

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

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## **Chapter 10. Local Options and Waiting List Policies**

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### **I. CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

Local Department of Social Services (DSS) or Local Purchasing Agencies (LPA) have local options for prioritizing populations when there is a waiting list and increasing the county's set-aside for vulnerable populations which include children identified as having special needs and children and families experiencing homelessness. This chapter will describe the policies for both options and the 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. Prioritization of these populations is required. Payment for these services is made with the vulnerable population set-aside. The set-aside amount is 4% of the county's subsidy allocation. Refer to Chapter 2: Funding for Subsidized Child Care Services for additional information on these funds. For set-aside funds to be applied to vulnerable populations, evidence must be entered into NC FAST. See SCCA – Homeless Living Arrangements and SCCA – Child Care Special Needs Job Aids.

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. The DSS/LPA must contact DCDEE to request additional funds be added to the set-aside for vulnerable populations.

### **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. The DSS/LPA must maintain waiting lists in NC FAST.

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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 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 Job Aid SCCA: 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, staff or providers 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)
- Children in DSS custody (Foster Care)
- Work First Participants with MRA-B
- Teen Parents
- Siblings (including newborns)
- Children with Developmental Needs
- Active-Duty Military
- Full-Time Employment
- Part-Time Employment
- Education or Skills Training

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### 1. Applicants Not Included in the Priority Listing

If an applicant applies for Subsidized Child Care Assistance while the county is on a waiting list but is not included in the county's priority listing, that applicant will not be prioritized and will be added to the waiting list.

### 2. Applicants Included in the Priority Listing

When an applicant applies and is included in one of the priority populations determined by the county's local policy, the DSS/LPA must monitor expenditures closely to determine placement of children in care. The DSS/LPA must determine:

- i. If all priority populations in the list can be served without wait, or
- ii. If some of the highest priority populations can be served while lower priority populations must be placed on the waiting list.

### 3. Adding a Child to an Existing Case

The DSS/LPA may prioritize families who are already receiving services and later need care for another child, such as a newborn. The DSS/LPA is encouraged but not required to serve siblings or children being added to an existing case to prevent hardship to a family already receiving child care services.

### 4. Vulnerable Populations

The DSS/LPA is **required** to prioritize vulnerable populations (children with special needs and families experiencing homelessness).

- i. Children identified as having special needs or homelessness **must** be served with the set-aside funds without being added to the waiting list.

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- ii. Once set-aside funds are depleted, vulnerable populations already receiving services must continue to be served with the DSS/LPA's regular subsidy allocation.
- iii. New applications for children in vulnerable populations may be served with the DSS/LPA's regular subsidy allocation once set-aside funds are depleted.
  - a) The DSS/LPA must continue to prioritize new applications for vulnerable populations once the set-aside is depleted and they are served with the regular subsidy allocation. The DSS/LPA may choose which order vulnerable populations have in the priority populations listing once the set-aside funds are depleted.
- iv. If the vulnerable population set-aside is depleted and the regular subsidy allocation is at risk of overspending, the DSS/LPA should evaluate their priority listing to determine if children in vulnerable populations must be added to the waiting list.
  - a) If it becomes necessary to add vulnerable populations to the waiting list, vulnerable populations should be removed from the waiting list first if any set-aside funds become available, such as when another case using set-aside funds terminates.
  - b) If set-aside funds continue to be depleted and the DSS/LPA is able to pull families from the waiting list due to regular subsidy funds becoming available, the DSS/LPA must follow their local policy when pulling families from the waiting list, including vulnerable populations.

### C. Adding Children to the Waiting List

Before adding a child to the waiting list in NC FAST, the DSS/LPA must

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conduct an informal eligibility screening by collecting the following information from the applicant:

- Name.
- Address.
- Phone number.
- Child's name and date of birth.
- Date of inquiry.
- Reason care is needed; and
- Household size and amount of household income (if applicable).

The applicant must be eligible based on the informal eligibility screening. It is not necessary for applicants to complete a full application or provide verifications to be put on the DSS/LPA's waiting list. The applicant's statement of eligibility factors is acceptable.

If an applicant 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 effective the date of the request. For example, an applicant 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 priority 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.

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**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 –Waitlist Management Job Aid for procedures on adding children to the waiting list in NC FAST.

