

## CCDF OP-ED

Mississippi uses the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) to provide child care vouchers to low-income working parents. CCDF vouchers make a huge positive difference by making child care affordable so low-income parents can work. Unfortunately, CCDF is so inadequately funded that vouchers only reach 14% of working families who qualify.

Mississippi is currently having to comply with new CCDF rules prompted by recent Congressional reauthorization. The challenges are enormous and implementing the new rules requires more money than Congress appropriated.

The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) and the State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) have been tasked with creating new policies. As part of that process, public input was solicited.

The Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative (MLICCI) convened 200 providers who rely on CCDF to solicit input on how to comply with these new regulations and how to make the program better for working parents.

Providers reported that TANF families experienced frequent interruptions in child care because of changes in their TANF eligibility. New federal CCDF rules place an emphasis on uninterrupted child care and make clear that families who are eligible should receive continuous assistance for 12-months at minimum. Yet the state's proposed new policy would have eliminated child care assistance for parents receiving it through TANF prior to 12 continuous months. MLICCI recommended that the state allow TANF families to retain child care for a full year like other families, regardless of changes in their TANF eligibility.

MLICCI and providers are pleased to report that after the public comment period, MDHS revised its proposed policy and as of October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, TANF families will, indeed, retain services for an entire year. This change is good for both parents and providers.

While this positive change gives us a moment to appreciate, other issues surfaced at our convening that have yet to be addressed.

CCDF must expand to serve more eligible children. MS can do this with additional revenue from existing sources of funding, such as TANF.

The Quality Rating System is too expensive for providers serving low income working families. New CCDF rules require states to invest in quality improvement and providers urge the state to meet this requirement by supporting higher wages for child care workers who attain higher levels of early childhood training so centers can afford to retain workers with more training.

Providers noted they do not feel their input is valued nor their concerns addressed by MDHS. This lack of trust undermines the effectiveness of CCDF. MLICCI would like to commend MDHS for adopting the provider recommendation that TANF families retain services for an entire year. This is a great example of how provider input can be adopted and indicates that providers who rely on CCDF have important and useful feedback to share about CCDF. Soliciting and using provider input can enhance the relationship between MDHS and the effectiveness of CCDF for working parents.