Maryland
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

TO: Members of the Strategy and Operations Committee

FROM: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools

DATE: November 18, 2026

SUBJECT: Child Care Regulatory Framework and House Bill 477

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

Pillar 1: Early Childhood Education
Goal: Every child has access to a high-quality early childhood program.
Outcome:
1.C Decrease gaps in kindergarten readiness between student groups.

Purpose

This presentation will summarize the history of House Bill 477, it's requirements for regulatory analysis, and the resulting report, *Family Child Care Homes and Child Care Centers Regulatory Analysis*, which provides high-priority recommendations for MSDE policy changes. Improving licensing policies and processes is expected to increase capacity and affordability across child care settings, support the early childhood workforce, and build trust and collaboration with the child care community.

Background

House Bill 477 passed in March 2026 and required an analysis of how licensing regulations impact a child care business' ability to open and operate sustainably. The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) reviewed every licensing regulation and compared them with regulations in other states and current research and best practice.

Interest holder feedback was gathered from a Regulatory Improvement Tiger Team, an Office of Child Care Advisory Council Task Force, and a survey for MSDE Licensing staff.

Feedback and research results were used to draft the *Family Child Care Homes and Child Care Centers Regulatory Analysis,* which includes eight recommendations that aim to improve child care access and affordability (especially for infant and toddler care), compliance with and communication around licensing regulations, and OEC customer service.

While there are eight total recommendations in the report, this presentation highlights six of the recommendations that OEC believes are of greatest interest to committee members and the general public.

Executive Summary

1. Recommendations 2A and 2B: Ratios and group sizes in family child care homes and child care centers

2. Cross-state analysis and research on ratios and group sizes in family child care homes and child care centers supported an increase in infant and toddler ratios and group sizes. This would be achieved by redefining toddler ages and recognizing that their support needs differ from those of infants.

3. The proposed ratios and group sizes maintain safety and support for infants and toddlers while allowing more flexibility for staffing, increasing slots, and ultimately aiming to lower costs for families.

4. Recommendation 3: Expand teacher qualifications with demonstrated experience.

    - The recommendation to qualify teachers based on 750 hours of supervised teaching experience would transform a system that currently requires a full calendar year of experience. Allowing qualification to be based on hours worked would cut the time in half for full-time workers.

    - A quicker path to teacher qualification will stabilize and expand the early childhood workforce while maintaining training standards.

5. Recommendation 5: Escalation and Review

    - Interest holders shared a need to escalate licensing concerns beyond a regional manager, allowing review for statewide consistency in how licensing regulations are applied.

    - An impartial review process will increase compliance with regulations and allow sustainable operations.

6. Recommendation 6: Hierarchy of Violations

    - Feedback and cross-state analysis supported a hierarchy that distinguishes between minor licensing violations and those that pose health and safety risks.

    - Clearer distinctions in reporting violations will give families better information when choosing a child care program and improve business operations.

7. Recommendation 7: Grace Period

    - Establishing a grace period for citing minor licensing violations would allow staff time to train on new practices and adjust operations while maintaining strict enforcement for health and safety-related violations.

8. Recommendation 8: Customer Service Improvement

    - Analysis and feedback found a broad need for improvements in communication, review processes, paperwork submission, and cross-agency collaboration.

- Streamlining technology and review, focusing on training and consistency for licensing staff, and introducing centralized background checks will improve OEC's efficacy and relationship with the child care community.

9. Next Steps

- Customer service improvements are currently underway and interest holder engagement will continue throughout implementation.
- Legislative outreach will begin this winter to support changes to group size and ratio regulations.
- COMAR revisions that result from new legislation will be proposed in the spring and summer.

Action

No action is required; this information is for discussion only.

Attachments

SOC HB477.pptx

Family Child Care Homes and Child Care Centers Regulatory Analysis



House Bill 477: Analyzing Access and Affordability for Child Care

Office of Early Childhood

Presented By | Sarah Neville-Morgan, Chief of Early Childhood
Ann Stock, Executive Director of Policy and Impact

November 18, 2026

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MSDE Strategic Plan Goals

1

Every child has access to a high-quality early childhood program.



PILLAR 1: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

2

Every school has high-quality and diverse teachers and leaders.



PILLAR 2: HIGH-QUALITY & DIVERSE TEACHERS AND LEADERS

3

Every student graduates high school college and career ready.



