

Understanding the Child Care Assistance Program in Steuben County

Pro Action Child Care Council

117 E. Steuben Street

Bath, New York 14810

607-776-2126

Fax 607-776-4873

8:30 am – 4:30 pm Monday – Friday

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Bath

117 E. Steuben St, Bath, NY 14810

T: (607) 776-2126 F: (607) 776-4873

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INTRODUCTION

The Child Care Assistance Program was created to assist eligible families with the cost of child care. This handbook is designed to provide parents (caretakers) and the Child Care Program staff with an understanding of the Child Care Assistance Program. We hope this handbook will be a helpful resource for the providers and families we serve.

The staff of Pro Action Child Care Council, as well as the Steuben Department of Social Services, is happy to provide any additional assistance needed. You may contact this staff at the Bath office at 607-776-2126 at the following extensions:

Child Care Fee Assistance Manager	x 2108
CACFP Manager	x 7107
Child Care Processor	x 2111
Child Care Case Worker	x 2110
Child Care Case Worker	x 2106
Parent Education Counselor	x 2114
Director	x 9100

You may also visit our website at <https://proactioninc.org/programs/rcf/about-us/>

Please refer to the Definitions section in the back for terminology used in this handbook.

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THE ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (DSS)

DSS is the lead agency in child care assistance at the state and county levels. They are responsible for receiving child care assistance funds from the federal and state governments. DSS has contracted with Pro Action Child Care Council, a department of Pro Action of Steuben and Yates, Inc to administer the majority of these funds. A close partnership has been developed between DSS and Pro Action Child Care Council on the management of the child care assistance cases. DSS retains the final approval for opening and closing all child care assistance cases based on New York State regulations.

PRO ACTION OF STEUBEN & YATES, INC.

Pro Action of Steuben and Yates Inc., is a multi-purpose, private, not for profit human service agency assisting families since 1965. Pro Action Child Care Council is one of several of its programs.

Pro Action Mission

Pro Action works to build a community of resilient individuals and families who can meet their basic needs, overcome adversity, and prosper.

PRO ACTION CHILD CARE COUNCIL

Pro Action Child Care Council has provided child care resource and referral services throughout Steuben County since 1985. In 2013 Schuyler County was integrated into our service area. It has four main departments:

- *Child Care Assistance Department* - guides parents and providers through the application process and is responsible for processing assistance and CACFP reimbursements to registered and licensed providers.
- *Quality Department* - provides technical assistance, training, CACFP sponsorship and supports all types of child care providers.
- *Family Services* - responsible for assisting and educating families in accessing child care.
- *Registration and Resource Development Department* - handles the recruitment and inspection of new family child care providers.

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Our Mission

Pro Action Child Care Council empowers the development of high-quality environments for children, ensuring families have access to affordable and secure child care.

FAMILY ELIGIBILITY

QUALIFICATIONS

To qualify for assistance, families must be:

- A resident of Steuben County and working
- Document the need for child care
- Age guideline for children eligible for assistance is 6 weeks through 12 years old
- And meet the following income guidelines

INCOME GUIDELINES (300%)

Current Annual Gross Household Income Guidelines (June 1, 2023)

Family Size	Annual Gross Income Limit
1	\$43,740
2	\$59,160
3	\$74,580
4	\$90,000
5	\$105,420
6	\$120,840
7	\$136,260
8	\$151,680

NOTE: For each additional family member add \$15,420.

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Some families may be determined eligible for child care services without regard to income or their employment/schooling status if they have a special family need. For more information, contact Pro Action Child Care Council's Assistance Department.

PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS

Families participating in the child care assistance program may choose any of the following types of providers:

- **Registered/Licensed Child Care Providers (Required to comply with NYS regulations)**
 - Day Care Centers – care provided in a facility (not a home).
 - Group Family Day Care – care provided in a home, for no more than 14 children, by a caregiver with an assistant.
 - Family Day Care – care provided for up to six full time children and two school age children in the provider's home.
 - School Age Child Care – a program for school-age children operated outside a home.
- **Legally Exempt (Informal) Child Care Providers (Exempt from NYS regulations)**
 - Family Child Care – care provided by a caregiver outside the child's home.
 - Group Child Care – care provided by those caregivers that are not required to be registered/licensed with NYS but meet all applicable state or local requirements for such child care programs. Examples are pre-kindergarten and nursery schools.
 - In-Home Child Care – child care furnished in the child's own home by a provider or relative within the third degree of consanguinity of the child.
- **Out of County Child Care Providers**
 - Providers legally exempt or registered/licensed, residing outside of Steuben County who care for Steuben County residents.

NOTE: Child care providers are independent business individuals and are not employed by Pro Action Child Care Council, ProAction, or Steuben County DSS. They may have other requirements in their contracts, which may dictate additional charges.

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APPLICATION PROCESS

OVERVIEW

To apply for the Child Care Assistance program, a parent may contact Pro Action Child Care Council by phone, e-mail, or in person. This process will include:

- Pro Action Child Care Council – The Parent Education Counselor will send the application and checklist instructions to apply for child care assistance after the initial contact. **During the application process, the parent is responsible for the full cost of care.**
- The parent must complete all required sections on the application and provide the required documentation identified in the checklist instructions. It is only necessary to complete one application per family even if using more than one provider.
 - The completed application and required documentation must be returned to the Assistance Case Manager.
 - It is important that all documentation is received in a timely manner. A NYS regulation requires eligibility to be determined within 30 days from the date of the completed application.
- **Any application submitted incomplete will be held pending receipt of required documentation.**

ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION

- The Assistance Case Manager will determine eligibility based on the annual gross household income and the need for care according to the NYS regulations.
 - The parent fee is also determined at this time according to the county's family share percentage.
- Once eligibility is determined, DSS has final approval for all requests for child care.
- Final approval or denial of an application normally takes less than 15 days but the process may take up to 30 days.

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APPLICATION PROCESS (CONTINUED)

NOTIFICATION

Approval

Once the documented request is approved by DSS it is sent back to Pro Action Child Care Council for the Child Care Certificate to be processed.

- Pro Action Child Care Council will print and mail the Child Care Certificate based on the approved information within 2 days.
- A copy of the certificate is mailed to the parent and childcare provider(s)
- The Child Care Certificate should be carefully reviewed by the parent and childcare provider. Any discrepancies should be brought to the attention of Pro Action Child Care Council immediately:
 - **Authorization period**
 - **Hours of care (in school and no school)**
 - **Weekly parent fee amount (family share)**
- Eligibility may be authorized for up to a twelve-month period. Actual authorization may vary based on individual circumstances.

Denial

Denial of an assistance application can occur including, but not limited, for the following reasons:

- The family's gross income exceeds the income eligibility guidelines (refer to page 2)
- Schedules do not justify the need for childcare assistance
- Incomplete application or failure to submit required documentation

When any of these situations occur, Pro Action Child Care Council will notify the parent of the denial by issuing a legal State form ("Action Taken on Your Application for Child Care Benefits") indicating the date of the denial, reason, and the NYS regulation number for the decision.

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Fair Hearing: If funding is denied and you do not agree with the decision made, or think you have been treated unfairly, you have the right to request a Fair Hearing. This can be done by phone or in writing to:

Office of Administrative Hearings
P.O. Box 1930
Albany, New York 12201-1930
Rochester (585) 266-4868

PARENT COSTS

RESPONSIBILITY

The weekly parent fee (family share) is calculated at the time of determination of eligibility.

- The amount of the parent fee is based on the annual gross income and family size (not the number of children using care).
- The parent fee is to be paid directly to the provider each week as stated on the Child Care Certificate.
- If the parent is using more than one child care provider, the parent fee is paid to the provider that cares for the youngest child or the provider who provides the most hours of care.
- The parent is responsible for any additional provider fees (i.e. registration fee, supplies, etc.), if they are notified ahead of time.

