

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2025**

S

3

**SENATE BILL 528  
Health Care Committee Substitute Adopted 4/9/25  
Third Edition Engrossed 4/15/25**

Short Title: Child Care Regulatory Reforms & Flexibilities.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

March 26, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT TO MAKE VARIOUS CHILD CARE REGULATORY REFORMS AND PROVIDE  
FOR FLEXIBILITIES IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**PART I. VARIOUS CHILD CARE REGULATORY REFORMS**

**EXPERIENCE EQUIVALENCY FOR LEAD TEACHERS IN LICENSED CHILD CARE**

**SECTION 1.1.** Section 8 of S.L. 2024-34 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

**"SECTION 8.(a1)** In modifying the quality rating improvement system (QRIS), the Division of Child Development and Early Education shall ensure a North Carolina Early Childhood Credential based on five years of work experience in a licensed child care facility in this State is treated as equivalent to when that credential is earned through other pathways for purposes of awarding a star rating."

**SECTION 1.2.** G.S. 110-91(8) reads as rewritten:

"(8) Qualifications for Staff. – Qualifications for child care staff are as follows:

- a. All child care center administrators shall be at least 21 years of age. All child care center administrators shall have the North Carolina Early Childhood Administration Credential or its equivalent as determined by the Department. All child care administrators performing administrative duties as of the date this act becomes law and child care administrators who assume administrative duties at any time after this act becomes law and until September 1, 1998, shall obtain the required credential by September 1, 2000. Child care administrators who assume administrative duties after September 1, 1998, shall begin working toward the completion of the North Carolina Early Childhood Administration Credential or its equivalent within six months after assuming administrative duties and shall complete the credential or its equivalent within two years after beginning work to complete the credential. Each child care center shall be under the direction or supervision of a person meeting these requirements. All staff counted toward meeting the required staff-child ratio shall be at least 16 years of age, provided that persons younger than 18 years of



\* S 5 2 8 - V - 3 \*

age work under the direct supervision of a credentialed staff person who is at least 21 years of age.

b. All lead teachers in a child care center shall have at least a North Carolina Early Childhood Credential or its equivalent as determined by the Department. Lead teachers shall either (i) be enrolled in the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential coursework or its equivalent as determined by the Department within six months after becoming employed as a lead teacher or within six months after this act becomes law, whichever is later, and shall complete the credential or its equivalent within 18 months after ~~enrollment~~ enrollment or (ii) have a minimum of five years of documented experience teaching in a licensed child care facility in this State which shall be deemed equivalent to the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential.

c. For child care centers licensed to care for 200 or more children, the Department, in collaboration with the North Carolina Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, shall establish categories to recognize the levels of education achieved by child care center administrators and teachers who perform administrative functions. The Department shall use these categories to establish appropriate staffing based on the size of the center and the individual staff responsibilities.

d. Effective January 1, 1998, an operator of a licensed family child care home shall be at least 21 years old and have a high school diploma or its equivalent. Operators of a family child care home licensed prior to January 1, 1998, shall be at least 18 years of age and literate. Literate is defined as understanding licensing requirements and having the ability to communicate with the family and relevant emergency personnel. Any operator of a licensed family child care home shall be the person on-site providing child care.

e. The Commission shall adopt standards to establish appropriate qualifications for all staff in child care centers. These standards shall reflect training, experience, education and credentialing and shall be appropriate for the size center and the level of individual staff responsibilities. It is the intent of this provision to guarantee that all children in child care are cared for by qualified people. Pursuant to G.S. 110-106, no requirements may interfere with the teachings or doctrine of any established religious organization. The staff qualification requirements of this subdivision do not apply to religious-sponsored child care facilities pursuant to G.S. 110-106."

## **INCREASE CERTAIN MAXIMUM GROUP SIZES & REVISE NAP-TIME SUPERVISION REQUIREMENTS IN CHILD CARE**

### **SECTION 1.3. G.S. 110-91(7)a. reads as rewritten:**

"a. The Commission shall adopt rules for child care centers regarding staff-child ratios, group sizes and multi-age groupings other than for infants and toddlers, provided that these rules shall be no less stringent than those currently required for staff-child ratios as enacted in Section 156(e) of Chapter 757 of the 1985 Session Laws.

1. Except as otherwise provided in this subdivision, the staff-child ratios and group sizes for infants and toddlers in child care centers shall be no more than as follows:

	Age	Ratio Staff/Children	Group Size
1			
2	0 to 12 months	1/5	<del>40</del> 15
3	12 to 24 months	1/6	<del>12</del> 18
4	2 to 3 years	1/10	20.
5	No child care center shall care for more than 25 children in one		
6	group. Child care centers providing care for 26 or more		
7	children shall provide for two or more groups according to the		
8	ages of children and shall provide separate supervisory		
9	personnel and separate identifiable space for each group.		
10	1a.	<u>If a child care center is operating under voluntary enhanced</u>	
11		<u>requirements, the maximum group size for toddlers aged 2 to</u>	
12		<u>3 years may be increased from 18 to 20 children when the child</u>	
13		<u>care center maintains a 1/9 staff-child ratio.</u>	
14	1b.	<u>If a child care center is operating under the highest voluntary</u>	
15		<u>enhanced requirements, the child care center may use the</u>	
16		<u>following maximum group sizes for infants and toddlers when</u>	
17		<u>the child care center maintains staff-child ratios as provided</u>	
18		<u>herein:</u>	
19	<u>Age</u>	<u>Ratio Staff/Children</u>	<u>Group Size</u>
20	<u>0 to 12 months</u>	<u>1/4</u>	<u>12</u>
21	<u>12 to 24 months</u>	<u>1/5</u>	<u>15</u>
22	<u>2 to 3 years</u>	<u>1/8</u>	<u>20.</u>
23	...."		