PILLAR 3: COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS



Every student is matched with the resources they need to ensure their success.

4

PILLAR 4: MORE RESOURCES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS



Every school and district receives a rating of ___ or higher.

5

PILLAR 5: GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Visit the Maryland State Department of Education website to learn more about the Strategic Plan!

strategicplan.marylandpublicschools.org



STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT

GOAL 1

Every child has access to a high-quality early childhood program.

1.A	Increase student readiness for kindergarten annually as measured by the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA).
1.B	Increase kindergarten readiness proficiency rates for each student group.



Presentation Outline

1. Overview
2. Key Recommendations
3. Discussion

Overview

History of House Bill 477 and Regulatory Analysis

History

House Bill (HB) 477 required MSDE to analyze its child care regulations with the goals of **making child care more affordable** and increasing access to care, **especially for infants and toddlers.**

Analysis Requirements:

Limitations to licensing/registering and operating a quality child care program at a profit.

Staffing ratios, physical requirements for facilities, and support programs.

If these requirements result in safer, higher-quality programs, and what impact they have on operations.

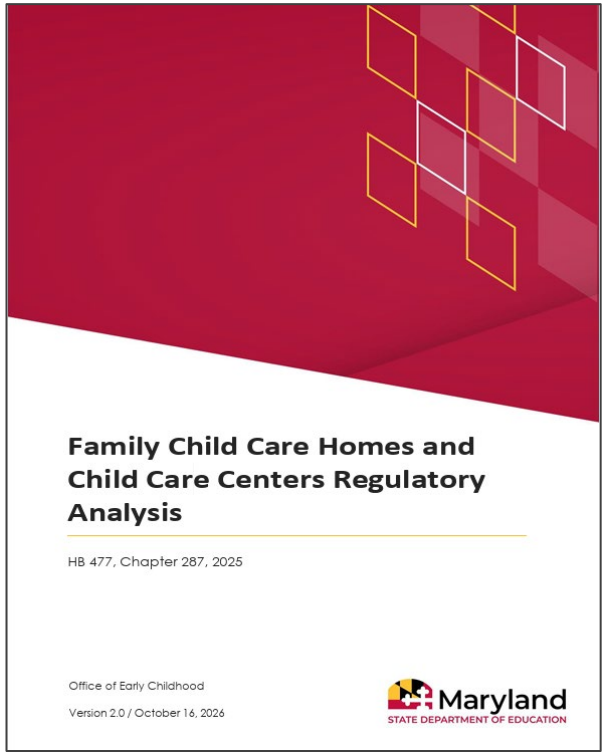
Key Recommendations

Improving Child Care Access and Affordability

Overview of Recommendations

8 recommendations addressing COMAR, adult-child ratios, internal MSDE processes, and more.

- Broadly **simplify licensing regulations.**
- **Change infant-toddler ratios and group sizes to a maximum of 8** across settings to promote access to infant-toddler child care.
- **Fast track teacher training and onboarding requirements** to build ECE workforce.
- Support providers by **improving internal processes,** creating fairness and consistency in licensing practices across the state.
- **Differentiate licensing violations** by severity and **provide grace period** for non-safety-critical regulations.



Focusing today on highest priority recommendations

Recommendation #2A, Center-based Ratios and Group Sizes



- **Increase infant group size to 8** with a 1:4 staff-to-child ratio.
- Redefine toddlers as ages 18 to 36 months with a 1:6 ratio and maximum group size of 12.
- For mixed-age groups, the ratio and maximum group size are based on the age of the youngest child in the group.

Why?

- Shortage of affordable infant and toddler care.
- Cross state analysis and national standards support these ratios and group sizes.