DELINQUENCY

Parents are required to pay their weekly family share to their child care provider in order to retain their eligibility.

- If at any time the parent fee becomes delinquent a delinquency letter ("Delinquent Family Share for Child Care Benefits") will be issued to the parent and provider. Failure to make satisfactory arrangements for payment will result in action to discontinue (terminate) the child care benefits.

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REDETERMINATION

CHANGES

- Regulations governing childcare subsidy require parents (caretakers) to report any changes in the following circumstances:
 - Financial circumstances that put the family's income over 85% State Median Income (If you are unsure what this amount is, please contact us)
 - Living arrangements
 - Employment
 - Household Composition
 - Childcare provider or
 - Other circumstances that affect the families need or eligibility for child care services.
 - Parents may report changes by **phone, e-mail, in writing, or face to face.**

RECERTIFICATION

Continuing eligibility for childcare services in Steuben County must be re-determined every 12 months. This process of redetermination of eligibility is referred to as recertification.

- At the time of recertification, the parent is responsible for completing the renewal application.
- **Pro Action Child Care Council is not responsible for any recertification paperwork not received due to unreported address changes.**
- Families are required to update their documentation and return the application and supporting documents **before** the expiration of the existing authorization period. (See Chapter 8 ("Closure") for failure to comply with the required documentation in a timely manner of submitting recertification paperwork.)
- When the recertification process has been successfully completed, a new Child Care Certificate will be issued.
- If a parent fails to meet recertification requirements, the case will be terminated on the expiration date of the previous authorization.

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DISCONTINUANCE OF CHILD CARE SERVICES

Termination of a childcare assistance case can occur in a number of ways including, but not limited to:

- The family's income exceeds 85% State Median Income
- The family has experienced a non-temporary cessation in work or attendance at a training or education program
- The recipient failed to agree to a reasonable plan for repayment or recovery of an overpayment or failed to comply with an agreed upon plan for repayment or recovery of an overpayment
- The recipient has been convicted of or voluntarily admitted to fraudulently receiving childcare assistance
- The recipient certified and attested to false information on the application for childcare assistance and/or enrollment from or any attachment thereto.

When any of these conditions occur, Pro Action Child Care Council will notify both the caretaker and provider. Pro Action Child Care Council will issue an "Intent to Discontinue Child Care Benefits" notice.

Right to a Fair Hearing: If you disagree with the decision made you have the right to request a fair hearing. This can be done by phone or in writing to:

Office of Administrative Hearings
P.O. Box 1930
Albany, New York 12201-1930
Rochester (585) 266-4868

FRAUD

Parents and childcare providers must ensure all information submitted is accurate.

"It shall be unlawful for any person, firm, or corporation knowingly by means of a false statement or representation or by deliberate concealment of any material fact, or other fraudulent scheme or device, on behalf of himself or others, to attempt to obtain or to obtain payment from public funds for services or supplies furnished or purportedly furnished pursuant to this chapter." (Quoted from Social Services Law 145)

At anytime fraud is suspected, the relevant facts will be referred to the Department of Social Services Fraud Investigation Unit.

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INFORMATION FOR PROVIDERS

The Assistance Program in Steuben County allows a family to have 24 absent days per child, per provider per year, regardless of the reason for the absence or contract status of the provider. The provider must be duly licensed, registered, or enrolled. If a child is provided care by multiple providers in one year, each provider is entitled to up to 24 absences, as needed. The parent may still be responsible for the weekly parent fee and non-reimbursable absences depending on the provider contract.

- Pro Action Child Care Council will not reimburse absences when a provider is closed for vacations, holidays, illness, etc. Some providers may have a policy to charge parents for such days and assisted families may agree to pay this cost on their own as a condition of enrollment.
- Required notification of withdrawal outlined in agreements between parents and providers must be enforced through independent court action.
- If a parent leaves a program and does not give proper notification to the provider, the provider must pursue payment with the parent. Absences cannot be claimed on timesheets for this situation.

