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## **The Department of Human and Social Services Earmarks Approximately \$10 Million in Sub-Grants to Authorized Child Care Providers to Elevate the Quality of Child Care in American Samoa**

Governor Lemanu P. S. Mauga is pleased to announce that the Department of Human and Social Services (DHSS) received approval this week from the Office of Child Care under the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for its *Intended Use Plan* for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Child Care Stabilization Award. The ARPA Child Care Stabilization Award provides thousands of dollars to child care centers and family child care homes authorized by DHSS under the American Samoa Child Care Program. Currently, 46 authorized child care providers qualify to apply for up to four different sub-grants aimed at better aligning their services with quality rating improvement standards. These grants particularly focus on enhancing accessibility and the quality of services for children with special needs. Quality improvements include upgrades to the facility's physical space and infrastructure, health and safety measures, disaster preparedness, resources such as training and mental health support for children and employees, and strategies for increasing employee retention.

In making the announcement, Governor Lemanu stated, “With about \$10 million being earmarked for these sub-grants, this unprecedented investment to improve the quality of early learning and care for the most vulnerable of our Territory’s population comes with a great deal of responsibility. I encourage all child care providers who will receive these sub-grant awards to work closely with the DHSS Child Care Division to ensure that these investments translate directly to heightened services for our children, renewed facilities, better equipment and supplies, and strengthened systems that are child-focused, family-friendly, fair to providers, and supportive of workers”.

Qualifying child care centers and family child care homes are scheduled to meet with the DHSS Child Care team next week to officially kick off this project and receive technical assistance (TA). Although these federal funds require the completion of an application, the DHSS Child Care Division is committed to assisting Authorized Providers so they can access most, if not all, of these sub-grants:

- **Sub-grant 1 for Employee Retention Incentives** encourages and promotes the retention of child care employees by providing short-term financial incentives directly to qualifying employees. An approved formula and eligibility criteria will be applied to determine how much each employee's incentive would be.
- **Sub-grant 2 for Mental Health Support for Children and Employees** offers up to \$25,000 to Providers to create and support opportunities, spaces, and activities to improve the social, emotional, and behavioral health and development of children, their families, and the employees in the center/ family child care home.
- **Sub-grant 3 for Minor Renovations** offers Providers the funding needed for renovations and improvements throughout their facility. Minor renovation funds are dedicated to increasing the availability of developmentally appropriate and accessible spaces, improving the overall health and safety across every inch of their facility, and where practicable an additional \$25,000 for centers or \$15,000 for family child care homes will be added to install a playground that is covered, safe, age-appropriate (birth – 13 years old), with special accommodations for children with special needs. Moreover, these playgrounds will also incorporate child-safe surface options (e.g., artificial grass, rubber tiles or mulch, etc.)
- **Sub-grant 4 for Emergency and Disaster Preparedness** provides up to \$50,000 to Authorized Providers to improve their ability to effectively prepare and respond to emergencies and disasters. Activities funded with this subgrant will improve the provider's ability to ensure everyone's health and safety before, during, or after public health, natural, or man-made disasters, emergencies, lockdowns or sheltering in place, and evacuations.

In closing, Governor Lemanu, along with DHSS Director Muavaefa'atasi John E. Suisala, expresses appreciation to the Office of Child Care (OCC) and the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for their continued support of American Samoa's child care needs. We are especially thankful to the OCC's Region IX Office for their partnership and ongoing support of young children and their families through the American Samoa Child Care Program.

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