



DRAFT Survey Results – ELAA Provider Caucus Subsidy Survey

Survey dates: July 20-August 7, 2009
Population surveyed: Email survey distributed by WSA, WAEYC, SEIU, School’s Out Washington, Children’s Alliance, etc. to their member lists.
Responses received: 466

This web-based survey was voluntary and self-selected, not random, and reflects the perceptions of the providers who responded, based on their personal experiences with the child care subsidy system. It was designed by WSA, WAEYC, SEIU and School’s Out Washington in order to get a sense of where our organizational priorities should be in working with the state legislature, Department of Early Learning and the Department of Social and Health Services on subsidy-related policies and practices.

The survey results bring to light a generally high level of dissatisfaction with the subsidy system among providers, most notably with the subsidy rate, but also with the way in which the program is administered at DSHS. We also collected an enormous number of comments within the survey that described a wide variety of suggestions and experiences. A few common themes emerged that threaded through the entire survey:

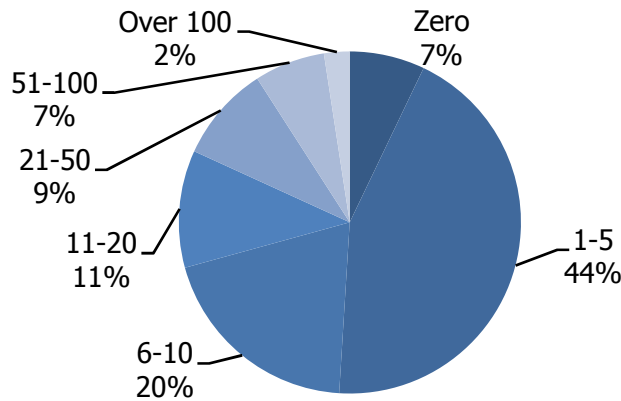
- The current subsidy rate is too low;
- There is a considerable level of dissatisfaction with DSHS due to continuous errors, the amount of time required to work on a file, handling of paperwork, regular mistakes, and lack of efficiency;
- The system is difficult, complicated for both providers and parents, and unfair to providers ; and
- The paperwork is duplicative, too frequent, and it is difficult to get someone on the phone at DSHS who can answer questions accurately.

1. My organization/business offers the following (choose all that apply):

	Response Percent	Response Count
Nonprofit licensed child care	20.6%	96
For-profit licensed child care	21.0%	98
Family home licensed child care	56.4%	263
License-exempt family childcare provider	6.0%	28
Head Start/Early Head Start/Migrant/Tribal ECEAP	8.6%	40
School-age child care services	4.5%	21
Other (please specify)	23.0%	107
answered question		466

- Other includes Preschool/Montessori (17), FFN (6), Resource & Referral (6), Special Needs (4).

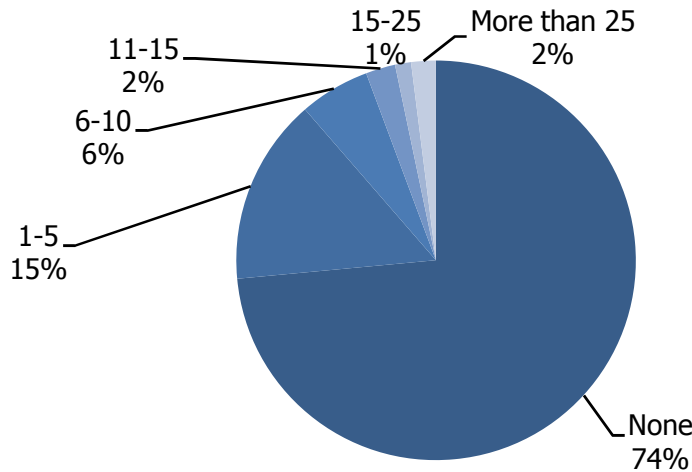
2. At any given time, what is the average number of children you have in your program that receive Working Connections, Seasonal or other child care subsidies?



