Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

Statewide Child Care Emergency Preparedness Plan

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Table of Contents

Section 1. Background, Scope, Assumptions, and Overview 3
Section 2. Emergencies & Disasters 7
Section 3. Preparedness 7
Section 4. Response 9
Section 5. Recovery 10
Section 6. Subsidy-Critical Activities 12
Section 7. Temporary and Emergency Child Care 14
Section 8. Communication 18
Section 9. Family Assistance/Reunification 18
Section 10. Emergency Counseling 19
Section 11. Plan Review 20
Section 12. Resources 21

Section 1. Background, Scope, Assumptions, and Overview

1.1 Background

The Georgia State Emergency Operations Plan (SEOP) is designed to assist state-level leaders and emergency management personnel in handling all phases of emergency management during a human-caused or natural disaster. It follows the principles of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), and the Incident Command System (ICS) as specified by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (USDHS). It also follows a format similar to the National Response Framework (NRF).

All-hazard emergency management acknowledges that most disasters and emergencies are best managed as a cycle consisting of four (4) phases: prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery, with mitigation across all four (4) phases. All-hazard emergency management also acknowledges that there are common emergency functional responses. To address these commonalities, the SEOP contains 15 functional annexes, each addressing an Emergency Support Function (ESF). The ESF is a mechanism that consolidates multiple agencies that perform similar or like functions into a single, cohesive unit to allow for the better management of emergency response functions. The Georgia Department of Human Services (GDHS) has been tasked as the coordinating agency for Emergency Support Function Six (ESF-6).

ESF-6 – Mass Care, Shelter, and Human Services coordinates the delivery of mass care, emergency assistance, housing, and human services when county response and recovery needs exceed their capabilities. GDHS's Response and Recovery Framework for Mass Care, Shelter, and Human Services identifies the authority, roles, and responsibilities for GDHS executives and program offices to ensure a collective response to disasters and emergencies.

1.2 Scope

In September 2014, the federal Child Care and Development Fund Block Grant (CCDBG) was reauthorized. In Georgia, the CCDBG Act of 2014 provides the funding to support child care, through the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Child Care to the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). These funds, along with the required matching state funds, support child care licensing, child care subsidies, and the state's quality rating and improvement system, Quality Rated. A key component of the CCDBG Act of 2014 reauthorization was the inclusion of a requirement that participating states develop and disseminate a Statewide Child Care Emergency Plan.

Section 658E(c) (2)(U) of the CCDBG Act of 2014 states that the Statewide Child Care Emergency Plan must include:

- Guidelines for continuing Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) assistance and child care services after a disaster, which may include provision of temporary child care and temporary operating standards for child care after a disaster.
- Requirements that child care providers receiving CCDF have in place procedures for evacuation; relocation; shelter-in-place; lockdown; communication and reunification with families; continuity of operations; and accommodation of infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and children with chronic medical conditions.

- Requirements that child care providers receiving CCDF have in place procedures for staff and volunteer emergency preparedness training and practice drills.

In order to fulfill the requirement of Section 658, DECAL has developed the following Statewide Child Care Emergency Plan to identify and communicate the processes and supports for child care in the event an individual, local, regional, or statewide emergency or disaster occurs. It outlines recommendations for planning preparedness, response, and recovery from a disaster and the role the agency will play in providing support. This document provides guidance regarding child care learning centers (CCLCs) and family child care learning homes (FCCLHs) licensed by DECAL and license-exempt and informal child care providers accepting CCDF funds. This document also strives to provide information relevant to all other early learning programs in terms of recommendations and resources.

1.3 Assumptions

The following assumptions were considered in the development of the plan:

Emergencies and disasters present themselves in all forms. While some provide advanced warning such as weather-related events, others may come about with no warning. Emergencies and disasters may include weather-related events, human or nature-caused incidents, and public health emergencies such as a pandemic. The best way to prepare for a disaster is planning and practice.

Child care is a necessary component for families and should be restored as quickly as possible.

All licensed child care providers and all license-exempt and informal child care providers receiving CCDF funds are required to develop an individual emergency preparedness and response plan and then orient staff and volunteers, share with parents, and should consider filing the plan with their local municipality and county.

The Georgia Department of Human Services (GDHS) is the Coordinating Agency for ESF-6 – Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing and Human Services when county and regional task forces' response and recovery needs exceed their capabilities.

This document is a supplement to those plans developed by Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH) and the Georgia Emergency Management Agency/Homeland Security (GEMA/HS) and does not serve to address the full scope of community or state response to a disaster or emergency.

Time frames provided throughout the plan, unless specifically noted, serve as guidelines for activities and may vary depending on the nature of the disaster or emergency.

