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Shapiro Administration Urges Child Care Providers to Apply for New Recruitment and Retention Bonuses Before January 29 Deadline, Reinforces Commitment to Ensuring Families Have Access to Quality Child Care

Child care providers are encouraged to apply for the \$450 recruitment and retention bonuses for staff by the January 29th, 2026, deadline.



York, PA – Today, the **Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) Executive Deputy Secretary Andrew Barnes** and **Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) Deputy Secretary Shante' Brown** visited York Day Early Learning and encouraged child care providers to apply for the new [Child Care Staff Recruitment and Retention Program](#) before the January 29, 2026, deadline.

This funding, secured in **Governor Josh Shapiro's 2025-26 budget**, will distribute **\$450 per employee** to licensed Child Care Works (CCW) providers to address workforce shortages and expand child care availability for families around the Commonwealth. Providers must complete applications [online](#) before the deadline.

"Every child in Pennsylvania deserves access to excellent early learning opportunities, and every child care provider deserves fair compensation for the vital work they do every day. High quality child care helps our children grow and thrive while allowing parents to work and participate in our economy, and our dedicated, passionate child care workers are the ones who make that possible," said **Executive Deputy Secretary Andrew Barnes**. "The Shapiro Administration is proud to make these investments that will support this essential field and strengthen our child care industry and our overall economy. I encourage any eligible provider who has not yet applied to complete their application now and receive this additional funding to support their staff and help recruit additional workers."

"At York Day Early Learning, we are committed to providing high-quality early learning while advocating for policies that strengthen the child care workforce and expand access to reliable, affordable care," said **Sara Bradley, York Day Early Learning Executive Director**. "Establishing this new line item in the budget and applying for the new Child Care Recruitment and Retention funding is an important first step toward easing the financial burden carried by child care professionals in a historically underpaid field and supporting the stability of the workforce families rely on."

The 2025-26 budget allocated **\$25 million** to support retention bonuses for approximately **55,000 child care workers** statewide as well as help providers recruit new staff to fill vacancies and open more classrooms to serve more children. Eligible providers must [submit their application](#) for retention and recruitment bonuses to the Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) before January 29, 2026. The ELRC will then distribute retention payments to providers in the amount of \$450 per qualified employee between February 9, 2026, and May 22, 2026. Interested child care providers and their staff must meet DHS' program [eligibility requirements](#) in order to receive funding.

Once all retention bonuses for staff are paid, remaining funds will be distributed to child care providers to administer as recruitment payments to qualified staff hired after the application period closes. In their application, providers will have the option to request recruitment funds for staff they intend to hire prior to June 30, 2026. If funding is available, providers will then receive recruitment payments based on provider type and licensed capacity.

Pennsylvania's early learning and child care system serves more than **300,000** children annually across the Commonwealth, including approximately **94,000** children who access care through the Child Care Works program, Pennsylvania's state and federally-funded subsidized child care program that helps low-income families access high quality child care that allows parents with young children to work. This program is managed by OCDEL and local ELRCs, who monitor providers and enrollment to monitor capacity and attendance and ensure appropriate payment so families who qualify are able to access child care services.

Child care is a critical part of our economy, but providers are struggling to hire and retain staff. Staffing challenges can limit child care capacity if providers are forced to close classrooms or limit enrollment. Pennsylvania has an estimated **3,000** unfilled jobs in child care; if filled, **25,000** more children in Pennsylvania could have access to child care, and their parents would have the peace of mind that their kids are well taken care of so they can go to work.

This new investment builds on the work the Shapiro Administration has accomplished to support affordability of and access to child care for families in Pennsylvania. Since 2023, DHS has invested more in child care providers by increasing base reimbursement rates for providers participating in Child Care Works to the **75th percentile** of private pay rates for the first time, helping Pennsylvania meet federal best practices and providing greater financial support to child care providers and their dedicated workforce. This allows CCW providers to invest in quality of care and their workforce amid the continued challenges of operating.

The 2025-26 budget also invests an additional **\$7.5 million for Pre-K Counts** to help providers raise wages and stabilize the early educator workforce, along with a **\$13.2 million increase for Early Intervention's [Infants and Toddlers program](#)** in DHS' budget, with **\$10 million** of these funds directed to increase provider rates to address key challenges in the sector including the rising need of services for families. This investment of state dollars can be matched with federal dollars bringing the total investment in Early Intervention rates to **\$22.6 million**.

Early learning and child care programs are an invaluable resource that foster educational and social development for our youngest Pennsylvanians. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, access to early childhood education improves performance in K-12 schooling, lowers health care costs, and improves employment and earning prospects into adulthood. Child care programs also allow parents to work knowing their children are safe and cared for. The CDC also cites child care as a factor for increased parental employment and income, making this industry an essential cornerstone for a healthy, vibrant economy.

Providers can apply now and learn more about the [Child Care Staff Recruitment and Retention Program](#).

Learn more about [Child Care Works](#) and find more information on certified child care providers at www.findchildcare.pa.gov.

Read more about Governor Shapiro's [2025-26 budget](#).

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