### **D. Conducting the Waiting List Survey**

Regular assessment of the SCCA waiting list ensures that the children on the waiting list continue to be eligible and continue to want or need child care assistance. The waiting list survey is used to collect information from families who are on the county's waiting list to ensure the family's information is up to date. The DSS/LPA is responsible for:

1. Sending the waiting list survey every six (6) months. The DSS/LPA has the option to choose which months the surveys are sent.

DCDEE-0476 Waiting List Survey may be used as a guide when creating the waiting list survey. Use of the DCDEE-0476 Waiting List Survey is not required. If the DSS/LPA chooses not to use the DCDEE-0476, the DSS/LPA must create a survey form to use. The survey should include sufficient questions to assess whether the family remains eligible, including questions about household, income and need for care. The DSS/LPA must allow 30 calendar days for families to respond to the survey.

2. Once the survey is returned to the DSS/LPA, the child care worker must review the information and update NC FAST. If the information provided on the survey indicates the family no longer screens eligible for Subsidized Child Care Assistance, the DSS/LPA must notify the family and remove the family from the waiting list.
3. If the family fails to return the waiting list survey, the family is removed from the waiting list.

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### E. Pulling Children from the Waiting List

DSS/LPAs must establish a procedure for pulling children from the waiting list so they may be served. Children are pulled from waiting lists as funding, child care spaces or staff become available. When pulling children from the waiting list, children must be served in accordance with federal, state, and local policy. The DSS/LPA must notify waiting list families in writing using the Waiting List Notice in NC FAST, informing them that they may come in to apply for services. The child care worker may also make a telephone call to the family as a courtesy in addition to the written Waiting List Notice. Applicants have thirty (30) calendar days to submit an application to the DSS/LPA. If the applicant does not apply by that deadline, the child care worker must manually remove the child from the waiting list. Refer to SCCA – Waitlist Management Job Aid for further instructions.

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.

DSS/LPA's have multiple options for pulling families from the waiting list:

1. Families may be pulled according to the priority order in the local policy.
  - i. If the DSS/LPA chooses to pull families from the waiting list using their priority population listing, the DSS/LPA must plan to serve children from the waiting list who are not included in the priority listing. For example, non-prioritized children are pulled from the waiting list in chronological order after prioritized children are pulled from the list.
2. Children may be pulled strictly in chronological order.
3. If it appears that children in some populations never receive services, the DSS/LPA may clear one population one month and clear another population the next time children are pulled from

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the waiting list. In this manner, the DSS/LPA is prioritizing services to children but also attempting to serve each area of need.

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

When a recipient'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 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.

## **IV. LOCAL POLICY AND WAITING LIST PLANS**

The DSS/LPAs must develop local policy on how they will prioritize families, pull children from the waiting list and how much will be set-aside for vulnerable populations.

All local policies must be reviewed by the Subsidy Services Policy Unit at DCDEE 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. Once local policies have been approved by DCDEE, signatures of the DSS/LPA director and governing board and date are required on the final copy of the policies which must be maintained in the DSS/LPA's office and with DCDEE. The local policy must be made available by distribution to parents or by posting in the DSS/LPA.

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The DSS/LPA is required to update and submit a new local policy to DCDEE:

- At least every two years (with new signatures by the director/governing board after DCDEE approval)
- Anytime the local policy is amended
- Anytime there are changes in the local governing board members

### A. Local Policy Requirements

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

1. The priority populations list of how children will be served when funds, child care staff or child care spaces are limited.
2. How children will be pulled from the waiting list as funding, child care staff or child care spaces become available (e.g. children will be removed in chronological order or children will be removed according to their priority list) See III.E. above.
3. If the county will or will not add to the 4% set-aside for vulnerable populations. If the county will add to the 4% set-aside, the county must state the percentage that is being set-aside.
4. How counties will handle lack of funding, as reduction in services is no longer an option. DCDEE recommends "*If child care cases are in jeopardy of termination due to potential lack of funding, the DSS/LPA will contact DCDEE for guidance*".

Refer to DCDEE-0475 Template - Local Policy Form 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 - Application to Case

SCCA – Child Care Special Needs

SCCA – Homeless Living Arrangements

SCCA - Waiting List Configuration

SCCA - Waitlist Management