1.4 Overview

As an office, many of the state's child-serving systems are funded or supported by DECAL or its business partners. DECAL serves as Georgia's lead agency for the administration of the Child Care and Development Block Grant. Additionally, DECAL receives funding through the Office of Head Start from the Head Start State Collaboration Office.

1.4.1 Licensed Child Care

The standards to aid in protecting the health, safety, and rights of children are found in GA Code Chapter 20, Section A for child care learning centers and family child care learning homes , respectively. Those chapters identify the minimum level of compliance necessary to obtain and maintain licensure. On October 1, 2016, child care licensing rules and regulations were amended to include expanded requirements for a facility emergency preparedness plan.

These rules and regulations can be found in the following chapters for child care learning centers:

591-1-1-.21 Operational Policies and Procedures

591-1-1-.27 Posted Notices

591-1-1-.29 Required Reporting

591-1-1-.33 Staff Training

And in the following chapters for family child care learning homes:

290-2-3-.07 Staffing and Supervision

290-2-3-.08 Children's Records

290-2-3-.11 Health, Safety, and Discipline

290-2-3-.14 Reporting

1.4.2 License-Exempt and Informal Child Care

Six identified child care category types are exempt from licensure in Georgia, which include Category 1: Government Owned and Operated, Category 2: National membership School Aged, Category 3: Private Schools, Category 4: Short term care, Category 5: Faith-based Accredited or Religious Schools, and Category 7: Day Camp Programs and School Breaks Of those, two identified category types (Category 1: Government Owned and Operated and Category 7: Day Camp Programs and School Breaks) are eligible to receive child care subsidies. Additionally, informal providers, those providers offering child care to a maximum of six children for pay, are eligible to receive child care subsidies. As such, these program types are required to comply with health and safety standard requirements for a facility emergency preparedness plan.

These requirements can be found in the following health and safety standards for license-exempt providers:

J. Policies and Procedures

P. Staff Training

T. Required Reporting

And in the following health and safety standards for informal providers receiving subsidy:

J. Policies and Procedures

O. Staff Training

S. Required Reporting

At this time, there are no specific Georgia requirements for license-exempt providers not accepting child care subsidies to have an emergency plan, but in terms of best practices, it is advisable. The United States Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) and the American Red Cross provide resources to support families' emergency planning. See Section 12. Resources for useful links.

1.4.3 Child Care Subsidies

Georgia's child care subsidy program, Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS), provides financial assistance to families with low incomes to help cover the cost of child care while parents work, go to school or training, or participate in other work-related activities. To support continuity of operations during an emergency, the CCDF requires the agency to have an operations plan in place.

1.4.4 Head Start

Head Start is a federal-to-local community grant funded through the Office of Head Start within the U.S. Administration for Children and Families. While DECAL has no role in funding oversight or program model fidelity at the state level, Head Start programs are federally required to use the Comprehensive Background Check from the state. DECAL plays a crucial role in both health and safety for those programs participating in licensing, as well as in the supports for providers participating in Georgia's Quality Rated program and Georgia's lottery-funded PreK program. Head Start Program Performance Standards 1302.47.b.7; 1302.47.4.i.G; and 1302.47.b.8. reference the required emergency preparedness activities for Head Start grantees.

DECAL also is the federally funded grantee for the Head Start State Collaboration Office.. The state office facilitates partnerships between Head Start providers and other state programs that provide services to benefit children from families with low incomes. These offices contribute to state systems for early care and education, and play a key role in targeted communication and resource dissemination during emergency response efforts at DECAL.

1.4.5 Georgia's Pre-K

This state-funded program offers early learning programming to 4-year-old children in approved provider settings (child care, Head Start, school district and private academic preschool). Emergency preparedness is addressed in the rules and regulations of the facilities licensed by DECAL and under the local school system protocols for those Georgia's Pre-K classrooms hosted in public schools.

In the event of an emergency closure, Georgia's Pre-K Programs should contact their assigned Pre-K Specialist to report closure. The Pre-K Specialist will work with the program to approve changes or modifications to the Pre-K School Year Calendar. The Pre-K Program has a web-based payment system that will allow continuation of Pre-K payments during and after a disaster. DECAL also has a web-based telephone platform and web-based inquiry system allowing Pre-K providers, families, and other stakeholders to communicate with the Pre-K program during and after a disaster.

DECAL has statutory authority over the licensing of child care facilities as well as the authority for the provision of subsidized child care through CAPS. The agency does not have the authority to take custody of children or provide them with direct care.

Section 2. Emergencies & Disasters

Emergencies and disasters are sudden and serious events or unforeseen changes in circumstances that require immediate action to alleviate harm or avert imminent danger to life, health, or property. They can be human-caused, weather-related events, public health emergencies, or natural catastrophes. Additional information regarding natural disasters and severe weather can be found on the following websites:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/index.html
- American Red Cross: https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies.html
- Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency: https://gema.georgia.gov/plan-prepare/storms-disasters
- Federal Emergency Management Agency: https://www.fema.gov/
- National Weather Service: https://www.weather.gov/

The most common disasters in Georgia are flood, fire, and weather. While it is impossible to plan for every contingency, individuals, families, businesses, communities, and all levels of government have a responsibility to establish basic emergency planning. In some cases, there are regulations or laws requiring emergency and disaster planning and annual review and training around the content of the plans and responses.