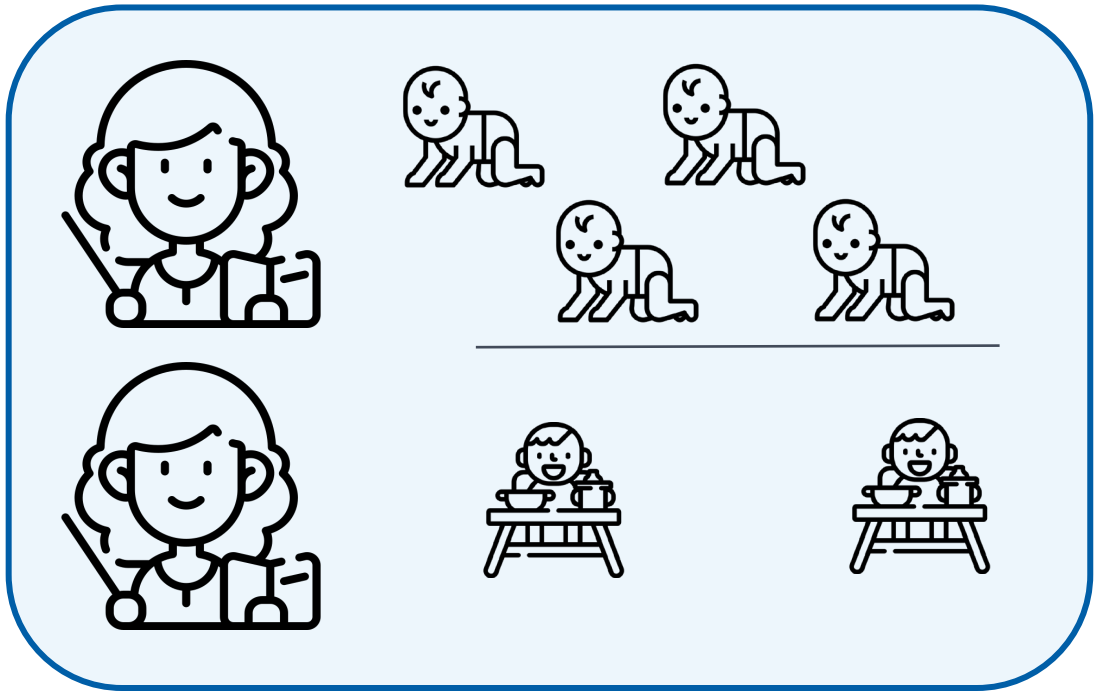
Outcome

- Add infant and toddler slots at lower costs.
- Maintain safe, quality care while making operations more financially sustainable.
- Result in more child care access for families.

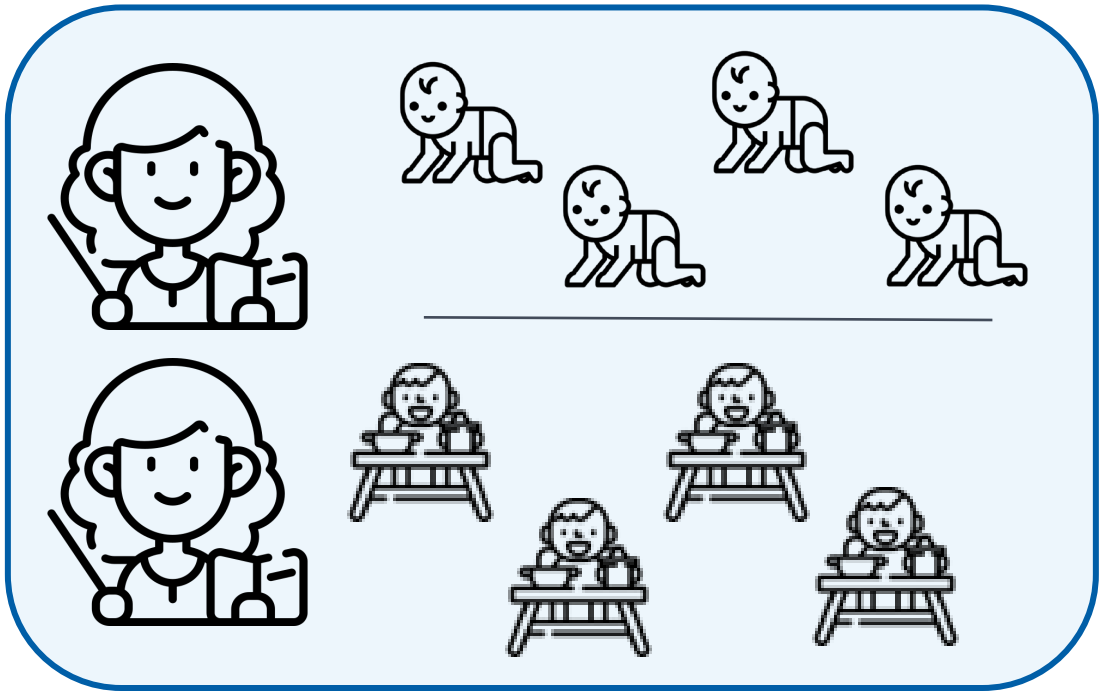
Next step: Propose revised COMAR in early 2027.

