

## DPW Proposes New Childcare Regs

In a September 11<sup>th</sup> announcement, the PA Department of Public Welfare proposed new rules regarding child care subsidies. According to Cathleen Palm, a lobbyist and children's advocate, the new package is "a significant and progressive step to remove barriers in the subsidized child care system."

There are three key changes.

- The regs propose to return to a 20 hour per week work requirement in place of the current requirement of 25 hours. This would open eligibility to many parents who have part-time jobs and can not get the additional hours from their employers.
- As proposed by DPW, up to 10 hours per week in time spent in training or education programs would count toward the 20 hour requirement. This would enable more parents to qualify for child care subsidies while upgrading their skills.
- The regs would drop the current requirement that single parents commence legal proceedings against the absent parent to establish paternity and support. Some parents decide not to bring legal proceedings because they do not want to disrupt carefully negotiated arrangements with the noncustodial parent. Under current law, that causes the loss of eligibility for the child care subsidy.

As has often been reported here, food insecurity is a significant problem among low-wage working families. Qualifying for a child care subsidy is often the step that enables such parents to stop worrying about how they will give their children enough to eat. The DPW proposal will enable more at-risk families to qualify for the subsidies. Still to be addressed are the financial implications of the change. Currently the child care subsidy system is not fully funded. As more families qualify for subsidies, the waiting list is likely to grow. Resolution of that problem awaits reauthorization by Congress of TANF legislation, in which child care funds are a major component.