**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

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8:30 am – 4:30 pm Monday – Friday



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**INTRODUCTION**

The Childcare Assistance Program was created to assist eligible families with the cost of childcare. 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 Childcare Council, as well as the Steuben Department of Social Services, is happy to provide any additional Childcare Assistance needed. You may contact this staff at the Bath office at 607-776-2126 at the following extensions:

Family Services Manager x 2108

Childcare Assistance/CACFP Manager x7107

Childcare Assistance Processor x 2111

Childcare Assistance Case Manager x 2106

Childcare Assistance Case Manager x 2110

Parent Education Counselor x 2113

Director x 9100

You may also visit our website at http://www.proactioninc.org/programs/rcf/about-us/

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

**THE ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (DSS)**

DSS is the lead agency in Childcare Assistance at the state and county levels. They are responsible for receiving Childcare Assistance funds from the federal and state governments. DSS has contracted with Pro Action Childcare 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 Childcare Council on the management of childcare assistance cases. DSS retains the final approval for opening and closing all childcare 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 Childcare Council® of Steuben and Schuyler 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 CHILDCARE COUNCIL**

Pro Action Childcare Council has provided childcare resources and referral services throughout Steuben County since 1985. In 2013 Schuyler County was integrated into our service area. It has four main departments:

* *Childcare Assistance Department* - guides parents and providers through the application process and is

responsible for processing childcare assistance and CACFP reimbursements to registered and licensed providers.

* *Quality Department* - provides technical Childcare Assistance, training, CACFP sponsorship and supports all types of childcare providers.
* *Family Services* - responsible for assisting and educating families in accessing childcare.
* *Registration and Resource Development Department* - handles the recruitment and inspection of new family childcare providers.

**Our Mission**

Pro Action Childcare 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 Childcare Assistance, families must be:

* A resident of Steuben County and working
* Document the need for childcare
* Age guideline for children eligible for Childcare Assistance is 6 weeks through 12 years old
* And meet the following income guidelines

**INCOME GUIDELINES (200%)**

**Current Annual Gross Household Income Guidelines (October 1, 2023 )**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Family Size | Annual Gross Income Limit |
| 1 | $51,610.13 |
| 2 | $67,490.17 |
| 3 | $83,370.21 |
| 4 | $99,250.25 |
| 5 | $115,130.29 |
| 6 | $131,010.33 |
| 7 | $133,987.40 |
| 8 | $136,965.35 |

Some families may be determined eligible for childcare services without regard to income or their employment/schooling status if they have a special family need. For more information, contact Pro Action Childcare Assistance Department.

**PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS**

Families participating in the Childcare Assistance program may choose any of the following types of providers:

* **Registered/Licensed Childcare 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 Childcare – a program for school-age children operated outside a home.
* **Legally Exempt (Informal) Childcare Providers (Exempt from NYS regulations)**
  + Family Childcare – care provided by a caregiver outside the child’s home.
  + Group Childcare – 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 childcare programs. Examples are pre-kindergarten and nursery schools.
  + In-Home Childcare – childcare furnished in the child’s own home by a provider or relative within the third degree of consanguinity of the child.
* **Out of County Childcare Providers**
  + Providers legally exempt or registered/licensed, residing outside of Steuben County who care for Steuben County residents.

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

**APPLICATION PROCESS**

**OVERVIEW**

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

* Pro Action Childcare Council – The Parent Education Counselor will send the application and checklist instructions to apply for childcare 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 Childcare Assistance Case Manager.
  + It is important that all documentation is received in a timely matter. 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 Childcare 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 childcare.
* Final approval or denial of an application normally takes less than 15 days but the process may take up to 30 days.

**NOTIFICATION**

**Approval**

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

* Pro Action Childcare Council will print and mail the Childcare Certificate based on the approved information within 2 days.

**APPLICATION PROCESS (CONTINUED)**

* A copy of the certificate is mailed to the parent and childcare provider(s)
* The Childcare Certificate should be carefully reviewed by the parent and childcare provider. Any discrepancies should be brought to the attention of Pro Action Childcare 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 a Childcare 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 Childcare Council will notify the parent of the denial by issuing a legal State form (“Action Taken on Your Application for Childcare Benefits”) indicating the date of the denial, reason, and the NYS regulation number for the decision.

**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 Childcare Certificate.
* If the parent is using more than one childcare 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 childcare provider in order to retain their eligibility.

* If at any time the parent fee becomes delinquent a delinquency letter (“Delinquent Family Share for Childcare Benefits”) will be issued to the parent and provider. Failure to make satisfactory arrangements for payment will result in action to discontinue (terminate) the childcare benefits.

**REDETERMINATION**

**CHANGES**

* Regulations governing childcare assistance 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 family’s need or eligibility for childcare services.
* Parents may report changes by **phone, e-mail, in writing, or face to face.**

**REDETERMINATION**

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 Redetermination.

* At the time of Redetermination, the parent is responsible for completing the renewal application.
* **Pro Action Childcare Council is not responsible for any redetermination 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 Redetermination paperwork.)
* When the Redetermination process has been successfully completed, a new Childcare Certificate will be issued.
* If a parent fails to meet Redetermination requirements, the case will be terminated on the expiration date of the previous authorization.

**DISCONTINUANCE OF CHILDCARE SERVICES**

Termination of a childcare assistance case can occur in several 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 Childcare Council will notify both the caretaker and provider. Pro Action Childcare Council will issue an “Intent to Discontinue Childcare 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 any time fraud is suspected, the relevant facts will be referred to the Department of Social Services Fraud Investigation Unit.

**INFORMATION FOR PROVIDERS**

The Childcare Assistance Program in Steuben County allows a family to have 80 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 80 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 Childcare 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 subsidized 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.

The CCAP program is required to pay providers for up to 20 program closures for licensed, registered or enrolled legally exempt **GROUP** providers. The program closure must be due to a state, federal, religious or cultural holiday, or due to extenuating circumstances beyond the provider’s control, such as a disaster, severe weather or an emergency, provided that the closure is not a result of a regulatory violation.

**DEFINITIONS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Word (s)** | **Definition** |
| Block Grant | As a result of a welfare reform bill, the federal government provides money for childcare 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. |
| Childcare Certificate | A certificate that is issued directly to a child’s caretaker which verifies that the caretaker is eligible for subsidized childcare 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 childcare. 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 childcare providers that are not required to be licensed or registered with NYS but meet applicable local or State requirements for such childcare 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. |
| Redetermination | Continuing eligibility for childcare services must be re-determined as often as case factors indicate. This process of re-determination of eligibility is referred to as Redetermination. |

**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 a 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 childcare 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 childcare expenses be paid?***

A 5. Your eligibility will begin from the date we receive your signed and dated childcare 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). In order 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 childcare provider once I’m approved?***

A 6. If you are approved and Pro Action Childcare Council/DSS makes retroactive payment, these funds are paid directly to the childcare provider. It is the responsibility of the childcare 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 childcare provider charge me a registration fee?***

A 9. Yes