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Brian P. Kemp
Governor

Amy M. Jacobs
Commissioner

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Dear Child Care Professionals of Georgia:

As you may have heard, DECAL is celebrating its 20-year anniversary as a state agency this month. There is cause for optimism about child care in Georgia today. The average number of children present in child care programs during Child Care Services (CCS) visits is just 3% below pre-pandemic levels, and the overall licensed capacity of child care in Georgia has increased by 7% since 2018. It is a reflection of your commitment and hard work that we made it through the pandemic without losing capacity, and I am grateful for your efforts.

I have been with the agency since 2008, and I have been reflecting on the ongoing partnership between the agency and child care programs and how our collaboration has evolved to help young children flourish. In Georgia we have developed a system of support for providers and families that is the envy of many other states. When we go to regulatory conferences, we are seen as innovators because we build ongoing relationships with providers and provide technical assistance (TA) and training. You may know your CCS Consultant only from the two monitoring visits you receive each year, but she also has a wealth of information to share about child development and best practices for creating high-quality experiences for young children.

A cornerstone of our system is the use of weighted core rules. I highly recommend taking our Core Rules training on GaPDS if you have not already. There are two courses, one for Child Care Learning Centers, and one for Family Child Care Learning Homes. The use of core rules allows CCS to focus our attention on the rules that have the greatest impact on children's health and safety, and the training will help you see what we see.

While I have your attention, I'll also give you a heads-up about a rule change coming next year. The Georgia Early Literacy Act (HB538) enacted in 2023 requires that, beginning in 2025, all early learning professionals who have direct contact with children receive two hours of Language and Literacy training annually after their first year of employment. This training is part of the required 10 hours of annual training—not in addition to it. We will discuss our proposed rule to meet this requirement with the Board of Early Care and Learning during its November 21 meeting, and we'll be asking the Board to adopt the new rule at its May 25, 2025 meeting. The new rule will go into effect July 1, 2025.

Like many on the DECAL leadership team, I began my career teaching and caring for young children. I know from personal experience the demands and the rewards of working in child care. I know it's not an easy livelihood, and I applaud your dedication to seeing young children grow and thrive.

Sincerely,

Pam Stevens
Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services