## CLARIFY RULES ON MULTIUSE CHILD CARE CENTERS

**SECTION 1.4.** The Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education (Division), in coordination with the Child Care Commission, shall work to clarify the rules governing multiuse child care centers to ensure each of the following:

- (1) Allow the use of existing buildings to house multiunit child care centers and include mixed-age centers if they meet the requirements outlined in the rules regarding multiunit child care centers.
- (2) Grant individual licenses within a multiunit child care center based on the square footage used by each owner.

Applicants who meet the pre-licensing guidelines and are awarded a license by the Division shall be considered eligible to qualify as a tenant in a multiuse facility.

## PART II. SCHOOL-AGE FLEXIBILITIES

**SECTION 2.2.(a)** G.S. 110-91 reads as rewritten:

### "§ 110-91. Mandatory standards for a license.

All child care facilities shall comply with all State laws and federal laws and local ordinances that pertain to child health, safety, and welfare. Except as otherwise provided in this Article, the standards in this section shall be complied with by all child care facilities. ~~However, none~~ Notwithstanding any provision of law or rule to the contrary, any building and grounds which are currently approved for school occupancy and which house a public or private elementary or middle school shall be deemed to have met the space and equipment, sanitation, fire, and building code requirements for a licensed child care facility when the building and grounds are serving the same, or a subset of the same, school-age children in an out-of-school child care program. None of the standards in this section apply to the school-age children of the operator of a child care facility but do apply to the preschool-age children of the operator. Children 13 years of age or older may receive child care on a voluntary basis provided all applicable required standards

are met. The standards in this section, along with any other applicable State laws and federal laws or local ordinances, shall be the required standards for the issuance of a license by the Secretary under the policies and procedures of the Commission except that the Commission may, in its discretion, adopt less stringent standards for the licensing of facilities which provide care on a temporary, part-time, drop-in, seasonal, after-school or other than a full-time basis.

...

(6) Space and Equipment Requirements. – There shall be no less than 25 square feet of indoor space for each child for which a child care center is licensed, exclusive of closets, passageways, kitchens, and bathrooms, and this floor space shall provide during rest periods 200 cubic feet of airspace per child for which the center is licensed. There shall be adequate outdoor play area for each child under rules adopted by the Commission which shall be related to the size of center and the availability and location of outside land area. In no event shall the minimum required exceed 75 square feet per child. The outdoor area shall be protected to assure the safety of the children receiving child care by an adequate fence or other protection. A center operated in a public school shall be deemed to have adequate fencing protection. A center operating exclusively during the evening and early morning hours, between 6:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M., need not meet the outdoor play area requirements mandated by this subdivision.

Each child care facility shall provide indoor area equipment and furnishings that are child size, sturdy, safe, and in good repair. Each child care facility that provides outdoor area equipment and furnishings shall provide outdoor area equipment and furnishings that are child size, sturdy, free of hazards that pose a threat of serious injury to children while engaged in normal play activities, and in good repair. The Commission shall adopt standards to establish minimum requirements for equipment appropriate for the size of child care facility. Space shall be available for proper storage of beds, cribs, mats, cots, sleeping garments, and linens as well as designated space for each child's personal belongings.

The Division of Child Development of the Department of Health and Human Services shall establish and implement a policy that defines any building which is currently approved for school occupancy and which houses a public or private elementary or middle school to include the playgrounds and athletic fields as part of the school building when that building is used to serve school-age children in ~~after-school-out-of-school~~ child care programs. ~~Playgrounds~~ Except as otherwise provided in this section, playgrounds and athletic fields referenced in this section that do not meet licensure standards promulgated by the North Carolina Child Care Commission shall be noted on the program's licensure and rating information.

...."

**SECTION 2.2.(b)** The Child Care Commission shall adopt or amend any rules to ensure uniformity and consistency in application of the exemptions for school-age children in out-of-school child care programs as provided in this section.

