, the increased CAPS funding*

*will help many families remain in their current child care program because the gap between market rates and CAPS rates will narrow. The raises for Pre-K teachers demonstrates the fact that early childhood educators are as valuable as their K-12 counterparts. This increased funding was a significant milestone for child care providers and the support shown by DECAL in reaching that milestone deserves a hearty round of applause. Thank you.*

*Kind regards,  
Sharon*

*On Wednesday, May 15 Sandra O'Neal wrote, Chair Quandra Obi, Good afternoon my name is Sandra McLean O'Neal. I have been a childcare provider for the past 31 years. I am about to go into my third round of quality rating. I have three centers Angels 12 and three it is very, very difficult to find reliable staff members to work Childcare, we have to pay these ladies and gentlemen salary so that they can take care of their families at the end of the stick. The owners are the one I can't speak, but I can't speak for myself that goes without receiving a paycheck. We have to make sure our centers are at 100% not 50% and it takes money when we call in contractors to work weekends so that our buildings will be up to Car , we have to make sure our sheets are clean holes. The cribs are up-to-date. The toys are in good shape. Nothing with rips or tears so that they would harm the children. The price of food has gone up and we are in this profession because we love what we do, I love I love the families that I meet each and every day I love the children. The kids are in our care more than what it would be and , the parents care I've had a young ciao that came up to me and told me that she was raped by her brother. We have a bond with these children. The only thing that the question that I have for you why are we doing all this and the money that we go that we go through to get to the quality quality rating to my centers have three stars one have two stars so you know we've had time and energy put in it , can't y'all pay us what we deserve. We are supposed to get extra money if you read it three stars we get 55% of that child daycare fee not give it to us. That's not fair. That's not right and if we say something we can ride like a horse , make it make sense to me. I have to pay for people to come to pay to paint down. We have to pay liability insurance, which would be a dummy not to have liability insurance. I have to pay for the insurance on my vans. Please give us what we we are working, we're not begging .*

*Sandra O'Neal*