



**CHILDCARE AND PARENT SERVICES (CAPS)
Georgia’s Subsidy Program**

CAPS Policy – Priority Groups	No.: CAPS/00-7	Effective Date: 10/01/2016
		Revised: 07/01/2019
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LEGAL AUTHORITY: Federal Register: 45 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 98 and 99.

Cross Reference/See Also: CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6), CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8), CAPS Annual Redetermination Policy (CAPS/00-14)

Note: Definitions of words or phrases in bold are located in [Definitions and Acronyms](#). Only the first occurrence of the defined words or phrases are bolded.

7 PRIORITY GROUPS

7.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for identifying priority groups and outlining exceptions to specified eligibility requirements, as applicable.

7.2 Scope

This policy applies to all employees of the **Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)**, all parties responsible for the administration of the CAPS program, **parents**, and child care **providers** who receive subsidies administered by DECAL on behalf of parents.

7.3 Priority Groups Overview

7.3.1 The Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program uses an eligibility model based on priority groups. Priority groups may be widened, narrowed, added, or removed based on available funding. Applications submitted for initial eligibility will be denied if the family does not meet eligibility for a priority group, even if other eligibility requirements are met.

7.3.1.1 Applicants who are denied for not being in a priority group can appeal that decision only if they believe the determination was made in error.

7.3.1.2 Priority group status is only required at initial eligibility determination and is not required at annual redetermination.

7.3.1.3 The following is a list of the priority groups (in alphabetical order):

- **Child Protective Services (CPS)** and court-ordered supervision cases
- Children in Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) custody
- Families experiencing domestic violence
- Families of **children with disabilities**
- Families of children enrolled in Georgia’s Pre-K Program
- Families participating in or transitioning from TANF
- Families who have experienced a natural disaster
- Families who lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing
- Families with very low income as defined by CAPS

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- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG)
- **Minor parents**
- Need to protect

7.4 Child Protective Services (CPS) and court-ordered supervision cases

Description	Program Requirements	Eligibility Requirements	Payment Authorization
<p>Children who receive a referral from Georgia Child Protective Services (CPS) for child care are considered a priority group for CAPS. This includes children with an active safety plan, an active family plan, or a court order requiring supervision for children 13 years of age or older.</p> <p>Children who need to receive protective services but are not formally involved with CPS may qualify for the Need to Protect priority group as prescribed in CAPS Policy 7.15.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A referral from Georgia CPS is required. • In cases where a child has been placed in a caregiver's home by DFCS, that placement will, for CAPS purposes, supersede any biological or legal relationships or family unit structure. 	<p>Parents must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet non-financial eligibility requirements (Georgia residency, child citizenship or qualified alien status, immunization, and identity) as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). • Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in the CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). • The state-approved activity requirement may be waived while the CPS case is open and through the 12-month eligibility period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAPS may pay through the end of the eligibility period of the child's 18th birthday if requested through court order for children in CPS cases.

7.5 Children in Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) custody

Description	Program Requirements	Eligibility Requirements	Payment Authorization
<p>Children in Georgia DFCS custody are considered a priority group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no distinction in requirements based on where the child in DFCS custody is placed (e.g., relative, non-relative). • Each child will be counted as a family unit of one and will be considered as custodian and the recipient of services. • When there is a sibling group in DFCS custody, each child eligible for CAPS will have a separate CAPS case. • No family fee will be assessed for children in DFCS custody. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A referral from DFCS Social Services stating need for child care services and verification that the child is in the custody of DFCS in Georgia are required. • Children who receive CAPS under this priority group who go home or to another permanent placement will continue to be eligible for CAPS for the remainder of the 12-month eligibility period so long as the family meets residency requirements and the family's gross applicable income does not exceed 85% of the state median income. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verification of child citizenship or qualified alien status as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). • Current immunization as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). • Because children in this priority group are considered a family unit of one, foster parents are not required to meet income or activity requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAPS will reimburse up to the child care provider's published rate barring any discount or scholarship as applied to children not in DFCS custody. • CAPS will approve a negotiated rate for informal providers should their rate exceed the maximum reimbursement rate based on the chart located in Appendix C. • Refer to the CAPS Purchase of Child Care through Scholarships Policy (CAPS/00-10) for payment rates related to children in DFCS custody. • In addition to licensed or CAPS-eligible exempt programs, informal providers may be selected for children in DFCS custody, as prescribed in CAPS Participating Providers Policy (CAPS/00-11).