Closer Look at Ratios: Center Infant and Toddler Groups

Current ratio
1 teacher: 3 children
(max capacity 6 when 3 or more are infants)



Proposed ratio
1 teacher: 4 children
(max. capacity 8)



Recommendation #2B, Home-based



- Remove the current cap of four children ages 0-24 months.
- Allow a 1:3 staff-to-child ratio when every third child is over 18 months, with a **maximum group size of 8**.

Why?

- Staffing requirements create financial pressures and limit provider capacity.
- Interest holders emphasized the need for more safety considerations.

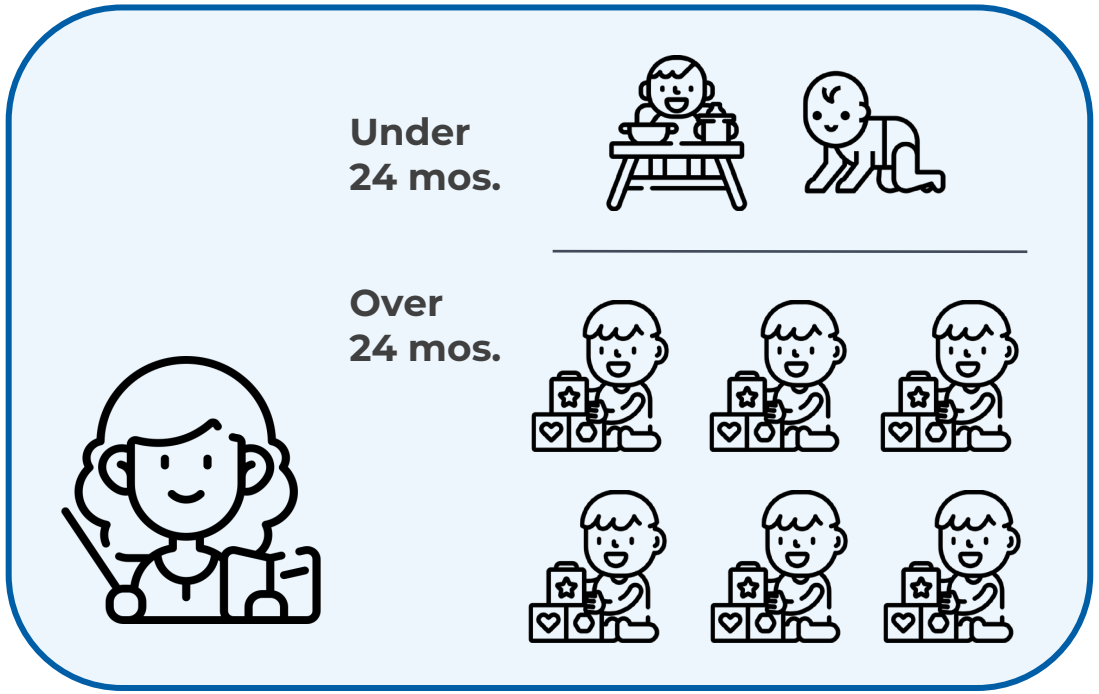
Outcome

- Add infant and toddler slots at lower costs.
- Maintain safe, quality care while making operations more financially sustainable.

