



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog
www.dcfpi.org

October 1, 2015

Strategies to Streamline Child Care Subsidy Eligibility

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Many parents have trouble accessing DC's child care assistance program, based on results of recent town hall meetings held by the DC government. The good news is that short- and long-term strategies are in the works to streamline the process.

The District's child care subsidy program helps low-income families by giving them vouchers to pay for care at licensed child care centers and homes. This kind of help is critical to ensuring that children get safe and high-quality care and that parents can go to work or job training. Without help, many could not afford child care costs in DC, which are the [highest in the nation](#).



Unfortunately, the process of determining eligibility for child care subsidy is often described as challenging for parents and providers navigating the system. At a recent set of town halls hosted by the DC government, the community identified several problems with the program, including burdensome eligibility policies, unclear or outdated requirements, and frustrations over how to best communicate issues when they arise. Here is some of the feedback – and solutions – discussed at the town halls:

- **DC has only one Department of Human Services location to complete child care eligibility, and it is not Metro accessible.** Until recently, the only place for families to apply for child care through DHS was the Child Care Services Division at 4001 South Capitol Street, SW. DC has since opened a second child care eligibility office at 1207 Taylor Street, NW.
- **It is difficult for parents to connect with someone to get child care questions answered.** In response, DC's Department of Human Services is taking steps to return calls within 24 hours and offer callers the option of leaving messages. An e-mail system will be set up for parents to make appointments with an eligibility worker.
- **It is not easy to access basic information about the child care subsidy program.** In response, the District is updating relevant websites and will develop a user-friendly one-page fact sheet on how to apply and who to contact about the child care subsidy program.

- **Service seems to be limited to English speaking providers and parents.** The Department of Human Services and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education responded by pledging to update all current materials and translate them into Spanish, Amharic, and French.
- **There is no “complaint line” for parents.** In response, OSSE has created an e-mail account for parents and providers to voice their concerns (osse.childcareconcerns@dc.gov).

DCFPI appreciates the city’s efforts to hold these town hall meetings and we look forward to seeing progress made on these fronts, both in the short- and long-term. As the town halls showed, there is much that needs to be done to make it easier for parents to get the child care assistance they need.