

## ROCKLAND

# 'Programs are closing': Calls for Cuomo to use CARES Act funds to aid child care providers

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SPRING VALLEY – When the governor announced federal CARES Act funding would be available to help child care providers meet COVID-19 safety demands, West Street Child Care Learning Center Executive Director Diane Rivera applied.

She has yet to see a penny. "It's very competitive," Rivera said of the \$65 million in federal CARES Act funding released by Gov. Andrew Cuomo in July as part of The New York Forward Child Care Expansion Incentive program.

The demand and delay make clear that the state needs to do more, Rivera said.

That's why she joined Thursday's statewide Child Care Day of Action, which called on Cuomo to release the remaining approximately \$70 million of CARES Act funding to help child care providers meet the demand for safe and quality care.

Thursday's local event included Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee; Vicki Caramante, executive director of Childcare Resources of Rockland; Ouida Foster Toutedon, executive director of Head Start of Rockland; and Rivera.

Members of the Assembly held similar events across the state with local Child Care Resource Centers and local providers.

"Child care is essential," Caramante said. "Safe, quality child care helps ensure children start school ready to learn." She said that with many day cares closing their doors, unable to weather the economic impact of the pandemic, essential workers have scrambled to find care.

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"We cannot effectively open the state without adequate child care," said Jaffee, a Suffern Democrat who chairs the Assembly's Committee on Children and Families. "Centers are often staffed by women of color, serving communities of color."

The pandemic cascaded challenges upon the child care sector. Enrollment, and therefore revenue, dropped as parents were working from home, and those with older children already had them home when schools went remote. Costs increased from cleaning and safety measures.

For providers like Rivera, "it was hard even before the pandemic." Her center serves children ages 18 months to 5 years; there were 132 children enrolled when the pandemic hit. When children could no longer attend in person, she arranged virtual storytelling and family projects.

She tried to keep her 28 workers paid through the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program loans. But by June, she had to cut back most workers' hours.

Now West Street Center is planning to reopen Sept. 9. Rivera said they've stocked up on PPE and made a lot of changes to meet safety protocols, from installing "temperature kiosks" to adding more supplies since children can no longer share things like crayons and paintbrushes. All these costs add up, Rivera said.

Freeman Klopott, spokesman for the New York State Division of the Budget, said the state has released \$95 million of the federal funding so far.

The state continues to evaluate the needs of parents and child care providers, he said, "understanding that those needs continue to change as we move through different phases of the pandemic and economic recovery."

Caramante said that in April, Cuomo allocated CARES Act funding to Child Care Resource & Referral agencies like hers to help providers stock up on supplies so they could remain open and serve essential workers. The funding was approximately \$600 per provider.

"Providers had to jump through hoops for a few hundred dollars," Caramante said. The costs of PPE and cleaning supplies continue, but the funding doesn't.

About 65% of child care providers that are registered and licensed with the Office for Children and Family Services remain open.

Without more support, Caramante said, that number will trend down. "Programs are closing."

*Nancy Cutler writes about People & Policy. Click here for her latest stories. Follow her on Twitter at @nancyrockland. Support local journalism; go to [lohud.com/specialoffer](https://lohud.com/specialoffer) to find out how.*