Section 3. Preparedness

Preparedness is fundamental to the success of any emergency plan. It allows for the consideration of the risks to which an individual provider, community, or region could be exposed; identification of internal and external resources for use during an emergency or disaster; and designation of roles for critical staff and volunteers during an emergency or drill.

3.1 Child Care Providers

3.1.1 Emergency Plan

Providers are required through regulation to develop an emergency plan. Resources available to assist programs in developing this plan can be accessed at:

- https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/schools.html
- https://extension.psu.edu/programs/betterkidcare/lessons/developing-an-emergency-preparedness-plan
- https://www.childcareaware.org/our-issues/crisis-and-disaster-resources/tools-publications-and-resources/
- https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies.html
- https://www.ready.gov/business/emergency-plans
- https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohsepr/toolkit/resource-guide-supporting-children-families
- CCLCEmergencyPlanstemplate.docx (live.com)
- FCCLHEmergencyPlanstemplate.docx (live.com)
- https://gema.georgia.gov/plan-prepare

Emergency plans should be developed so as to be specific to the program and operation type, resources available, and with careful consideration to the children and families served by the program. These plans should incorporate procedures for preparedness and response to any potential emergency situation. Just as important as developing this plan is the practice and training of it. Emergency plans must be communicated with families enrolled in the programs, as well as with volunteers and staff employed by the program. Training must also be conducted with both volunteers and staff on emergency preparedness requirements and emergency response procedures. In addition, the practice of procedures (drills) established within the plan must be conducted with both staff and children enrolled on a regular basis so as to familiarize them with the expectations of what would occur in the event of an actual emergency.

3.1.2 Providers Receiving CCDF

CCDF regulations require all child care providers receiving CCDF funding to have a plan that includes procedures for the following:

- Evacuation
- Relocation
- Shelter-in-place
- Lockdown
- Communication and reunification with families
- Continuity of operations
- Accommodations for infants and toddlers
- Accommodations for children with disabilities
- Accommodations for children with chronic medical conditions

3.1.3 Emergency Manager

Programs seeking to identify the Emergency Manager for their municipality can do so by following this link to GEMA/HS locations.

3.1.4 Periodic Test and Readiness Activities

It is not sufficient to develop and file a plan. All staff should be oriented to the plan annually. Periodic emergency drills should be incorporated into the program activities. The saying goes, "The more preparation, the shorter the response." The types of drills should be varied so that staff, children, and families have a level of comfort in responding to a variety of potential risks. Emergency drills are necessary to prepare children and staff for how to respond appropriately to numerous potential emergencies. Routine practice of emergency drills fosters a calm, competent response to an emergency when it occurs. A child who is coached properly ahead of time will have a better chance to be safe. Documentation ensures that all children are accounted for, that emergency plans are conducted appropriately, and drills are carried out in a timely manner. Fire drills must be practiced monthly, tornado and other emergency situation drills, such as lock-down and shelter-in-place, must be practiced semi-annually. Documentation to include the date and time of these drills must be maintained at the program for two (2) years.

3.2 Department of Early Care & Learning (DECAL)

3.2.1 Plan Integration

DECAL will incorporate this Statewide Child Care Emergency Plan into the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) developed for the office.

3.2.2 Supports

DECAL will identify internal and external supports and determine the role they will play in the execution of the plan.

3.2.3 Risk Assessment

DECAL will partner with DPH and GEMA/HS to provide risk assessment to assist providers in preparedness planning. Additionally, DECAL-approved training vendors or DECAL staff appropriately trained through Child Care Aware of America may offer Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery training to child care providers.

3.2.4 Plan Review

Annually, DECAL will conduct a review of the plan and make revisions as needed.

3.2.5 Plan Publication and Dissemination

The Georgia Statewide Child Care Emergency Plan is a public document. It is posted, along with numerous resources, on the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) website at https://www.decal.ga.gov/bfts/GAStatewideChildCareEmergencyPlan.aspx.

Additionally, the plan is shared with the following DECAL partners:

Georgia Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies
Georgia Department of Human Services
Georgia Department of Public Health
Georgia Department of Education
Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities
Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency
Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Georgia Children's Cabinet

Section 4. Response

Response is identified as the time period immediately before, during, and after an emergency event. It is during this time period that providers should be prepared to enact their emergency plan. Georgia follows the principles of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS). Immediate emergency or disaster response and recovery operations will be accomplished at the lowest level of government. Local jurisdictions will be responsible for all operations up to their capability. During response, the priorities are saving lives, protecting property and the environment, and meeting basic needs.