**SECTION 2.3.** G.S. 110-91(8) reads as rewritten:

"(8) Qualifications for Staff. – All child care center administrators shall be at least 21 years of age. All child care center administrators shall have the North Carolina Early Childhood Administration Credential or its equivalent as determined by the ~~Department~~ Department or the School-Age Administration Credential when exclusively providing school-age child care. All child care administrators performing administrative duties as of the date this act becomes

1 law and child care administrators who assume administrative duties at any  
2 time after this act becomes law and until September 1, 1998, shall obtain the  
3 required credential by September 1, 2000. Child care administrators who  
4 assume administrative duties after September 1, 1998, shall begin working  
5 toward the completion of the North Carolina Early Childhood Administration  
6 Credential or its ~~equivalent~~ equivalent, or the School-Age Administration  
7 Credential when exclusively providing school-age child care, within six  
8 months after assuming administrative duties and shall complete the credential  
9 or its equivalent within two years after beginning work to complete the  
10 credential. Each child care center shall be under the direction or supervision  
11 of a person meeting these requirements. All staff counted toward meeting the  
12 required staff-child ratio shall be at least 16 years of age, provided that persons  
13 younger than 18 years of age work under the direct supervision of a  
14 credentialed staff person who is at least 21 years of age. All lead teachers in a  
15 child care center shall have at least a North Carolina Early Childhood  
16 Credential or its equivalent as determined by the Department. Lead teachers  
17 shall be enrolled in the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential  
18 coursework or its equivalent as determined by the Department within six  
19 months after becoming employed as a lead teacher or within six months after  
20 this act becomes law, whichever is later, and shall complete the credential or  
21 its equivalent within 18 months after enrollment.

22 For child care centers licensed to care for 200 or more children, the  
23 Department, in collaboration with the North Carolina Institute for Early  
24 Childhood Professional Development, shall establish categories to recognize  
25 the levels of education achieved by child care center administrators and  
26 teachers who perform administrative functions. The Department shall use  
27 these categories to establish appropriate staffing based on the size of the center  
28 and the individual staff responsibilities.

29 Effective January 1, 1998, an operator of a licensed family child care home  
30 shall be at least 21 years old and have a high school diploma or its equivalent.  
31 Operators of a family child care home licensed prior to January 1, 1998, shall  
32 be at least 18 years of age and literate. Literate is defined as understanding  
33 licensing requirements and having the ability to communicate with the family  
34 and relevant emergency personnel. Any operator of a licensed family child  
35 care home shall be the person on-site providing child care.

36 The Commission shall adopt standards to establish appropriate  
37 qualifications for all staff in child care centers. These standards shall reflect  
38 training, experience, education and credentialing and shall be appropriate for  
39 the size center and the level of individual staff responsibilities. It is the intent  
40 of this provision to guarantee that all children in child care are cared for by  
41 qualified people. Pursuant to G.S. 110-106, no requirements may interfere  
42 with the teachings or doctrine of any established religious organization. The  
43 staff qualification requirements of this subdivision do not apply to  
44 religious-sponsored child care facilities pursuant to G.S. 110-106."

45 **SECTION 2.4.** G.S. 110-98.5 reads as rewritten:

46 **"§ 110-98.5. Care for school-age children during state of emergency.**

47 Notwithstanding any provision of law or rule to the contrary, when remote or virtual learning  
48 is required due to a declared state of emergency issued under G.S. 166A-19.20, the following  
49 shall apply:

50 ...

- (3) Care provided to school-age children pursuant to this section is not considered child care as defined under G.S. 110-86. However, if a program was licensed prior to the state of emergency, it shall be deemed licensed during the state of emergency whether it expands its capacity to provide services to more children so long as it adheres to the staff-child ratios for licensure."

**SECTION 2.5.** The Weikart Youth Program Quality Assessment (Weikart Program) shall be added as an assessment tool for evaluating out-of-school child care programs and awarding of a star rating. The Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education, shall complete the necessary crosswalk evaluation of the Weikart Program and have it available for applicants to use not later than one year after the date this act becomes law.

## **PART II-A. ESTABLISH WORKGROUP TO EXAMINE STREAMLINING REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR PHYSICAL STRUCTURES OF LICENSED CHILDCARE FACILITIES**

**SECTION 2A.1.** The Division of Child Development and Early Education (the Division) shall establish the Licensed Childcare Licensure Workgroup to examine streamlining regulatory requirements related to the physical structures of licensed childcare facilities. The workgroup shall consist of at least one representative from each of the following:

- (1) The Division of Child Development and Early Education.
- (2) The Office of the State Fire Marshal.
- (3) The Department of Insurance.
- (4) The North Carolina Building Code Council.
- (5) The Division of Public Health.
- (6) The League of Municipalities.
- (7) The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners.
- (8) N.C. Licensed Child Care Association.
- (9) The North Carolina Child Care Commission.
- (10) Other representatives deemed necessary by the Division.

The Division shall appoint two individuals to serve as co-chairs of the workgroup.

Each entity above shall choose the individual or individuals to serve on the workgroup in a number to be determined by the Division.

**SECTION 2A.2.** The work group shall develop findings and recommendations related to at least the following:

- (1) Streamlining the regulatory requirements related to the physical structures of licensed childcare facilities, including building codes, fire codes, and sanitation codes.
- (2) Resolving conflicts between various code requirements for licensed childcare facilities.

**SECTION 2A.3.** The Division of Child Development and Early Education shall report the findings and recommendations of the work group to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on General Government, and the Fiscal Research Division no later than one year after this act becomes law.

## **PART III. EFFECTIVE DATE**

**SECTION 3.1.** This act is effective when it becomes law.