3. What percentage of your total children does that represent?

	Response
Average	48.5%
Median	50.0%
Total Responses	443

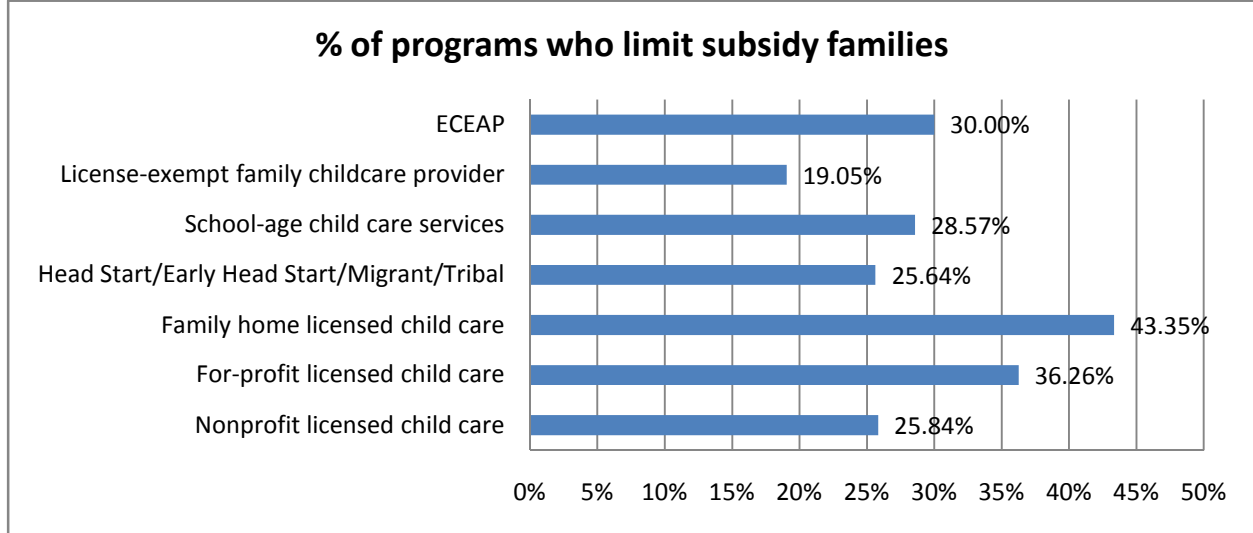
4. In the past year, how many families have you turned away due to the current child care subsidy rate?



5. Are you limiting the number of families served with DSHS subsidies due to the current child care subsidy rate?

	Percent	Count
Yes	35.3%	159
No	64.7%	292
answered question		451

There is a substantial difference among types of programs regarding whether or not they are limiting their subsidy recipients, with *Licensed family homes* limiting it the most often:



Common themes among the comments included:

- The rate is too low, and is unsustainable. This appears to be particularly the case with infants and school-age rates.
- The low rate affects quality and increases staff turnover.
- Many programs have started or will start limiting DSHS families due to their own economic situation.
- Many programs have a mission to serve low income families and do fundraising to make up part of the difference.

Sample actual comments:

- I cannot afford a 30% loss in income compared to private pay.
- Teacher turnover is 60% due to low wages
- It is becoming increasingly difficult to serve such a high number of state subsidized children; we might start limiting if the rate does not go up.
- I never ask a family how they are paying first, if they come in they need care
- Infant rates are extremely low for our area and do not cover cost for caregivers at today's wages.
- I turn them away because of Co-Pay issues
- We do not take part time for subsidy families because of the rate.
- I don't see how you could run a high quality center with the amount of income from one or more children on such a low subsidy rate. It's also not fair to charge other families a higher rate, they are all receiving the same services. The amount of administrative time is not accounted for in that rate either.
- I can't afford to hold up spots for before and after school kids who pay \$200 a month in order to turn away \$500

6. Does your organization have staff that help families navigate and enroll in the subsidy system?

	Percent	Count
Yes	44.5%	202
No	55.5%	252
answered question		454

Common themes among the comments included:

- The system is difficult and complicated for parents and staff to understand
- I don't accept families until they are already approved
- Large programs devote several full-time staff members to subsidy issues.
- Many Family home providers provide what help they can, but they are alone

7. How many TOTAL STAFF HOURS PER MONTH does your organization spend on subsidy issues (billing, working with parents on their paperwork/applications, connecting with DSHS, troubleshooting denials, etc)?

