



CHILD CARE LAW CENTER

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BY EMAIL

October 19, 2011

Diana Dooley, Chair of the Health Exchange Board & Secretary of Health and Human Services Agency
Peter V. Lee, Executive Director
2535 Capitol Oaks Drive, Suite 120
Sacramento, CA 95833

RE: Health Portal – Integration with Child Care and Other Human Services

Dear Secretary Dooley and Mr. Lee:

I am writing on behalf of the Child Care Law Center, a non-profit law firm that focuses on improving access to and the quality of child care for low-income Californians. As an IOLTA-funded legal services support center, we are also part of a statewide network of concerned advocates working to simplify access to safety net services for California's most needy.

We urge you to take advantage of the incredible opportunity presented by the health portal under development to strategically integrate health care with other key human services, including child care. The Board's upcoming decisions on the portal's design concept, Request For Proposal, and vendor, and throughout the implementation process, should build in options to create strategic linkages between health care and child care (and other human services), in order to better serve families.

The benefits of integration between health and child care are numerous, both for families and for government. Families with children applying for health care who have incomes up to approximately 200% of the federal poverty level could receive a child care benefit that would support the parent's work (and therefore potentially employer-sponsored health care); the child's healthy development; and overall family stability and well-being. At the same time, government and its contracted providers of child care could efficiently use the family information already collected and electronically-verified for health to then determine eligibility for child care -- rather than begin anew with a duplicative round of information gathering. A specific plan and timeline for the connection between the portal and child care could be further developed in consultation with the Department of Social Services, the Department of Education, the Counties, the contracted child care agencies and the Resource & Referral Network, consumers, providers, and other stakeholders.

Federal support and other states' examples suggest a way forward for California. As you know, this "horizontal" integration between health and human services is encouraged by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Section 1561, and is funded, according to the August 2011 tri-agency letter, by a 90/10 federal match through 2015. In the current budgetary climate, this represents a rare and significant opportunity to invest in new technologies and improve the well-being of struggling families. At the same time, a September 2011 Information Memorandum from the federal agency responsible for child care encourages states to streamline child care and better coordinate with other benefits, in order to provide the care that is "vital to the healthy development of young children." (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, CCDF-ACF-IM-2011-06, September 21, 2011). Other states, such as Colorado and North Carolina – which like California, are both county-administered states are moving ahead in this direction, and California could, too.

We recognize that the task of launching a new state health portal, as required by the ACA, is a substantial and complex one. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the opportunity necessitates that together we develop a plan for a targeted, common-sense connection between health care, child care, and other human services that ultimately lead to healthier California for all.

We look forward to supporting and assisting California in the development of a portal that helps make the health care-child care connection for families.

Sincerely,



Melissa A. Rodgers
Directing Attorney