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[Maryland child care providers vote to ratify first contract](#)



Last week, 5,000 [Kids First Maryland](#)/SEIU Local 500 child care providers voted by a margin of more than 30-to-1 to ratify their [first contract](#). After [14 months of negotiations](#), providers won an increase in subsidy rates without an increase in parent co-pays; accountability for late payments from the state; and access to important decision-making bodies in the child care system.

"It's a historic moment. Providers who help raise and educate Maryland's most vulnerable children now have a seat at the table," explains Merle Cuttitta, President of SEIU Local 500, [of the new contract](#) that will cover providers who participate in the state subsidy program. Local 500 child care providers first voted to form a union with SEIU in September 2007 after they gained collective bargaining rights through an executive order signed by Gov. Martin O'Malley.

Contract Highlights

Child Care Subsidy Rates-Increases and Protections

- The state will use funds from the federal government's stimulus package to increase Child Care Subsidy rates in all jurisdictions for an average 2.9% increase.
- The state will be obligated to negotiate with SEIU providers when new funding becomes available for Child Care Subsidies.

Increased Access for Parents

- Parents' co-pays will not increase as a result of the agreement!

Training Funds and Bonuses: The state will continue to fund training bonuses and vouchers through the Credentialing Program.

Timely and Accurate Payments

- The state will issue payments on time, accurately and through direct deposit.
- Emergency advances will be available in cases of demonstrated hardship.
- The state will keep providers informed of parental eligibility and providers will not have to pay for mistakes made by the state.

A Seat at the Table: Providers who care for subsidy kids, represented by SEIU, will now be part of the decision making committees of the child care system, including the Office of Child Care Advisory Council, which makes recommendations to the Maryland State Department of Education on child care regulations and procedures.

A New Independent Voice with the Department of Education: A joint committee of representatives from the state and SEIU providers only will be created to work on big-issues providers have with the child care system.

Improved Professional Development and Training Opportunities

- A joint committee of representatives from the state and SEIU providers' only will be set up to work to expand opportunities for child care provider training and further education.
- SEIU providers will work with the state to review training proposals.
- SEIU providers and the state will work together to improve provider access to and participation in the state programs and grants for child care providers and low income families.

Informal Providers

- The subsidy for informal providers will also increase by an average of 2.9%.
- The state and SEIU will explore opportunities for informal providers to be eligible to participate in the Food Program.
- The State and SEIU will work together to support informal (unlicensed) providers to become registered.

Termination Notification: Providers will be given 5 working days notice if a child is removed from care.

Healthcare Study Group: The state will work with SEIU providers to put together options for Health care coverage, so that when the economy turns around we can work to enact the healthcare options.

An Environment to Grow our Union

- The state will remain neutral on the subject of union membership and is barred from using state funds to contact anti-union activities.

- Third parties contracting with the state will remain neutral on union membership and are barred from making anti-union statements or distributing anti-union information.
- If legislation is passed that expands the rights of the child care providers union, additional proposals may be added to the contract that are consistent with the expanded rights.

Scope of Contract

- The contract will be in effect until June 30th, 2011.
- At the request of either party the contract can be reopened in order to negotiate improved economic terms.