Note: Special considerations for Foster Parents on behalf of child who has been placed in their care by DSS.

- Foster Parents are not responsible to sign Provider/Program "parent contracts" on behalf of a child who has been placed in their care by Steuben County Department of Social Services. The rate agreement with Steuben County Department of Social Services and Providers/Programs serves in lieu of a "parent contract".
- Foster Parents cannot be charged above the regional market rates.
- Foster parents are not responsible for fee payments over and above the regional market rates on behalf of the child who has been placed in their care by Steuben County Department of Social Services.

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DEFINITIONS

Word (s)	Definition
Block Grant	As a result of a welfare reform bill, the federal government provides money for child care to states in the form of a block grant.
CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
Caretaker/Parent	Includes the child's parent, legal guardian, caretaker relative or any other person in loco parentis to the child.
Child Care Certificate	A certificate that is issued directly to a child's caretaker which verifies that the caretaker is eligible for assisted child care services which the caretaker arranges.
Child with Special Needs	A child who is incapable of caring for him/herself and has been diagnosed as having a condition to such a degree that it adversely affects the child's ability to function normally.
Consanguinity	Blood relationship or kinship.
DSS	Department of Social Services
Family Share	The amount the child's family is required to pay towards the cost of child care. Also known as "parent fee".
Family Unit	This is the number of family members that should be considered in the family size. This would include all members, even if they are not within the age guidelines.
Informal	Also known as "Legally Exempt".
Legally Exempt	Includes family, in-home and group child care providers that are not required to be licensed or registered with NYS, but meet applicable local or State requirements for such child care programs.
OCFS	Office of Children and Family Services – contact for Fair Hearing.
Parent	Includes the child's parent, legal guardian, caretaker relative or any other person in loco parentis to the child.
Parent in Loco Parentis	The child's guardian, caretaker relative or any other person with whom a child lives who has assumed responsibility for the day-to-day care and custody of the child.
Recertification	Continuing eligibility for child care services must be re-determined as often as case factors indicate. This process of re-determination of eligibility is referred to as recertification.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

- Q 1. *If I live with my parents, does their income count in determining my eligibility?*
- A 1. No, the only incomes to be used in calculating the gross income are those applying
- Q 2. *May I apply if I am in job search?*
- A 2. No.
- Q 3. *Once I fill out my application does that mean I'm approved?*
- A 3. No, refer to the "Application Process" section. You are responsible for the full cost of care until you receive notification that you have been approved.
- Q 4. *Am I required to come in for an interview to apply for child care assistance?*
- A 4. No face-to-face interview is required, but may be requested to expedite the process. You may call to obtain the documents to apply and mail in the required documents/application once completed.
- Q 5. *If I am approved, how far back will my child care expenses be paid?*
- A 5. Your eligibility will begin from the date we receive your signed and dated child care application **ONLY IF** you are using a licensed/registered provider **OR** a relative care legally-exempt provider (i.e. Grandparent, Great-Grandparent, Aunt/Uncle, or a sibling in a separate residence). To protect this filing date, you **MUST** submit all the required documentation by the due date. All other types of care, (i.e., non-relative legally-exempt provider) parent eligibility will be based on provider approval.
- Q 6. *How do I get reimbursed for what I have paid my child care provider once I'm approved?*
- A 6. If you are approved and Pro Action Child Care Council/DSS makes retroactive payment, these funds are paid directly to the child care provider. It is the responsibility of the child care provider to reimburse you less the weekly parent fee.
- Q 7. *May I use two different providers?*
- A 7. Yes
- Q 8. *What if my family share (parent fee) is higher than my cost of care for one week?*
- A 8. Parent is responsible for the actual cost of care up to the weekly parent fee amount.
- Q 9. *Can my child care provider charge me for a registration fee?*
- A 9. Yes

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