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Department of Children and Families Stops Wisconsin Shares Payments to 35 Child Care Providers

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has stopped Wisconsin Shares payments to 35 child care providers effective Saturday, September 26. These providers were suspended from the Wisconsin Shares program because DCF discovered evidence to reasonably suspect that providers had violated Wisconsin Shares regulations and will be referred to law enforcement. These are the second wave of suspensions this month as DCF suspended 34 providers last week, for a total of 69 to date.

"We have new tools to fight fraud and we are putting them to work," stated DCF Secretary Reggie Bicha. "Finding those who defraud the Wisconsin Shares program is our staff's top priority. We are aggressive in stopping criminals who scam this important program."

DCF is using both technology and on-site visits to determine if a provider is committing fraud. Providers were suspended for various violations to the Wisconsin Shares program. Two notable examples are Appetite for Learning and Zelda's Love and Happiness Child Care. Upon DCF staff visiting Appetite for Learning, the center was unable to produce attendance information, and the center was found to not have enough appropriate activities for the number of children authorized and did not meet standards for cleanliness. DCF staff attempted to visit Zelda's Love and Happiness Child Care last week and could not gain access as there were no adults or children present. Multiple attempts have been made to visit Zelda's since May without success as no one responds to doorbell or knocking.

These suspensions are as a result new authority given DCF through a change in Wisconsin law. Information about why each of 69 providers has been suspended from the Wisconsin Shares program is available on the DCF website, www.dcf.wisconsin.gov.

As part of the recent budget, DCF can now suspend providers during investigations if fraud is reasonably suspected. In efforts to detect fraud, DCF is developing a system to automatically collect attendance records from child care centers receiving Shares reimbursements. The Department has also created a five person fraud detection and prevention unit that includes two former police officers and contracted with an investigative firm with expertise in public subsidy fraud investigations. In partnership with the Milwaukee District Attorney's office, DCF is co-leading a Child Care Anti-Fraud Task Force which includes representatives from the Milwaukee County Sheriff, the Department of Justice, Milwaukee County, and the FBI.

Parents whose child care provider has been suspended from receiving Wisconsin Shares payments should contact 4C in Milwaukee at 414-562-2676 or outside of Milwaukee at 800-750-5431 to assist in finding a new child care facility. For more information about 4C, visit their Web site at www.4c-milwaukee.org or www.4-c.org.

To report suspicions of fraud, call the DCF child care fraud hotline at 877-302-FRAUD or 877-302-37283 or visit the DCF website at www.dcf.wisconsin.gov to submit tips directly to fraud detection and prevention unit.

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