

## Response to Questions on the FY 2014 Budget

**Request By:** Supervisor Cook

**Question:** Provide additional information on non-monetary related CCAR issues raised by the Annandale Christian Community for Action (ACCA) testimony.

**Response:** The Child Care Assistance and Referral (CCAR) program provides financial assistance for child care to working families with low- and moderate-incomes in Fairfax County. For many years the County has administered an integrated, seamless child care assistance program using federal, state and local dollars. This past year, however, the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) implemented a new statewide automated child care management system, VaCMS, which Fairfax County was required to begin using in June 2012. As a result of the implementation of VaCMS, VDSS has made several state policy changes that affect the policies and procedures of Fairfax County's CCAR program and limit the County's flexibility in case management for both state- and locally-funded child care cases.

- New Application: VDSS has redesigned their application for subsidized child care and mandated that the new application be used by all families applying for child care subsidies. The new application is much longer than the application formerly used for this process. In addition, the VDSS application is only available in English. Although Office for Children (OFC) has requested that the application be translated into other languages, VDSS has denied that request. OFC also requested approval to have the application translated into Spanish and Farsi but VDSS did not approve the use of a translated application. As a workaround, OFC staff has created a guide which is available in English, Spanish, and Farsi to help families to understand and complete the application.
- Communication: Parents are now required to report all changes which might affect their eligibility for subsidized care within five days, instead of 10 as previously allowed. These include, but are not limited to job loss, income change, change in family size, and/or change of residence. In almost all other situations, however, parents have 10 to 14 days to respond to requests for needed documents or information.
- Children's Absences: A child may have a maximum of 24 absences, per the state's fiscal year, for which the child care provider will be paid. After the number of authorized absences has been taken for any reason during a fiscal year, additional absences are not paid. Previously, payment could be made for extended absences (beyond 24) due to illness. However, being able to use the 24 absences at any time during the year may be a help to some families as the former policy limited paid absences to 2 days per month.
- Job Search: Families no longer receive three weeks of job search when a parent or guardian has lost his or her job (unless they participate in Virginia Initiative Employment not Welfare (VIEW) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAPET)). Instead, the parent will receive a request

to provide verification of new employment within 10 days. If a parent fails to provide the requested reemployment verification by the end of the 10-day period, a Notice of Action (NOA) is sent indicating that the case will close in 10 days. If the parent provides appropriate verification within that NOA 10-day period, the case will remain open. The verification form and NOA are mailed 14 days in advance to ensure that the family actually has 10 days to respond prior to taking action on the case. Thus, although there is no longer a formal job search grace-period, a family could have three weeks of care between reporting the loss of a job and the closure of their case. In addition, if OFC staff learns that a parent or guardian has lost a job staff will refer the family to other County and community employment and social service resources.

- **Sliding Fee Scale:** VDSS recently notified the County that, effective September 1, 2013 Fairfax County will no longer be permitted to use an alternate fee scale to determine parent co-payments for state funded child care. The County will be required to use the state fee scale, with families paying from 6 to 12 percent of gross income for care. In contrast, under the current Fairfax County fee scale, families pay from 2.5 to 10 percent of gross income for care. Thus, families with the lowest incomes will go from paying 2.5 to 6 percent. For a family of four with an income just above the federal poverty level, this is an additional \$804 per year for one child in care. Although Fairfax County has used a state approved alternate fee scale for over 14 years, VDSS is now denying the request to continue using the different scale because the state would like to have uniformity across the jurisdictions.

#### **Community Opportunity to Comment on Policies**

Every two years the federal government requires each state to submit a Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan, in which the state identifies how it will administer its child care subsidy program and quality initiatives funded by CCDF. The CCDF Plan addresses policies such as the ones identified above. The County and the community will have the opportunity to provide comments on Virginia's proposed FY 2014-2015 CCDF Plan through May 15, 2013. In addition, VDSS will hold a public hearing on the proposed CCDF Plan on April 23, 2013, 5:30pm to 7:00pm in Fairfax County. OFC continues to advocate to VDSS for more family friendly policies and will be providing comments on the CCDF Plan.