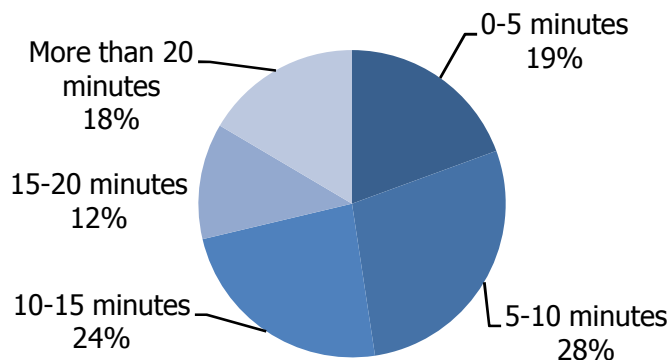
- Total avg hours/month reported (401 responses): 9148.5
- Average hours/month spent per provider: 23.8
- Median hours/month spent per provider: 6

8. Based on that estimate of time spent by you or your staff, how much do you estimate is spent in DOLLARS in an average month?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than \$100	41.7%	169
\$101-\$500	32.3%	131
\$501-\$1000	11.1%	45
\$1001-\$2000	7.7%	31
\$2001-\$4000	3.7%	15
Over \$4000/mo	3.5%	14
answered question		405

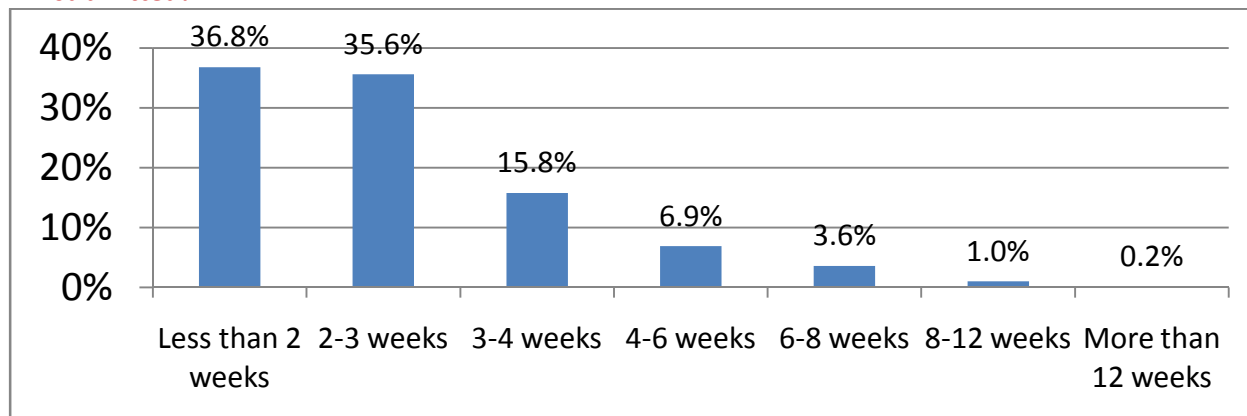
As you would expect, this amount is a function of the organization/provider type. 27% of Head Start and ECEAP programs spend more than \$2000 per month, for example, and fully 2/3 of HS/ECEAP programs spend more than \$500. Similarly, 30% of for-profit child care centers, which are generally quite a bit smaller than HS/ECEAP, spend more than \$1000/month on subsidy issues. The dollar amount spent by family child care is fairly low, with 79% reporting spending less than \$250 each month. The survey is not calibrated finely enough to determine what the costs are on a per-subsidy-child basis.

