

More parents to get child care help under CYFD proposal

Written by By Sylvia Ulloa, New Mexico In Depth New Mexico Voices for Children
Friday, 23 August 2019 02:48



More New Mexico families will qualify for child care assistance without being wait-listed, and could stay longer on the program under proposed rules posted July 29 by the Children Youth and Families Department.

Under current eligibility limits put in place in the wake of a lawsuit against CYFD, families can qualify and stay on the child care program if they make less than two times the federal poverty level and not one dollar more. The proposal would take the exit point up from twice the poverty level to 250%.

To put the changes in perspective, a single mother with two children could make up to \$42,660 per year and qualify, and could keep getting child care assistance with increasing co-pays until she earned \$53,325. About 90 percent of child care assistance recipients are single-parent households.

“It’s just our new approach and our plan to make New Mexico a safe place to be a child,” Charlie Moore-Pabst said. Moore-Pabst is a spokesman for CYFD.

He said widening the eligibility window will help low-income families keep their benefits as the state increases the minimum wage or be able to accept raises that might otherwise disqualify them from thousands of dollars in child care assistance.

More parents to get child care help under CYFD proposal

Written by By Sylvia Ulloa, New Mexico In Depth New Mexico Voices for Children
Friday, 23 August 2019 02:48

“This is a huge (help) to working poor families, allowing them to come out of poverty and stay out of poverty, which is why that exit level is important,” he said.

Moore-Pabst said the department calculated it would cost nearly \$10 million to serve an additional 1,436 children from Oct. 1 through the end of the fiscal year on June 30 if the rules are approved. He said CYFD had cobbled together enough money from its current budget to ensure it would not need to put any eligible family on a waiting list.

For the fiscal year that begins July 1, 2020, however, CYFD would likely ask the Legislature to appropriate \$26.3 million to add 4,163 additional children. If demand was higher than it calculated however, the department would need to ask for supplemental money or use emergency procedures to reinstate a waiting list.

The proposed rules are in response to a [lawsuit by OLÉ and the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty](#) that accused CYFD, under then Secretary Monique Jacobson, of making rules without public input, and making confusing and arbitrary decisions on eligibility for the program.

Attorney Sovereign Hager said the center was pleased overall with the proposal, especially the expanded eligibility and a posted formula that lays out how CYFD determines eligibility and what parents pay in cost-sharing, so people can see whether co-pays are calculated correctly, and they can appeal denials.

But even with the proposed changes, Hager said there is still work to be done to make child care in New Mexico affordable.

“What we see is that families end up paying upward of 10 to 15% of their income toward child care costs, even when they are getting assistance,” she said. “Families have been pretty clear that it’s too much. It’s one reason why only a third of eligible folk access the program as it is.”

Federal guideline considers spending 7% of income on childcare affordable.

More parents to get child care help under CYFD proposal

Written by By Sylvia Ulloa, New Mexico In Depth New Mexico Voices for Children
Friday, 23 August 2019 02:48

New Mexico Voices for Children, a nonprofit that has advocated for wider eligibility to ease the [child care assistance “cliff effect,”](#) also praised the proposal. It pushed a bill in the 2019 legislative session that would have taken the exit point to 300% of the federal poverty level.

“It’s fantastic. It’s a really significant step forward for child care assistance in New Mexico,” Amber Wallin said. Wallin is the New Mexico director for the annual Kids Count report on child wellbeing.

There will be a hearing on the proposed rules changes at 10 am, Aug. 30 at Apodaca Hall, 1120 Paseo de Peralta in Santa Fe.

The public can comment online on the CYFD website at www.newmexicokids.org/proposed-regulation-changes-to-8-15-2-nmac/

or email CYFD-ECS-PublicComment@state.nm.us with the subject line “8.15.2 NMAC Public Comment.”

The comment period ends at the conclusion of the public hearing Aug 30.

By Sylvia Ulloa, New Mexico In Depth
New Mexico Voices for Children