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7.6 Families experiencing domestic violence

Description	Eligibility Requirements	90-day Grace Period
<p>Families experiencing domestic violence are considered a priority group.</p> <p>For the purpose of this policy, domestic violence includes any violent crime that is alleged by the applicant against any past or present spouses, persons who are parents of the same child, parents and children, stepparents and stepchildren, foster parents and foster children, or other persons living or formerly living in the same household. This shall also include emotional, psychological, physical, or sexual abuse as attested to by the applicant or formally documented by a referral agency, law enforcement, or a court of competent jurisdiction.</p>	<p>Parents must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide verification from the Georgia Department of Human Services, report to TANF, police report, court documents, proof of shelter residence, or other third-party documentation verifying the family has experienced domestic violence. • Meet non-financial eligibility requirements (Georgia residency, child citizenship or qualified alien status, immunization, and identity) as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). • Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in the CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). • Participate in employment, education, or job search and job search related activities, as prescribed in the CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). Job search and job search related activities are state-approved activities at initial eligibility and for the initial 12-month eligibility period for this priority group. However, parents must meet CAPS state-approved activity requirements as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6) at annual redetermination. 	<p>Families may receive up to 90 days from the date their application is processed to provide verification documentation. The grace period for providing verification will not postpone the eligibility determination. However, if verification documents are not received by the end of the 90-day grace period, the case will be determined ineligible for ongoing child care assistance.</p> <p>If verification is not immediately available, parents must attest that all eligibility requirements are met.</p> <p>If verification of income is not immediately available, the family fee will be calculated based on the parent's verbal attestation of income.</p>

7.7 Families of children with disabilities

Description	Program Requirements	Eligibility Requirements	Payment Authorization
<p>Families of children with a disability that impacts the child's learning are considered a priority group. Disabilities that impact learning may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intellectual disabilities • hearing impairments (including deafness) • speech or language impairments • visual impairments (including blindness) • serious emotional disturbance • orthopedic impairments • autism • traumatic brain injury • specific learning disabilities • other health impairments that impact the child's learning • significant delays in physical, cognitive, communication, 	<p>Acceptable verification may include any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written diagnosis and statement of how the child's learning is impacted from a licensed medical specialist • an Individualized Family Service Plan (Part C of IDEA) • an Individualized Education Program (Part B, section 619, of IDEA) • an Individual Accommodation Plan (Section 504) that indicates how the child's learning is impacted • a Medicaid waiver for persons with disabilities (Katie Beckett, NOW, or COMP) 	<p>Parents must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet non-financial eligibility requirements (Georgia residency, child citizenship or qualified alien status, immunization, and identity) as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). • Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in the CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). • Meet CAPS state-approved activity requirements as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAPS will reimburse up to the child care provider's published rate, less the applicable CAPS family fee, for children with disabilities. • CAPS will approve a negotiated rate for informal providers should their rate exceed the maximum reimbursement rate based on the chart located in Appendix C. • Refer to the CAPS Purchase of Child Care through Scholarships Policy (CAPS/00-10) for payment rates related to children with disabilities. • CAPS funds may be used to support children with disabilities 17 years of age or younger at a licensed child care learning center or family child care learning

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social, emotional, or adaptive development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> proof of Supplemental Security Income for a child who is blind or disabled 		<p>home, a CAPS-eligible exempt program, or an informal provider enrolled with the CAPS program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAPS will include all children in the family unit who need child care when there is an eligible child with a disability. CAPS will reimburse up to the child care provider's published rate only for the child with a disability. Rates for the remaining children in the family unit will be based on the maximum reimbursement rate chart located in Appendix C.

7.8 Families of children enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program

Description	Program Requirements	Eligibility Requirements	Payment Authorization
<p>Families of children enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program are considered a priority group for CAPS.</p> <p>CAPS receives funds from Georgia's Pre-K Program to provide before and after school care services to children who are enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The parent must complete the CAPS Georgia's Pre-K Program Referral Form (Appendix S). 	<p>Parents must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet non-financial eligibility requirements (Georgia residency, child citizenship or qualified alien status, immunization, and identity) as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in the CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). Meet CAPS state-approved activity requirements as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAPS will only subsidize services for children enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K for times when the Pre-K classroom is not in session, such as school holidays or before and after school care. CAPS will include all eligible children in the family unit who need child care when care is authorized for a child enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K.