9. What's the average WAIT TIME you experience when calling DSHS?



Among the 443 people who responded to this question, over half (53%) experienced average wait times of 10 minutes or longer. Many commented that it is also difficult to get a call back when messages are left.

10. On average, how long does it take a family to get its subsidy approved after the paperwork is first submitted?



Of the 418 respondents, 27.5% wait more than 3 weeks to get approval.

There are differences according to type of care – 37% of *Head Start/ECEAP* programs report that their approvals take more than 3 weeks, while only 18% of *Nonprofit centers* report 3 week waits, and *For-profit centers* and *School-age* programs are not far behind (24% more than 3 weeks).

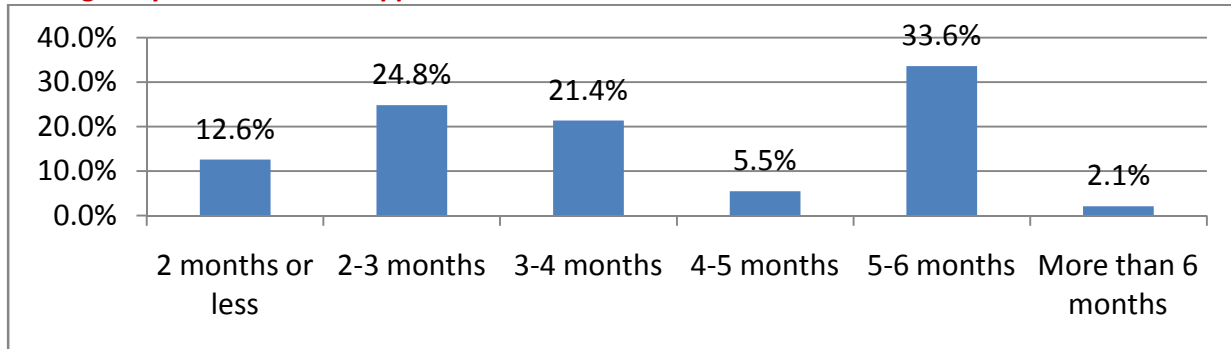
There were a large number of comments on this question, most of which fell into the following themes:

- There is a huge range, and it varies according to caseworker
- Many complaints from providers and parents that paperwork is lost by DSHS
- Delays create hardships either for the parents, who don't have care when they start work, or for the providers, who eat the cost for the time when approval or re-approval is pending
- The process is faster if you walk the paperwork in, and follow up with constant calls to DSHS
- Delays often occur because the family doesn't correctly submit all the paperwork

Actual quotes:

- I have found that the CSO's tend to "lose" paperwork So I have been suggesting to my clients that they keep a signed, dated copy in case this happens. So they have proof of the date paperwork was submitted
- There are times when I'm told that a family is approved and yet no reporting forms are sent and after I call I'm told oh yes it is now being sent right away. Again the next month nothing is done, it can take months of me calling to finally get proper paper work sent to Olympia. I feel that when something on the originating paperwork may be missing, I don't usually get any paperwork on that and when I call and get whatever is needed sent in that is where the break down happens. I am told everything is now OK but it doesn't seem to be finished by whomever is telling me that.
- I usually get right through to an answering machine and it can take two to 5 days before I GET A RESPONSE. When I do not get a response I call back every three days. They ask you not to call every day. I have also had machines that would not take my message as the mailbox was filled.
- This has been a very difficult situation as many of our clients are in higher education and need to enroll in their classes.
- Wow, that's a loaded question. I requested payment for night care about 3 mths ago and have not heard back and I don't have time to keep calling and faxing but I suppose that is what they are banking on.
- Delays are often because the family has not submitted all of their paperwork

11. On average, how long are approved families eligible before they are asked to renew their eligibility documents and application?



Of the 420 responses, more than a third (37.4%) report that their families’ average renewal period is less than three months.