4.1 Child Care Providers

4.1.1 Plan Execution

In the event of an emergency, providers should execute the portions of their plan that best address their needs in the immediate circumstances. Related to an emergency, a decision must be made to act on one of five paths—whether the provider should modify services, lockdown, immediately evacuate, shelter-in-place, or evacuate to a relocation facility.

4.1.2 Communication with DECAL

As soon as it is safe to do so, but no later than 24 hours after the emergency, child care providers shall immediately notify DECAL with information regarding impact to their program. The provider must follow the requirements of Child Care Learning Center or Family Child Care Learning Home Rules and Regulations, relating to reporting any cases of viruses or illnesses identified during a public health emergency, any death or serious injury of a child while in the care of the facility, any fire, structural disaster, or emergency situation that requires temporarily relocating children, and any changes in the program's operating status. Providers should notify DECAL through their DECAL KOALA provider self-service account, or call the DECAL office at 404-657-5562, if unable to report online, to comply with required reporting. In the event of a natural disaster, an Emergency Response Survey will be sent to providers in the affected counties. This survey will collect data to determine the severity of damage sustained by programs in a geographic area. The Executive Director of the DECAL Foundation and staff members from the DECAL Research Unit will monitor the survey responses and distribute the information to the other DECAL divisions affected such as Child Care Services (CCS), Nutrition, CAPS, Head Start, Georgia's Pre-K, and Quality Rated.

4.2 Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)

4.2.1 Communication With Providers

As appropriate, DECAL will communicate directly with providers in the emergency zone using phone, email, listservs, social media, the DECAL website, or in person as necessary to share information. In addition, DECAL advises child care programs to monitor local conditions using local media and electronic applications.

4.2.2 Communication with Grant Funders and Oversight Agencies

DECAL will collect and provide updates to the Office of Child Care or designee as to the impacts of the disaster/emergency throughout the response period. Information will be communicated to the State Head Start Collaboration Director housed within DECAL to ensure appropriate information is directed to the Office of Head Start on behalf of impacted grantees.

Section 5. Recovery

Recovery is the period after an emergency or disaster where individuals or community members as a whole attempt to return to or have completely resumed normal activities. Depending on the circumstances of the disaster, the recovery period can vary in length or duration.

5.1 Child Care Providers

5.1.1 Communication

A critical element of recovery is communication with families of children enrolled in child care, staff, and DECAL staff. It is important to establish whether the facility is operational, so that families can make appropriate alternative arrangements for child care.

5.1.2 Alternative Placements

Depending on the size and scale of a disaster, DECAL may attempt to identify placement opportunities for families who lost child care due to the disaster or emergency services workers supporting recovery activities.

5.1.3 Alternative Facilities

If providers are unable to re-open their facilities due to the disaster, but have identified alternative facilities, it is critical to contact the DECAL office immediately. Child Care Services (CCS) can start the process to expedite licensing at the new facility with a health and safety evaluation of the space, prior to operations beginning at an alternate location.

5.1.4 Self-Assessments

Providers impacted by an emergency should conduct a self-assessment to identify needs for their facility if their intent is to reopen. A self-assessment form is provided on the DECAL website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/FormList.aspx?cat=Child Care Learning Center.

5.1.5 Additional Staff and Volunteers

In the aftermath of a disaster, program staff may need to deal with the impacts of the disaster on their own family and may not be able to return to work. In the event that a facility finds the need to hire additional staff or use volunteers to support reopening, they must continue to fulfill the Child Protective Service Law requirements for Child Abuse, Criminal Background, and FBI Fingerprint Certifications. For more information about the requirements for background checks, visit the DECAL Criminal Records Check website at http://www.decal.ga.gov/CCS/CriminalRecordsCheck.aspx.

5.2 Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)

5.2.1 Impact Data Collection

During recovery, DECAL will be collecting data on the impacts of the disaster on the availability of child care in the affected community.

5.2.2 Communication

DECAL will receive information regarding statewide and local conditions from the Governor's office and partner agencies such as the Department of Public Health and the

Georgia Emergency Management Agency/Homeland Security. Using email, social media, and the DECAL website, DECAL will communicate information related to recovery efforts. Any grants available to providers will be communicated by email, DECAL webpage, and social media efforts.

5.2.3 Provider Support

DECAL CCS staff will support providers impacted by the event and assist with licensure of temporary or relocated facilities or exemption processes of facilities to which this may apply.

5.2.4 After-Action Assessment

After community-level disasters, DECAL will conduct after-action assessments to determine what factors should be considered for future events and modify the Statewide Child Care Emergency Plan accordingly.

