



NEWS RELEASE

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Proposed child care cuts place working families at risk

MONTGOMERY – Parents of 3,000 children currently enrolled in the Alabama Child Care Subsidy Program soon will become ineligible for assistance if proposed Department of Human Resources rule changes go into effect next month. For these low-income working families, affordable child care is a critical requirement for holding down jobs. Child care advocates estimate that the proposed cuts would jeopardize parent employment for 1,875 Alabama families.

“If this happens and I lose child care for my three children, I don’t know how I’ll be able to keep my job,” said Tomekia Going of Selma, who works at a family medical center and whose children attend Barney’s Child Care Center.

Ms. Going’s dilemma illustrates the “vicious cycle” that can occur when an economic downturn squeezes state budgets for human services. DHR receives state funding from both the General Fund and the Education Trust Fund. Declining revenues in 2008 prompted cuts in the subsidy program last October that reduced enrollment by 1,200 children. In December, Gov. Bob Riley declared a 9 percent proration in the education budget and asked General Fund agencies to trim their budgets by 10 percent.

As the economy has continued to decline, reversing the tide of unemployment has been a key focus of recovery efforts. DHR officials expect the federal stimulus package to offer some relief for the child care subsidy program. But timing is critical as the department decides whether to delay drastic measures in anticipation of federal assistance. Waiting for help from the stimulus may mean that families will get extremely short notice if the April cuts become necessary.

It would cost the state \$240,000 to keep the 3,000 child care slots open for another month while the stimulus funding becomes available, advocates estimate.

“For a department that spends \$240 million in state money every year, \$240,000 is a drop in the bucket,” said Sophia Bracy Harris, executive director of the Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama (FOCAL). “We call upon state leaders to find a way to address this immediate need and keep Alabama’s low-income families working.”

Advocates caution that Alabama’s child care funding has dropped by 16 percent over the last three years, from \$121 million in 2007 to \$102 million in 2009, not counting the proposed cuts.

“Preventing the April cuts can help keep families stable in a shaky economy,” said Kimble Forrister, executive director of Arise Citizens’ Policy Project. “If we’re going to say workforce development is a high priority for Alabama, we have to back up those words with adequate budgets.”

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Arise Citizens’ Policy Project (ACPP) is a nonprofit statewide citizens’ organization comprising 150 congregations and community groups that promote state policies to improve the lives of low-income Alabamians.