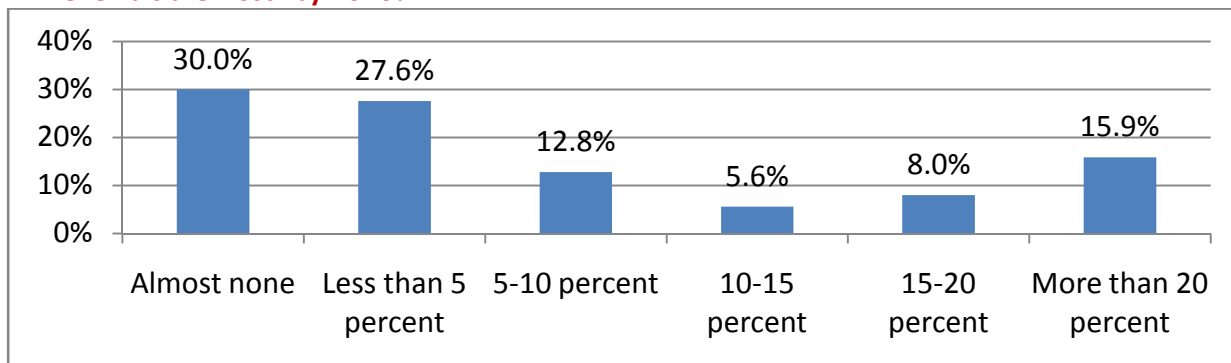
For profit centers, family home licensed providers, HS/ECEAP, and School age programs are the most likely to see frequent renewals, with around 40% of those respondents reporting renewals an average of every 3 months or less.

Many found the question difficult to answer due to the unpredictability of the renewal times, and many suggested longer periods and better communication from DSHS about when renewal was due. Sometimes parents get the information, but providers don’t.

Actual quotes:

- This is the most frustrating part!
- More and more are being dropped with no notice to the center and the only way we know is when the invoice comes in and their not on it! Collection of these funds is next to impossible.
- This is difficult to answer. Upon receiving an initial authorization there are frequent changes, updates, cancellations, etc. Ensuring a child is currently authorized is very time consuming to track and keeping track of the many changes is near impossible.
- The renewal process seems to be the biggest issue because papers are sent after they are due for return or the same day and then subsidy is denied and process is started all over again. Horrendous paperwork for the families every 3 months and for myself. Just when they get approved it's time to go through it all again, and the workers are never pleasant about it.
- They renewed a few of the families for three months this time. These parents have had the same job for awhile so, not sure why that would be. It's makes for a lot more paperwork.

12. In an average month or year, what PERCENTAGE of your families' subsidy applications and renewals are "lost" by DSHS?



While most (57.6%) report that less than 5 percent of their paperwork is 'lost', a substantial number of providers (15.9%) report that one in five of the applications and renewals submitted are 'lost' by DSHS.

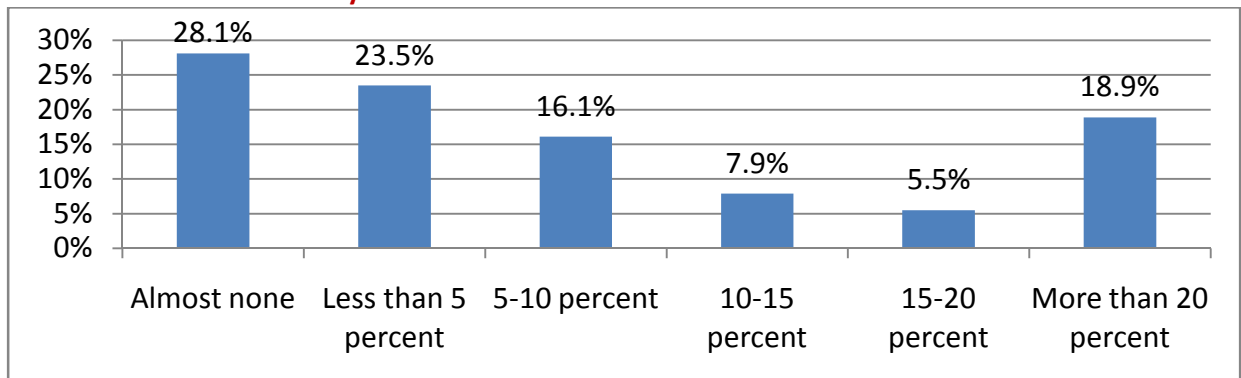
For profit and Nonprofit centers report the highest 'lost' applications and renewals – 32% of those respondents report that 15% or more of their paperwork is lost. Family home licensed and license-exempt providers report the least incidence of this problem, with 21.5% and 13.5% respectively.