Section 6. Subsidy-Critical Activities

6.1 Continuity of Services – Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS)

Georgia has a web-based eligibility system that allows CAPS to extend eligibility and process re-determinations remotely during and after a disaster. CAPS has an Internal Business Continuity and Contingency Plan that ensures provider payments continue in the event of inclement weather, office closure, building access restrictions, and local system outages.

Georgia CAPS also has a web-based telephone platform and web-based inquiry system on the CAPS website that allows families, child care providers, and other stakeholders to communicate with the CAPS program during and after a disaster. Families, child care providers, and other stakeholders can reach CAPS staff by calling 1-833-4GA-CAPS (1-833-442-2277) or by going to the Contact Us tab on the CAPS website at https://caps.decal.ga.gov/en/.

The QualityRated.org website, CAPS Family Support Consultants, and the Quality Rated Family Support Call Center serve as the hub of child care information. Regionally based Family Support Consultants are working within counties to assist working families with low income with obtaining assistance with child care. Additionally, they provide families with information on quality child care and with personalized child care referrals to providers based on specific needs or preferences. The Quality Rated Family Support Call Center referral specialists help families who need child care referrals or information about Quality Rated and other DECAL programs, supports, and resources. To locate available child care, families may use the online search service at www.qualityrated.org or contact the Quality Rated Family Support Call Center by calling 1-877-ALL-GA-KIDS (1-877-255-4254) or sending an email to findqrcare@decal.ga.gov. Families can also visit www.findhelpga.org for additional resources.

The information that providers enter in their self-service portal account, DECAL KOALA, feeds into the public-facing website that families can utilize to search for child care. The CAPS Customer Response unit is also available to help families with resources to assist

them in paying for child care. Families may contact CAPS Customer Response at 1-833-4GA-CAPS (1-833-442-2277) or https://caps.decal.ga.gov/en/ and select Contact Us.

To support continuity of operations during an emergency, the CCDF requires the agency to have an operations plan in place. The grant requires DECAL to provide comprehensive information on all agency services, including CAPS. CAPS staff often provide additional information for other community services available to individuals. In an emergency, CAPS staff will continue to make parent services available to the public and to all families who may be eligible for subsidized child care. To locate available child care, families may use the online search service at www.qualityrated.org or contact the Quality Rated Family Support Call Center by calling 1-877-ALL-GA-KIDS (1-877-255-4254) or sending an email to findqrcare@decal.ga.gov. Families can also visit www.findhelpga.org for additional resources.

CAPS staff will continue to deliver all the services they provide on a daily basis, which include resource and referral services. In accordance with grant requirements, the CAPS staff is cross trained to assure that core functions can be performed.

In the event the agency's office is impacted by an emergency or disaster, members of the CAPS staff can work from their home offices. The subsidized child care program's information systems, Gateway and GACAPS (Georgia Child Care Administrative and Payments System), are web-based and can be accessed via DECAL VPN from agency issued devices with internet capabilities. Families can apply for child care subsidy or request an update to their child care case using the Gateway one-stop web-based service at www.Gateway.ga.gov.

6.2 Continuity of Services – Families

In the aftermath of an emergency or a disaster, families may find that their need for child care or eligibility for care has been impacted. This section provides clarifications related to subsidized child care during an emergency or disaster.

6.2.1 Location, Schedule, and Other Changes

Families may request a change in provider, or hours and days of care at any time. The family may choose any licensed provider in an approved Quality Rated Status, including a qualified provider who may be operating at an emergency location that is approved by CCS under permit or temporary licensure, approved license-exempt programs that are government owned and operated or day camp programs, or informal providers.

If families are having difficulty providing the required verification, the CAPS eligibility specialists or consultants will support the families in obtaining the required verification information. When the family has cooperated, yet is still unable to provide the required verification, they may receive up to 45 days from the date their application is processed to provide verification documents when confirmed that they experienced a disaster. The grace period for providing these verification documents will not postpone the eligibility determination. New families typically have 10 calendar days to submit verification documents. Existing CAPS families must submit documents on or before the end of the eligibility period as stated in CAPS policy.

6.2.2 Increased Wages

Increased earnings based on temporary overtime do not impact eligibility. In the event that a parent's employer increases the number of hours worked, which in turn increases the family's income during a disaster, a procedure is in place to address increased earnings if families must work overtime due to such circumstances. Parents do not have to report increased earnings due to a disaster unless they will earn more than 85% of the state median income for a period of four or more consecutive weeks.

