

Subsidized Child Care Assistance Program Policy Manual
Chapter 10. Local Options and Waiting List Policies

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REVISED 2/12/2024

I. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Local Department of Social Services (DSS) or Local Purchasing Agency (LPA) have local options for prioritizing waiting lists and increasing the county's set-aside for vulnerable populations which includes children identified as having special needs and children and families experiencing homelessness or those who are in a temporary living situation. This chapter will describe the policies for both options and submission process to the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE).

II. LOCAL POLICY OPTIONS

A. Vulnerable Populations Set-Aside

Vulnerable populations include children identified as having special needs and children and families experiencing homelessness or those who are in a temporary living situation. Payment for these services is made with the vulnerable population set-aside. Prioritization of this population is required. Refer to Chapter 2: Funding for Subsidized Child Care Services for additional information on these funds.

The DSS/LPA must use the 4% set-aside to serve vulnerable populations. Once the minimum set-aside amount is encumbered, children that are identified as one of these vulnerable populations who are currently being served should be served with funds in the DSS/LPA's regular subsidy allocation. DSS/LPA's may continue to serve new children who apply and are in one of these vulnerable populations, as long as the DSS/LPA does not overspend their regular subsidy allocation. If necessary, children in one of these vulnerable populations must be placed on a separate waiting list. Refer to Chapter 6: Serving Children with Special Needs for additional information.

While the DSS/LPA is required to set aside the required 4%, the DSS/LPA has the option to set aside an amount greater than 4% to serve vulnerable populations.

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III. WAITING LIST POLICIES

Waiting lists provide an equitable and efficient method of allocating services when the local Department of Social Services (DSS) or Local Purchasing Agencies (LPA) are faced with limited resources. Waiting lists must be developed when child care funding is not available, child care providers are not available, or the DSS/LPA lacks sufficient staff to process all requests for child care services.

Waiting lists maintained by the DSS/LPA provide valuable information about child care needs. This information helps justify the need for additional child care funds; therefore, it is important that the list provides valid information regarding the number of *eligible children* who are waiting to receive services. Waiting lists are in NC FAST. Waiting lists also give potential providers useful information when deciding where to locate and what ages of children to serve.

A. Configure the Waiting List

The DSS/LPA must configure their county waiting list in NC FAST before adding children. Waiting list configuration involves selecting the start date and the reason for putting the county in waiting list mode. The waiting list configuration also includes entering changes in the reason for the waiting list or entering an end date for the county waiting list. Refer to the NC FAST SCCA Job Aid: Waiting List Configuration for step-by-step instructions.

B. Prioritizing Families

DSS/LPA staff should determine if funding is available by reviewing monthly expenditures for the state fiscal year and reviewing the budget. The DSS/LPA will determine policies for prioritizing the placement of children in care when there are insufficient funds to serve all eligible families. Examples of populations that the DSS/LPA may prioritize include but are not limited to:

- Child Protective Services (CPS)
- Child Welfare Services (CWS)

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- Children in DSS custody (Foster Care)
- Families in Work First
- Teen Parents
- Siblings (including newborns)
- Active-duty military
- Full-Time Employment
- Part-Time Employment
- Children with Developmental Needs
- Education or Skills Training

The DSS/LPA may also prioritize families who are already receiving services and later need care for another child, such as a newborn. The waiting list is a tool for providing assistance to the family as a unit. When a family is removed from the waiting list, all the children in that family needing care should be included.

C. Adding Families to the Waitlist

Before adding a family to the waiting list in NC FAST, the DSS/LPA must conduct an informal eligibility screening by collecting the following information from the recipient:

1. Name.
2. Address.
3. Phone number.
4. Child's name and date of birth.
5. Date of inquiry.
6. Reason care is needed; and
7. Family size and amount of family income (if applicable).

The recipient must appear to be eligible based on the informal eligibility screening. It is not necessary for recipients to complete an Application for Child Care Assistance in order to be put on the DSS/LPA's waiting list.

If a recipient is not eligible at the time of the informal eligibility screening but can reasonably be expected to become eligible within 30 days, the DSS/LPA may place them on the waiting list the date of the

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request. For example, a parent has job offer and will begin work within 30 days.

There are three ways child care workers can add a child to the waiting list:

1. By screening a potentially eligible child when the waiting list criteria prevents application
 - i. Complete steps 1-12 of the SCCA – Application to Case Job Aid

NOTE: When a county is in waiting list mode, NC FAST automatically adds children who do not meet screening criteria to the waiting list during the application screening process.

2. On the Manage Waiting List page, or
3. The parent / responsible adult's person page.

NOTE: Methods 2 and 3 above require that the child's residential address be in the waiting list county.