Comments underlined respondents' frustrations – many reported that paperwork was lost even when the provider walked it to the DSHS office, and many also report that parents also fail to submit the correct documents.

Actual comments:

- Happens so often, I make copies of everything for them (I have a copier) just in case!!!
- This is a hugely common problem, we often encourage parents to turn things in in person and get a receipt.
- What happens with paper is that it's not lost but just not inputted in a timely fashion
- I have not kept track, but do see much more than in the past. Currently I have 3 families dealing with this issue!
- I can't tell you how many times papers have been lost - I know because I have mailed them sometime for parents and faxed them and I have been told they were never sent or brought in.

13. In an average month or year, what PERCENTAGE of the documents or work you get from DSHS includes errors caused by the CASEWORKER?



Like the previous question, half of respondents have experienced very little caseworker error in their work with the subsidy system.

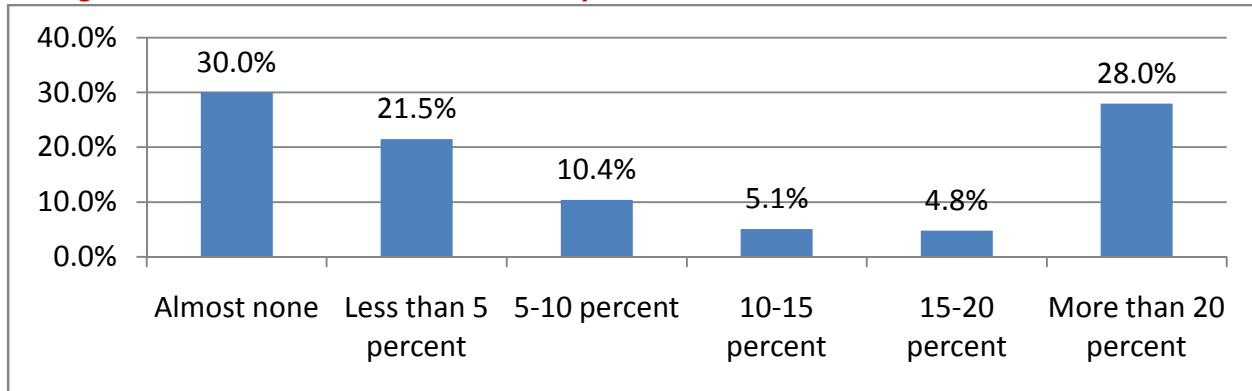
Head Start/ECEAP programs were least likely to report caseworker errors (18.5% report that more than 15 percent of their paperwork includes caseworker errors), while For-profit and nonprofit child care centers were the most likely (25.9% and 23.2% respectively).

There were many comments about the cost of errors to providers and the difficulty of getting errors fixed once they were identified. A sample of actual comments include:

- It is usually correct but sometimes it takes several phone calls to get a problem fixed.
- We have found that calling on behalf of our families as an advocate (ESPECIALLY families where English is not their first language) we get a more respected & higher response rate than our families calling on their own. we also coach our families about their rights so they may advocate for themselves better in the future.