6.2.3 Eligibility

Families maintain eligibility for child care for a period of no less than twelve (12) months. If a parent is temporarily unable to meet the activity (work and/or education/training) requirement due to an emergency or disaster, the family's eligibility continues until the next redetermination date, or they remain eligible for no less than 13 weeks after the loss of work. If a parent permanently loses their employment or stops attending education/training programs with 12 weeks or less remaining in their current eligibility period, they will remain eligible for on-going childcare through the end of their current eligibility period. If a parent permanently loses their employment or stops attending education/training programs 13 weeks or more prior to the end of their current eligibility period, they will be allowed job search as an approved activity for 13 weeks from the date the activity ended. If the parent resumes participation in a state-approved activity at any level during the 13-week job search period, care can continue for the duration of the existing eligibility period.

6.2.4 Co-Payments

During a family's 12-month period of eligibility, co-payments may be decreased if the family's income decreases as the result of a disaster. Likewise, co-payments may not be increased between redeterminations, even if the family's annual income increases due to a disaster.

6.2.5 Applications

Families may apply on paper, or online through the Georgia Gateway website at www.Gateway.ga.gov. A paper application for CAPS may be completed and submitted by mail to: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning 2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE, Suite 754 Atlanta, GA 30334,
email, or in person at the DECAL office. The parent can access the paper application online at https://caps.decal.ga.gov/assets/downloads/CAPS/AppendixJ-Form%2060%20Child%20Care%20Application.pdf or request that a paper application be sent to them by contacting CAPS at 1-833-4GA-CAPS (1-833-442-2277).

Section 7. Temporary and Emergency Child Care

An emergency is an unforeseen set of circumstances or conditions that result from situations requiring immediate action.

Temporary means lasting for a limited time.

7.1 Location Changes

7.1.1 DECAL Notification

The provider shall immediately contact DECAL regarding the emergency at the facility. The provider must follow the requirements of CCLC or FCCLH Rules and Regulations, relating to required reporting and must inform the office of the status of the building and the need to relocate. If part of the child care space was not affected by the emergency and the building is deemed safe for occupancy by a code enforcement officer, local building official, or fire marshal, child care may resume in the unaffected space. The provider must provide documentation of building safety to DECAL. The legal entity or the legal entity representative is responsible for informing the DECAL office if the provider plans on:

- returning to the original location within 180 days;
- converting the current temporary location into a permanent location; or
- moving to another permanent location within 180 days.

7.2 Initial Move to Temporary Location

7.2.1 Certification of Occupancy

If the provider is moving to a temporary location, the operator must obtain a certificate of occupancy within five (5) business days following the temporary relocation. If local authorities are unable to provide the certificate of occupancy within five (5) business days due to disaster response, the operator must notify DECAL immediately.

7.2.2 DECAL Inspection

DECAL CCS staff will conduct an initial inspection of the temporary location within five (5) business days of the relocation. The initial inspection is limited to high-risk items using the temporary relocation health and safety checklist. If the facility is in compliance with the regulations on the temporary relocation health and safety checklist, CCS staff will issue a temporary license as indicated by the program's time frame but for no more than 180 days. This temporary license may be extended as determined by the Department, based on the needs of the program if recovery operations extend longer than the initial 180 days.

7.2.3 Correcting Violations

If there are violations of the regulations on the temporary relocation health and safety checklist, CCS staff will assist the provider in developing an acceptable plan of correction and a schedule for verifying correction of these violations as soon as possible.

7.2.4 Quality Rated Participants

If the facility has a current or pending Quality Rated rating, the legal entity will contact DECAL Quality Rated to provide an update on the temporary relocation. CCS licensing staff will also contact a Quality Rated representative to provide an update on this temporary relocation.

For child care providers located within areas impacted by a natural disaster, the Quality Rated assessment process may be adjusted as follows:

- For Quality Rated providers working on a required reassessment, DECAL staff may extend providers' reassessment windows until the end of the Governor's State of Emergency Declaration timeframe. Dependent on the level of damage to a provider's physical location, a provider's rating may be extended and/or the provider's portfolio may be sent back to be resubmitted at a later time or put on hold to allow the provider to repair structural damage, to have appropriate staff in place, or to have classrooms adequately prepared for children.

- For providers who have been sent a 30-day notice of their Quality Rated assessment window: If provider has experienced a power or water outage, or significant damage to the physical location due to a natural disaster, which impacts the ability to serve children for more than 24 hours, providers should notify Child Care Services intake at 404-657-5562 first and then contact the Quality Rated Help Desk at 855-800-7747. A member of the Quality Rated Management team will contact the provider via phone and/or email to discuss the observation window options that would be available given the timeframe established by the Governor's State of Emergency Declaration and any post recovery time needed for temporary relocations and/or damage repairs.

7.2.5 License Status

The DECAL office will maintain the existing license for the original location unless notified that the original location will not be suitable for reentry by the licensee within 360 days.

7.2.6 Sanctions

If the provider is currently under an adverse action sanction, the sanction will follow the relocation. Nothing will disrupt the negative sanction process.

7.3 Returning to the Original Location

7.3.1 Notifying DECAL

The legal entity must inform DECAL prior to returning to the original facility location.