Child care workers must search for each household member and register each, when necessary, before adding a child to the waiting list. Searching the waiting list allows the child care workers to locate the recipient who should receive a notice on behalf of a child.

Refer to SCCA – Managing the Waiting Lis Job Aid for procedures on adding children to the waiting list in NC FAST.

D. Conducting the Waiting List Survey

The DSS/LPA is responsible for creating the waiting list survey and must send the waiting list survey twice per year, in March and September. The DSS/LPA must allow 30 calendar days for families to respond to the survey. DCDEE may periodically conduct a waiting list survey. DSS/LPA's have the option to conduct additional surveys as the DSS/LPA deems appropriate.

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Once the survey is returned to the DSS/LPA, the child care worker must review the information and update NC FAST. If the applicant fails to respond and return the waiting list survey, the applicant shall be removed from the waiting list.

E. Removing Families from the Waiting List

DSS/LPAs need to establish a procedure for managing the waiting list. Children are removed from waiting lists as funding, child care spaces or staff become available. When reducing the waiting list, families must be removed in accordance with federal, state, and local policy. The DSS/LPA must notify waitlist applicants in writing informing them that they may come in to apply for services. Applicants shall have thirty (30) calendar days to submit an application to the DSS/LPA. If the parent/RA does not apply by that deadline, the child care worker must manually remove the child from the waiting list. Refer to SCCA – Managing the Waiting List Job Aid for further instructions.

DSS/LPA's have two (2) opportunities for removing families from the waiting list:

1. Families must be served in order according to the local policy. The DSS/LPA must include the federal prioritizations in their local policies which includes children with special needs and families experiencing homelessness.
2. If it appears that some families in the lowest priorities never receive services, the DSS/LPA may clear one area of priority one month and clear another priority the next time families are removed from the waiting list. In this manner, the DSS/LPA is prioritizing services to families but also attempting to serve each area of need.

NOTE: DSS/LPAs are required to prioritize vulnerable populations however, the DSS/LPA's have the option to order the required prioritizations based on their county's need.

F. How Changes in Need for Child Care Affect Waiting Lists

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When a family's need for child care changes, it is not necessary to interrupt services if they are currently receiving child care. For example, a child receiving child care to support a general prioritized need would not have to go on the waiting list when changing to another non-prioritized need

G. Options When Not Enough Providers are Available

DSS/LPAs are encouraged to work with the local child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R), Smart Start Partnership, and other community resources to develop child care services that meet the needs of the community. These agencies should have a clear understanding of the demographics of the community and the need for specific types of care, e.g., infant care, school-age care, and evening care.

When a child care program becomes unavailable to currently enrolled children, the DSS/LPA should respond quickly to try to assist with locating other available arrangements and/or referring to the local CCR&R so that there will be little disruption to the child or to the parent's employment, training, etc. The DSS/LPA may develop its own policy for establishing a waiting list when child care spaces are not available.

IV. LOCAL POLICY AND WAITING LIST PLANS

The DSS/LPAs must submit their local plans on how they will maintain their waiting list and vulnerable population prioritization set aside.

All local plans are reviewed by the Subsidy Services Policy Unit for approval prior to submission to the DSS/LPA director and local governing board. The Subsidy Services Policy Unit will follow the Division's approval process. Signatures of the director of the DSS/LPA and governing board and date are required on the final copy of the policies which must be maintained in the DSS/LPA's office. The local plan must be made available by distribution to parents or by posting in the DSS/LPA.

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Waiting list policies must be submitted to DCDEE every five (5) years or anytime the local policy is amended or local governing board members change. Annually, counties must also submit notification that waiting list policies have been reviewed and indicate whether or not amendments were made upon request from DCDEE.

A. Local Plan Requirements

DSS/LPA's must include the following in their local plan:

1. Policies that state that the waiting list will be maintained in NC FAST
2. Policies that the waiting list survey will be conducted twice per year, in March and September, and will allow families 30 calendar days to respond.
3. Policies that families will be notified in writing that they may apply for services when being removed from the waiting list.
4. The priority populations and the order in which they will be served from the waiting list.
5. If the county will or will not add to the 4% set-aside for vulnerable populations
6. How counties will handle lack of funding, as reduction in services is no longer an option. DCDEE recommends *“If childcare cases are in jeopardy of termination due to potential lack of funding, the DSS/LPA will contact DCDEE for guidance”*

Refer to Chapter 10 Attachment 2 for a sample local policy template that may be used in developing the DSS/LPA's local plan.

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For additional information on policy described in this chapter please refer to:

SCCA Manual:

Chapter 2: Funding for Subsidized Child Care Services

Chapter 6: Serving Children with Special Needs

NC FAST Job Aids:

SCCA - Waiting List Configuration

SCCA - Waitlist Management

SCCA - Application to Case