- I try to get everything very clear to start, this makes less errors. If there are errors, they are hard to find the right person to fix the errors.
- I have been told to please not make them do all of the back work, for not paying me the right amount for more than 6 months because it's too much work to do
- Since there isn't a provider number anymore and a specific caseworker for each individual as before. I have almost every month been minus on payments owed to me by DSHS and the co pay is different then what the parents letter and my letters are.

14. In an average month or year, what PERCENTAGE of the subsidy DENIAL LETTERS received by your organization are received AFTER the last day that the child will be subsidized??



Again, half of providers report that less than five percent of their denial letters are received after the end date, but 28% report that more than 20 percent of their letters are late, resulting in financial losses on one in five of those children.

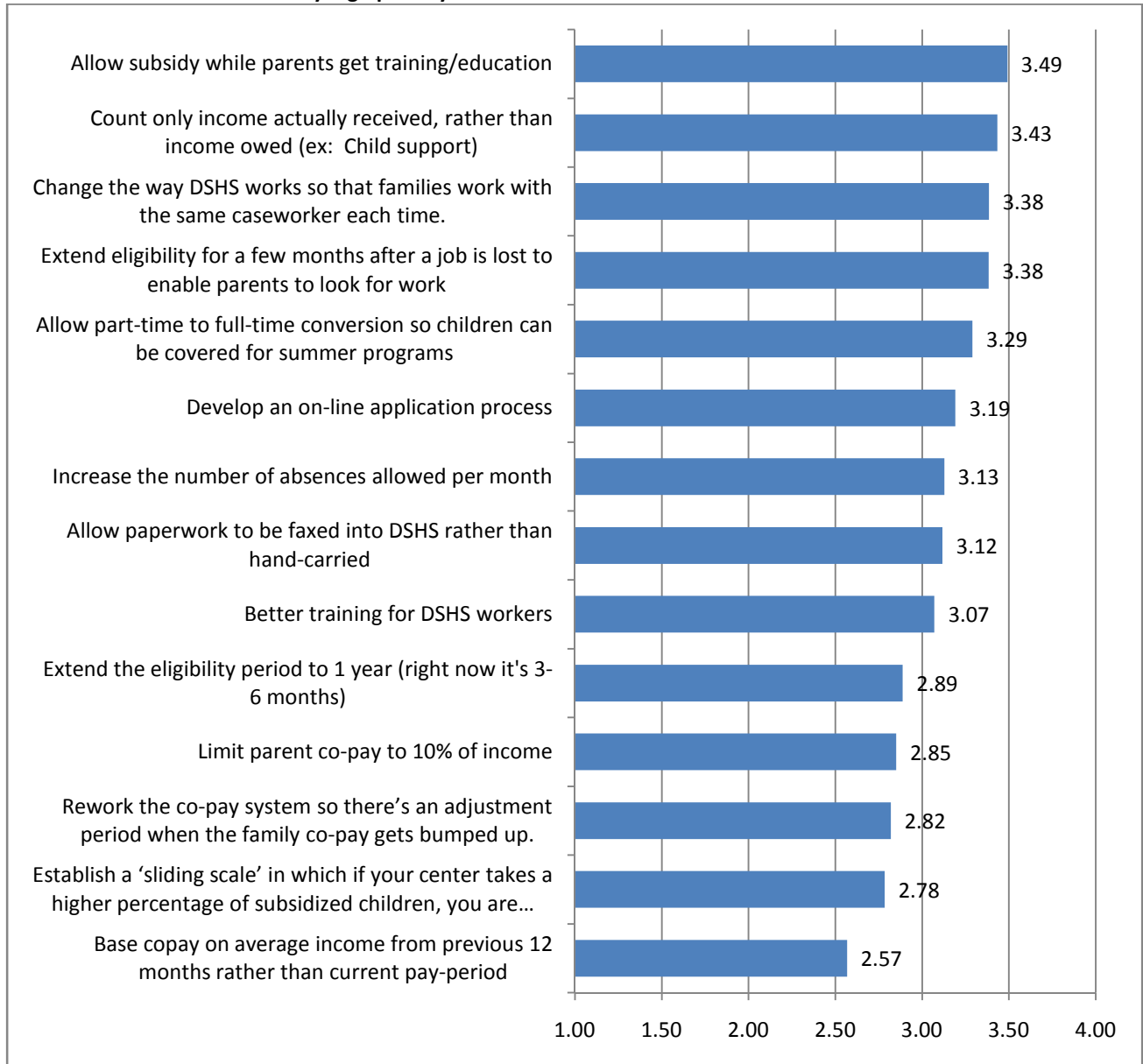
This question showed perhaps the most prominent difference among providers. More than 37% of *Nonprofit, For-profit, and HS/ECEAP* programs each reported that more than one in five of their denial letters arrived after the end date, while only 25% of *licensed family homes* and 5% of *license-exempt family homes* reported the same.