7.3.2 Structural Damage

If the facility sustained structural damage the legal entity must contact the local municipality to determine if an updated certificate of occupancy, fire marshal, or building code inspection is required. If one is required, the legal entity must have the certificate of occupancy prior to the DECAL inspection noted below. If the local municipality determines that an updated certificate of occupancy is not required, the legal entity should request this determination in writing.

7.3.3 DECAL Inspection

CCS staff will conduct a full inspection before child care may resume in the original location. The inspection will occur within ten (10) business days of notification that the site is deemed acceptable for child care purposes. Afterwards, the standard cycle of inspection and licensure will resume.

7.4 Converting the Temporary Location into a Permanent Location or Moving to Another Permanent Location

7.4.1 Application

The legal entity will submit a new, completed application for the site as a new location.

7.4.2 Inspections

CCS will utilize the standard inspection process to make a licensure decision.

7.5 Child Care in Emergency Shelter

7.5.1 Mass Care

Under the Emergency Support Function-6 (ESF-6), one of the four (4) primary functions is: Mass Care: which includes sheltering, feeding operations, emergency first aid, bulk distribution of emergency items, and support for family reunification. GDHS is the state's Coordinating Agency for ESF-6 and is therefore responsible for coordinating the mass care response and recovery operations in close coordination with county governments, state and federal partners, volunteer organizations active in disaster (VOADs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. GDHS ESF-6 operations will assist local shelters as needed. The Red Cross, with the support of GDHS and DPH, activates a shelter upon request of the local emergency management agency.

7.5.2 Special Accommodations

Congregate sheltering, feeding, and distribution of emergency supplies should include accommodation of infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and children with chronic medical conditions.

7.5.3 Caregivers

Through advance planning, an agreement will be reached with a disaster response vendor to provide trained and certified volunteers to establish temporary child care centers in Red Cross-managed or state-managed shelters as appropriate. This vendor will provide its volunteers with background clearances and training on the unique needs of children in disasters. The program may operate in a permit status to allow background checks to be conducted through DECAL protocols for a period of 21 days, to be extended no more than one additional time period of 21 days. If the facility is still in need of utilization, the program may be issued a temporary license if in substantial compliance of the rules and regulations for a period of 180 days.

Section 8. Communication

8.1 Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)

8.1.1 Provider Contacts

DECAL uses information from child care and other affiliated early learning program providers to communicate on an individual basis. To the greatest extent possible, it is critical and required by rule that phone numbers and email addresses are provided and maintained current, to the primary contact for each facility within DECAL KOALA provider accounts.

8.1.2 Isolated Emergencies

In the event that DECAL is informed of an isolated emergency or a disaster, contact must be made with the impacted individual programs where appropriate.

8.1.3 Widespread Emergencies

In the event that DECAL is informed of a widespread emergency or disaster, the agency will use listservs, emails, public announcements, social media, and website postings to inform child care and other early learning providers of relevant information.

8.1.4 Updating Leadership

During an emergency or disaster, DECAL or its business partners will collect state, regional, or local information as to the status of the event in order to keep the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners informed and to assist in prioritizing follow-up activities.

8.2 Information Dissemination

8.2.1 Public Announcements

Agency communications to the public will be coordinated by the DECAL Chief Communications Officer or a designee.

8.2.2 Media Requests

Requests for impact statements or updates intended for publication to print, broadcast, digital, or other media outlets should be directed to the DECAL Chief Communications Officer.

Section 9. Family Assistance/REUNIfication

Reunification includes identifying the correct parent/guardian, verifying their identity, and documenting the child's release to their custody.

9.1 Caregiver Responsibility

Children are the responsibility of their caregiver until such time as their parent(s) or approved guardian can retrieve them from the child care facility. It is imperative that contact information be maintained up to date on all children enrolled in child care facilities, so that in the event of an emergency, staff have this information available. Children's emergency medical and contact information should be maintained easily accessible and able to be transported out of the facility quickly with children in the event of an emergency.

9.2 Unclear Custody

In the event that a child's custody is unclear or when multiple persons seek to claim a child, all information will be turned over to the county Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) office or law enforcement for investigation and determination of custody.

9.3 Mass Care

Under the ESF-6, one of the four (4) primary functions is: Mass Care: congregate sheltering, feeding, distribution of emergency supplies, and reunification of children with their parent(s)/legal guardians and adults with their families.

9.4 Coordination of Efforts

GDHS is the state lead for ESF-6 and is therefore the coordinating agency to assist in reunification efforts should local authorities become overwhelmed.

9.5 Unaccompanied Minors

During a disaster, there may be children who will need short- or long-term placements if their parents/guardians become incapacitated, die, or cannot be located. If an unaccompanied minor housed in the shelter cannot return home and needs suitable living arrangements, DFCS will notify law enforcement within 24 hours. The child will remain with DFCS until a parent/legal guardian or law enforcement takes custody of the child.

