

**To First Responders and designated Healthcare Organizations:
This communication includes important information about Emergency Childcare Scholarships now
available for First Responders and Healthcare Organizations from
The Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida!**

Why is this Scholarship available now?

Florida's Office of Early Learning, under the direction of the Department of Education, is expanding access to childcare for Florida's first responders and employees of designated healthcare organizations. This expansion provides an Emergency Childcare Scholarship for up to 3 months (in monthly increments) and allows children, ages 6 weeks to age 13 years old, to receive state funded childcare at a childcare provider that is contracted with the Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida (families living in Collier, Hendry, Glades and Lee Counties), or the Early Learning Coalition (ELC) that serves the county your employee lives in. This expanded financial support includes a waiver of income requirements and eliminates parent co-pays for services (that are normally assessed by the ELC); but a provider **may** charge the difference between the ELC's full reimbursement rate and the provider's private pay rate.

Florida's 30 ELCs serve all 67 counties and receive federal and state tax dollars, along with raising required funds from our local community, to subsidize childcare for families that are working and/or going to school and qualify based on their income (generally up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level) for the School Readiness Program. We also administer Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program (VPK), which is a free program that helps to prepare 4 year-olds for kindergarten. Although some child care centers have closed, many across our county are still operating and have capacity to receive new enrollments.

Who is eligible?

Families who meet these eligibility requirements for the program may receive a child care scholarship:

- Child(ren) are a US citizen(s) or legal resident(s)
- Family resides in Florida – county will determine which ELC will handle the request
- One or both parents are a first responder or employed at an identified healthcare organization
- Parents must enroll child(ren) at a childcare provider that is currently contracted to offer School Readiness Program services (we have a listing of open SR providers).

How do eligible families enroll?

[The attached flyer](#) provides additional information on this process and a link to all ELCs through the Office of Early Learning's website can be found [here](#).

What is the responsibility of the employer?

We will need the attached referral form [Child Care Application and Authorization Form – First Responder and Essential Health Care Personnel \(Declaration of Emergency Responder\)](#) to be completed and signed by the employee and approved/signed by a designated person in your organization, generally the Human Resource Director or a designee.

The employee will then need to either start an account or access an existing account on the Florida's Office of Early Learning Family Portal web based application [through this link](#), fill out the appropriate information and upload a few documents or contact the ELC that covers the county where they live.

Who can assist you from the ELC of SWFL?

We have identified dedicated staff to connect families with open providers in our community. Kim Usa, Chief Program Officer, is our main point of contact for employers. Should you need help to complete the referral form, kindly contact Kim at kimberly.usa@elcofswfl.org. Families may get general information ask

questions, or request assistance with the application process through the “Concerns and Questions” link on our website, www.ELCofSWFL.org. An appropriate staff member will follow up directly with assistance.

We are grateful to the essential efforts of our First Responders and Health Care Workers during this difficult period. Please let us know how we may be of assistance!

Susan E. Block CEO