The intensity of the comments seemed to reflect the frustration many providers feel:

- I rarely get the denial paperwork until after they have left care --- in one case a few years ago --- I waited 3 months before finding out the client was denied -----PROBLEM??? 3 kids on an extended care late shift for a whole summer --- caseworker verbalized there were layoffs and she was behind but that they would be approved.....I lost over \$3000.00 that summer on those kids and had parent skip town as soon as she found out about the denial (her letter got to her before I got one).....I am STILL ANGRY!!!
- This is so frustrating! In most cases, we have cared for the child another month beyond their termination of services, and many times it is our loss.
- due to the nature of homelessness & the short stay in shelters (moving from shelter to shelter) letters do get "lost in the mail" or returned to the CSO a lot ~ or, take a while to catch up with the parents. it would be nice if the CSO would notice the "homeless status" of a family when they receive returned mail & try contacting an advocate or case manager for that family.
- More like 60% and it's so frustrating because then they assess an overpayment even though we were just providing the care that we had an authorization to provide.

15. Please help us determine what possible changes/reforms to the subsidy system you think are the most important and worthwhile for us to pursue. Rate the following ideas on the following scale:

- 0=Not at all a priority**
- 1=Somewhat low priority**
- 2=Average priority**
- 3=Somewhat high priority**
- 4=Very high priority**



The majority of the 108 “other” comments recommended either increased subsidy rates or instituting a ‘provider line’ at DSHS. Other suggestions included having parents send their co-pay to DSHS rather than the provider, customer service training for DSHS, retroactive pay to the application submittal date, a handbook to explain the process to parents, consistency among CSO’s, and an online system where providers can check approval status and invoice the state.

There were a lot of similarities in responses between groups, and a few differences:

- **These were ‘top five’ priorities for ALL groups:**
 - Extend eligibility during job search
 - Allow subsidy during education/training
 - Count only income received, rather than owed
 - Work with same caseworker at DSHS

- **Common ‘bottom five’ priorities included:**
 - Base co-pay on average of last 12 months (bottom 5 for all groups)
 - Rework the co-pay system so there’s an adjustment period when the family co-pay gets bumped up (bottom 5 for all except HS/ECEAP)
 - Limit parent co-pay to 10% of income (bottom 5 for all except HS/ECEAP and license-exempt family providers)

- **Differences among groups:**
 - **Increasing absences allowed** was a Top 5 priority for *For-profit centers* and *licensed family homes*, and was a Bottom 5 priority for *Nonprofit centers*, *Head Start/ECEAP*, and *License-exempt family providers*.
 - **Allowing subsidy during training/education** was the **top priority** for *Nonprofit centers*, *Licensed family homes*, *Head Start/ECEAP*, and *License-exempt family providers*.
Allowing part- to full-time conversion was the top priority for *School-age providers*, and **Working with the same caseworker each time** was the #1 priority for *For-profit centers*.
 - **Basing Copay on 12 months of income** was the **bottom priority** for *Nonprofit centers*, *For-profit centers*, *Head Start/ECEAP*, and *School-age providers* . Establishing a sliding scale system was the lowest priority for both *licensed and license-exempt family providers*.

For more information, please contact:

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