Section 10. Emergency Counseling

The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) helps connect individuals with resources following a disaster. The "Georgia Recovery Project" may be activated in the event of a man-made or natural disaster. This short-term crisis counseling program is administered through DBHDD's network of providers and is funded federally by FEMA. To search for behavioral health and intellectual/developmental disabilities supports and services, please visit https://providersearch.carelonbehavioralhealth.com/#/provider/home/277.

Anyone experiencing a suicidal crisis or emotional distress should dial 9-8-8 or call the Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL) at 1-800-715-4225. Both are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year. More information on 988 in Georgia can be found at https://988ga.org/.

Emergencies or disasters can create or exacerbate behavioral health problems. More information on disaster behavioral health can be found at https://georgiadisaster.info/.

If you need help navigating DBHDD's system of services, or more detailed information about resources in your community, please contact your regional field office at https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/regional-field-offices.

Young children can also experience trauma in the wake of an emergency or disaster. You can locate resources on the National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network website: https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/disasters and the FEMA – Helping Children Cope with Disaster Fact Sheet which covers all ages: https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/helping-children-cope-disaster . If local counseling services are needed for children ages birth – five, you can contact the Georgia Association for Infant Mental Health: Birth through Five: https://aimh.gsu.edu/ to connect to an early childhood mental health provider in your area.

Section 11. Plan Review

11.1 Reviewing Agencies

The Georgia Emergency Preparedness Coalition, consisting of staff from various state agencies that include Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH), Georgia Department of Human Services (GDHS), Georgia Emergency Management Agency/Homeland Security (GEMA/HS), Georgia Department of Education (GDOE), Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), and the Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (GAAP), will review and have the opportunity to comment on the initial and revised Statewide Child Care Emergency Plan.

11.2 Annual Reviews

An ad hoc committee will convene annually to review the plan, provide any after-incident recommendations, propose updates related to best practices, and complete an update of the plan.

11.3 Annual Updates

Annual updates to the Statewide Child Care Emergency Plan will be approved by DECAL and subsequently posted on the DECAL website.

Section 12. Resources

12.1 American Red Cross and American Red Cross Safe and Well

People affected by a disaster may enter information regarding their welfare so that family and friends can check their status.
https://www.redcross.org and https://redcross.org/safeandwell

12.2 CAPS Policies and Procedures

https://caps.decal.ga.gov/en/Policy/

12.3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Natural Disasters and Severe Weather - https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/
Emergency Preparedness and Response - https://emergency.cdc.gov/index.asp

12.4 Child Care Aware of America

https://www.childcareaware.org/our-issues/crisis-and-disaster-resources/tools-publications-and-resources/

12.5 Child Care Emergency Preparedness Template

http://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/CCLCEmergencyPlanstemplate.docx
http://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/FCCLHEmergencyPlanstemplate.docx

12.6 Child Care Information Listing

http://families.decal.ga.gov/ or http://qualityrated.org/

12.7 Child Care Technical Assistance Network

https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/child-care-and-development-fund-disaster-plans

12.8 County Emergency Management Contact

https://gema.georgia.gov/locations

12.9 DECAL KOALA Provider Self-Service Account

https://decalkoala.com/

12.10 Department of Homeland Security

https://www.dhs.gov/

12.11 Federal Emergency Management Agency

https://www.fema.gov/

12.12 Find Help Georgia

Provides resources on free and reduced cost services
https://www.findhelpga.org

12.13 Georgia Code
https://law.justia.com/codes/georgia/title-20/

12.14 Georgia Crisis & Access Line
https://www.georgiacollaborative.com/providers/georgia-crisis-and-access-line-gcal/

12.15 Georgia Department of Public Health – Emergency Preparedness
https://dph.georgia.gov/environmental-health/emergency-preparedness

12.16 Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency
https://gema.georgia.gov/

12.17 Georgia Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
https://988ga.org/

12.18 Head Start Emergency Preparedness Requirements
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-47-safety-practices
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/emergency-preparedness-manual-early-childhood-programs.pdf

12.19 National Weather Service
https://www.weather.gov/

12.20 Quality Rated Program Manual
https://qualityrated.decal.ga.gov/Content/Documents/PM_ProgramManual.pdf

12.21 Ready.gov
https://www.ready.gov/

12.22 United States Environmental Protection Agency
Protecting Children's Health During and After Natural Disasters
https://www.epa.gov/children/protecting-childrens-health-during-and-after-natural-disasters

12.23 Additional Resources
Additional resources can be found listed on the Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Recovery Resources List located on DECAL's website at:
https://www.decal.ga.gov/bfts/GAStatewideChildCareEmergencyPlan.aspx.