Washington PUBLIC POLICY

The Shut Down Continues

"When Child Care Becomes Collateral Damage: The Human Toll of the Federal Shutdown." Commentary, October 25, 2025

To my fellow Family Child Care Professionals and allies,

I write to you with a mix of urgency and solidarity. As many of you are aware, the federal government shutdown that began on October 1, 2025 is directly affecting our child care community. In these past weeks, I've heard from FCC educators across the country – including here in Washington State – who are anxious about keeping their programs running and families supported. While we remain a resilient community, this shutdown brings challenges we must face together.

Below is a thorough summary of what's happening nationally and in Washington, how key federal supports like CCDBGand CACFP are being impacted, and what it means for our FCC programs. My hope is that this newsletter arms you with clear information, key takeaways, and a reminder that we are not alone in this fight.

NATIONAL IMPACT: FCC PROGRAMS FACE UNCERTAINTY

The shutdown's effects on early childhood services are unfolding unevenly across programs. Not all funding stops at once, but the longer the shutdown lasts, the greater the disruption to the supports we and our families rely on [1].

CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES (CCDBG/CCDF):

The Child Care and Development Block Grant – which funds child care subsidies – is forward-funded, meaning states received FY2025 funds in advance [4]. In the short term, most states can continue paying subsidies without interruption [5]. Washington's subsidy program (Working Connections) is among those continuing on schedule [6].

However, if a shutdown persists beyond a few weeks, risks grow. A prolonged stalemate could delay quarterly reimbursements to states and providers, stall new subsidy awards, and pause any planned rate increases or quality grants [5]. It's important to note CCDBG already only serves a fraction of eligible families (about 14% nationwide) [7], so any further strain on this lifeline is devastating.

CACFP (FOOD PROGRAM REIMBURSEMENTS):

The Child and Adult Care Food Program is continuing for now under contingency funding. USDA authorized carryover funds to keep meal reimbursements flowing through October [8]. FCC providers should still submit October meal claims and expect November payments as usual [8].

If the shutdown extends into November, serious concerns arise: federal officials warn of delayed CACFP reimbursements for the 4.4 million children served by this program [1]. Even a short delay can hurt FCC homes, since many operate on slim margins. USDA staff furloughs mean less support – providers might experience slower processing and limited technical assistance in the interim [5].

HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START:

Most Head Start grants weren't immediately cut off on Oct. 1, but a handful of programs with Oct. 1 start dates (serving ~6,500 children) had to operate without funds [4]. The situation grows more dire by November 1, when over 130 programs serving 58,000–65,000 children would lose funding if no budget deal is reached [1][4].

Some FCC providers partner with Early Head Start or ECEAP programs, so these funding gaps threaten closures or lost slots in our communities. In Ohio, for example, several Head Start programs were on the brink, illustrating how quickly this can escalate [4].

WIC (WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN NUTRITION PROGRAM):

WIC has no budget during a shutdown and can only run until existing funds dry up. At the start of October, Washington's DOH warned WIC could shut down after about two weeks without new federal funds [10]. The federal administration injected some emergency dollars, and states report they can stretch WIC into late October or early November at best [1].

If WIC clinics close, families lose access to healthy foods and nutrition support almost immediately – a frightening prospect given WIC serves one-third of all babies born in Washington [10].

SNAP (FOOD STAMPS):

October benefits went out, but November's SNAP is at high risk [1]. USDA has indicated it cannot guarantee benefits past October 31 without a funding agreement [11]. Several states, including Washington, have begun alerting clients that food assistance will stop on Nov. 1 if the shutdown continues [11].

This is deeply concerning for FCC providers because so many of our low-income families – and even some educators – depend on SNAP to put food on the table [7].

In short, the federal supports that keep FCC services stable are fraying under the shutdown. Subsidy payments are okay for now, but future funding is uncertain; food program checks are coming for now, but could see delays; and critical family supports like WIC and SNAP are nearing a cliff [1].