7.9 Families participating in or transitioning from TANF

Description	Program Requirements	Eligibility Requirements
<p>Families participating in or transitioning from TANF who receive a referral from TANF for child care are considered a priority group.</p> <p>For this policy, families participating in TANF includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families who have completed TANF orientation, been determined income-eligible for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A referral from TANF (Appendix FF) and work plan are required. TANF and parents are required to inform CAPS within 10 calendar days if the parent is no longer participating in employment or support services. Parents who transition from TANF due to employment that is less than 24 hours per week will be considered to meet CAPS state-approved activity for the remainder of their eligibility period and at their 	<p>Parents must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet non-financial eligibility requirements (Georgia residency, child citizenship or qualified alien status, immunization, and identity) as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6).

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<p>TANF, and have been referred for employment services; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families who are currently receiving TANF and participating in employment services. <p>For this policy, families transitioning from TANF is limited to those who have transitioned from TANF within the previous 60 calendar days due to employment.</p> <p>Families who receive TANF but do not participate in TANF employment or support services (i.e., TANF Payees) are not eligible under this priority group.</p>	<p>next annual redetermination. However, at that redetermination, hours may not decrease further than the amount that was initially approved if less than 24 hours (see detailed example below¹).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents who cease to participate in TANF employment or support services for reasons other than employment will be required to meet CAPS state-approved activity requirements as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). Parents who cease to participate in TANF employment or support services for reasons other than employment and do not meet state-approved activity requirements will be approved for subsidy assistance for an additional 13 weeks for job search as prescribed in CAPS Case Changes and Documentation Policy (CAPS/00-13). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in the CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). Be in compliance with all TANF program requirements, or meet CAPS state-approved activity requirements as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6).

¹ For example, if a family transitions from TANF because the parent has employment of 20 hours per week, the 20 hours of employment will satisfy the CAPS activity requirement, but the parent must maintain at least the same number of hours—in this case, 20 hours—in order to continue to satisfy the activity requirement at their first redetermination after transitioning from TANF. A drop from 20 to 19 hours will not meet the activity requirement at their first redetermination after transitioning from TANF.

7.10 Families who have experienced a natural disaster

Description	Eligibility Requirements	90-day Grace Period
<p>Families who have experienced and been negatively impacted by a federal or state declared natural disaster within the previous 24 months are considered a priority group. The family's county of residence must have been identified by government officials as an area included in the state or federal disaster area.</p>	<p>Parents must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide verification of residency in the designated area during the time of the declared natural disaster. Designated areas for federal and state declared natural disasters can be verified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency at www.FEMA.gov/disasters. Meet non-financial eligibility requirements (Georgia residency, child citizenship or qualified alien status, immunization, and identity) as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in the CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). Participate in employment, education, or job search and job search related activities, as prescribed in the CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). Job search and job search related activities are state-approved activities at initial eligibility and for the initial 12-month eligibility period for this priority group. However, parents must meet CAPS state-approved activity requirements as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6) at annual redetermination. 	<p>Families may receive up to 90 days from the date their application is processed to provide verification documentation. The grace period for providing verification will not postpone the eligibility determination. However, if verification documents are not received by the end of the 90-day grace period, the case will be determined ineligible for ongoing child care assistance.</p> <p>If verification is not immediately available, parents must attest that all eligibility requirements are met.</p> <p>If verification of income is not immediately available, the family fee will be calculated based on the parent's verbal attestation of income.</p>

7.11 Families who lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing

Description	Eligibility Requirements	90-day Grace Period
<p>Families who meet the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness are considered a priority group. The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." This includes:</p>	<p>Parents must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet non-financial eligibility requirements (Georgia residency, child citizenship or qualified alien status, immunization, and identity) as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). 	<p>Families may receive up to 90 days from the date their application is processed to provide verification documentation. The grace period for providing</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families sharing housing due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason Families living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to lack of alternative accommodations Families living in emergency or transitional shelters Families whose primary nighttime residence is not ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g., park benches) Families living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, or bus or train stations Migratory children living in circumstances described in the above situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residency can be verified with a letter from the homeowner or lease holder (does not need to be notarized), an emergency shelter, or an agency that provides homeless assistance programs in Georgia. This will also be used to verify homeless status. A written or verbal attestation from the parent that they lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence may be accepted if no other documentation is available. Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in the CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). Participate in employment, education, or job search and job search related activities, as prescribed in the CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). Families who lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing may be authorized with job search and job search related activities as state-approved activities for the entire 12-month eligibility period. 	<p>verification will not postpone the eligibility determination. However, if verification documents are not received by the end of the 90-day grace period, the case will be determined ineligible for ongoing child care assistance.</p> <p>If verification is not immediately available, parents must attest that all eligibility requirements are met.</p> <p>If verification of income is not immediately available, the family fee will be calculated based on the parent's verbal attestation of income.</p>

7.12 Families with very low income

Description	Eligibility Requirements
Families with no income or very low income as defined by CAPS are considered a priority group.	<p>Parents must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet non-financial eligibility requirements (Georgia residency, child citizenship or qualified alien status, immunization, and identity) as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in the CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). Meet CAPS state-approved activity requirements as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). The family's gross applicable income must be at or below the very low income threshold defined in Appendix A.

7.13 Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG)

Description	Eligibility Requirements
<p>Parents participating in the Division of Family and Children Services's (DFCS) Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) program are considered a priority group.</p> <p>DFCS GRG program requirements are available on the DFCS website.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide verification of Georgia residency and identity. Provide verification of child citizenship or qualified alien status and current immunization. Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in the CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). Provide verification of participation in the DFCS GRG program. <p>Note: Because the DFCS GRG program is limited to those who meet an age or disability status, parents participating in the DFCS GRG program are not required to meet CAPS state-approved activity requirements.</p>

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7.14 Minor parents

Description	Eligibility Requirements
<p>Minor parents (20 years of age or younger) are considered a priority group and may receive child care in support of education or work activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one parent must be 20 years of age or younger. • Parents must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meet non-financial eligibility requirements (Georgia residency, child citizenship or qualified alien status, immunization, and identity) as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). ○ Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). ○ Minor parents enrolled in middle school, high school, or a GED program have no additional work requirement. Minor parents who are not enrolled in middle school, high school, or a GED program must meet the 24 hour per week requirement, as prescribed in the CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6).

7.15 Need to Protect

Description	Program Requirements	Eligibility Requirements
<p>CAPS services may be provided for a child who needs to receive protective services but is not formally involved with Child Protective Services (CPS).</p> <p>CAPS Management approval is required to determine if a case qualifies for this priority group.</p> <p>Situations that may qualify for a need to protect include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grandparents, relatives, and other caregivers (excluding biological or adoptive parents) who have taken over full-time care of a child (due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment) that is not in DFCS custody • Families who had a substantiated CPS case that closed within the last 12 months • Families of children involved in the Juvenile Justice system 	<p>Acceptable verification includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A completed Statement of Guardianship (Appendix EE) is required for grandparents, relatives, and other caregivers raising children who are not in DFCS custody. • Referral from a community service program. • Copy of a case plan or verification from DFCS for families who had a substantiated CPS case that closed within the last 12 months. • Other documentation verifying need to protect. 	<p>Parents must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet non-financial eligibility requirements (Georgia residency, child citizenship or qualified alien status, immunization, and identity) as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6). • Meet CAPS income guidelines as prescribed in the CAPS Income Calculations Policy (CAPS/00-8). • Meet CAPS state-approved activity requirements as prescribed in CAPS Eligibility Requirements Policy (CAPS/00-6).

POLICY REVISION HISTORY

Date	Description of Change
05/30/2018	Revised section 7.8 noting that the income threshold for the families with very low income priority group is defined in Appendix A. Previously, the income threshold was defined in CAPS policy.
07/02/2018	Revised language to reflect expanded definition of children with special needs and added attestations as acceptable verification for families experiencing domestic violence or homelessness. Clarified in sections 7.11 and 7.12 that job search and job search related activities may be approved at initial eligibility and for the entire 12-month eligibility period for those priority groups. Revised language in section 7.14.1.1 noting that eligible families' gross applicable income cannot exceed 85% SMI.

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Date	Description of Change
10/01/2018	Revised language to clarify that appeal rights are afforded in certain situations; clarified that priority group is only required at initial application; established a new priority group for children in need of protective services who are not formally involved with CPS (this population was previously served under the CPS priority group); renamed the priority group for families experiencing homelessness to families who lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing; renamed the priority group for children with special needs to families of children with disabilities; renamed and simplified the priority group for families participating in or transitioning from TANF; added a 90-day grace period to submit verification documentation for families experiencing domestic violence, families who have experienced a natural disaster, and families who lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing; clarified that families experiencing domestic violence and families who have experienced a natural disaster must meet state-approved activity requirements at annual redetermination.
07/01/2019	Revised language to remove written or verbal attestations as acceptable verification of domestic violence and renamed the heading "Payment Authorization" to "90-Day Grace Period" in sections 7.6, 7.10, and 7.11 to more accurately reflect the policy guidance in those sections.