WASHINGTON STATE SPOTLIGHT: RESILIENCE AND RISKS

Here in Washington, we have a proactive state leadership, but we are not immune to the shutdown's impact.

Washington's Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) announced that our state-funded and state-administered early learning services will continue without immediate disruption [6]. Child care subsidy payments and ECEAP are still being disbursed on schedule thanks to forward-funded dollars and state bridge funds.

However, officials are urging caution. In an Oct. 20 bulletin, DCYF Secretary Tana Senn noted that even though DCYF's direct services remain funded, the agency is "very concerned" about other federal supports for families being disrupted [11]. DSHS warned that without federal funds, November SNAP benefits will not be issued, and DOH flagged that WIC clinics could close after mid-October [10].

Washington's leaders understand that when food and nutrition aid stops, family stress rises and demand for social services can increase [11]. For FCC providers, that means higher community need and potentially greater strain on limited local supports.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: HOW FCC PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITIES ARE AFFECTED

1. OPERATIONAL STRAINS

With agencies partially closed, guidance and oversight are limited [12][5]. Routine questions to USDA or HHS may go unanswered. Some programs are pausing hiring or expansion until funding resumes.

2. FINANCIAL PRESSURE

Cash flow is tight for small FCC programs. Delayed subsidies or CACFP checks mean immediate trouble paying bills or staff [12][7]. Many providers are already struggling post-pandemic, and the shutdown compounds financial instability.

3. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

When supports vanish, parents may miss work or leave jobs, increasing family instability and reducing child care access [7]. FCC closures create ripple effects in local economies.

This is not just a budget issue – it's a child welfare, family stability, and economic issue.

Washington PUBLIC POLICY

STANDING TOGETHER: ADVOCACY AND MUTUAL SUPPORT

Despite these challenges, our solidarity remains strong.

✓ STAY INFORMED

Follow updates from NAFCC, NAEYC, and EveryChildCA for accurate information [12].

✓ ENGAGE IN ADVOCACY

Contact your congressional leaders and stress the urgency of ending the shutdown and protecting child care [7].

✓ SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER

Share resources, host local support circles, or coordinate food drives for affected families.

✓ TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Emotional and financial stress are real; reach out for community and professional support.

We have weathered many storms together – from the pandemic to funding cliffs. This shutdown is another storm: disruptive but temporary. Our work and unity matter more than ever.

RESOURCES (OCTOBER 2025 SHUTDOWN IMPACT REPORT)

- NAEYC Blog. "What a Government Shutdown Means for Early Childhood Programs." National Association for the Education of Young Children, Oct. 2025.
- NAFCC Policy Newsletter. "FY2026 Continuing Resolution and Government Shutdown." National Association for Family Child Care, Oct. 2025.
- Home Grown Child Care Blog. Patterson, Alexandra R. "Child Care at Risk: How Federal Funding Cuts—and Government Shutdown—Hurts Families and Home-Based Providers." Oct. 9, 2025.
- Action for Children Blog. "What the October 2025 Government Shutdown Means for Child Care Professionals and Families." Oct. 17, 2025.
- NAFCC Reports and Alerts. "Shutdown Updates and Implications for FCC Programs." Oct. 2025.
- Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF). "Federal Government Shutdown Impacts on Families." Secretary's Message, Oct. 20, 2025.
- Home Grown Child Care. "Impact of Shutdown and Funding Gaps on FCC Providers." Policy Series, Oct. 2025.
- CACFP Roundtable. "USDA Contingency Funding Guidance During Government Shutdown." Oct. 2025.
- EveryChildCA. "Child Care Advocacy During the Federal Shutdown." Oct. 2025.
- Washington State Department of Health. "Federal Shutdown Jeopardizes Critical Support for Infants, Children, and Pregnant People." Oct. 1, 2025.
- Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and OFM Reports. "Statewide Impacts and SNAP Contingency Alerts." Oct. 2025.
- EveryChildCA and NAFCC Joint Brief. "How the Shutdown Disrupts FCC Planning, Grants, and Rate Adjustments." Oct. 2025.