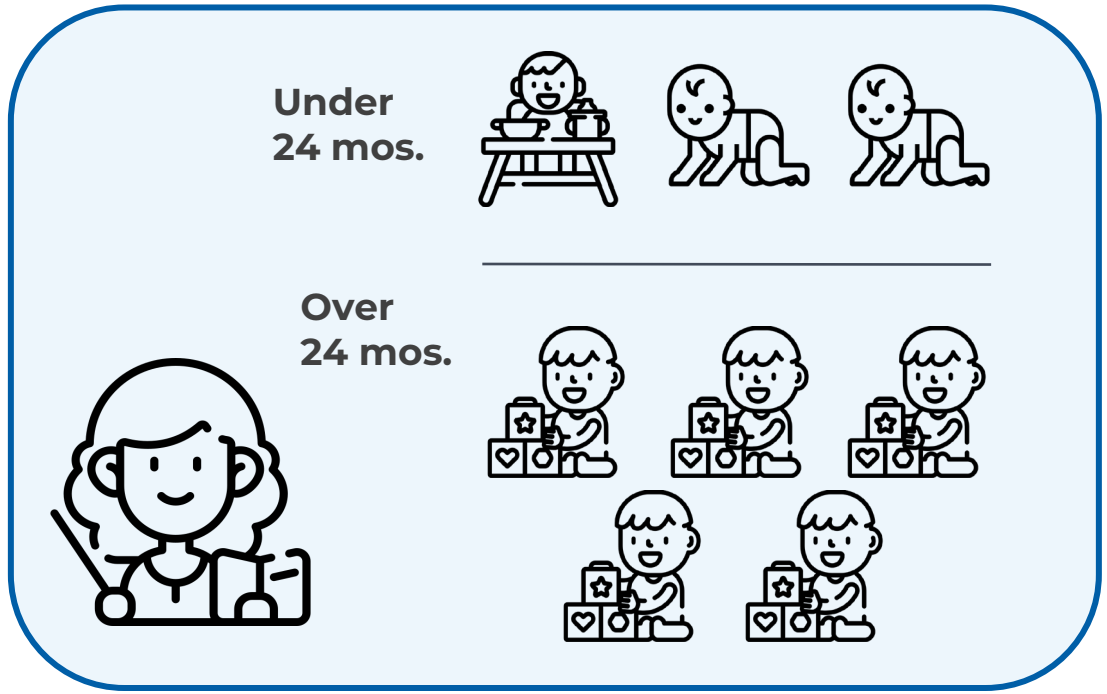
Next steps: Pursue statutory changes during the 2027 Legislative Session and revise COMAR.

Closer Look at Ratios in Small Family Child Care Homes

Current ratio
1 teacher: 2 children under 24 mos and 6 over 24 mos

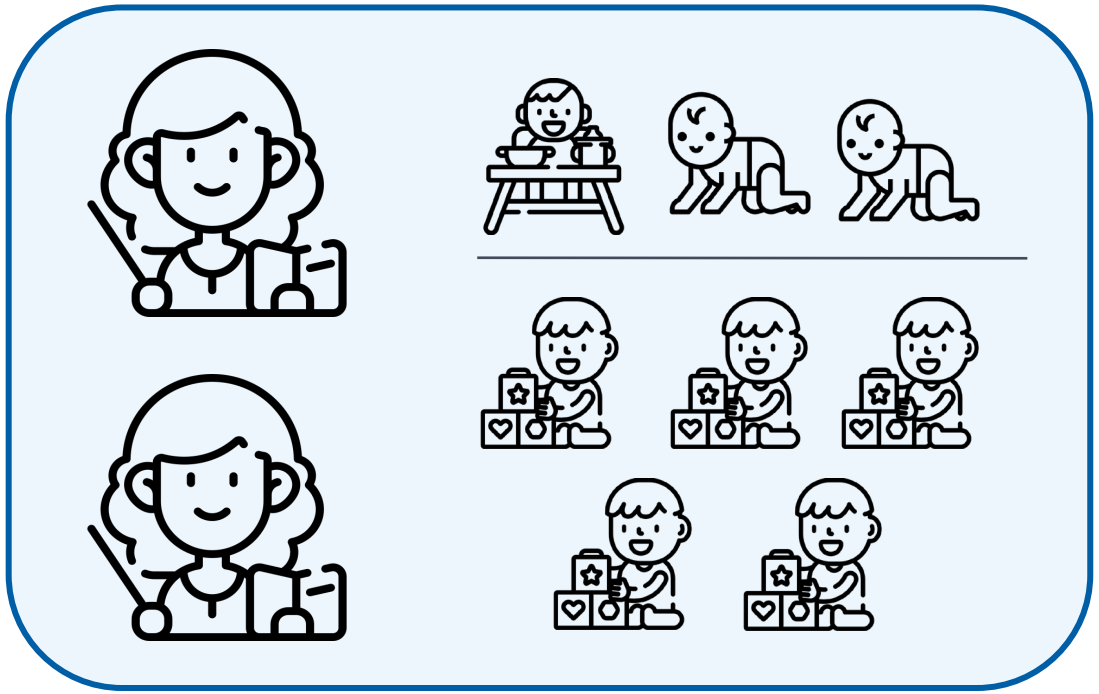


Proposed ratio
1 teacher: 3 children under 24 mos with one over 18 mos, and 5 over 24 mos (max. cap. 8)

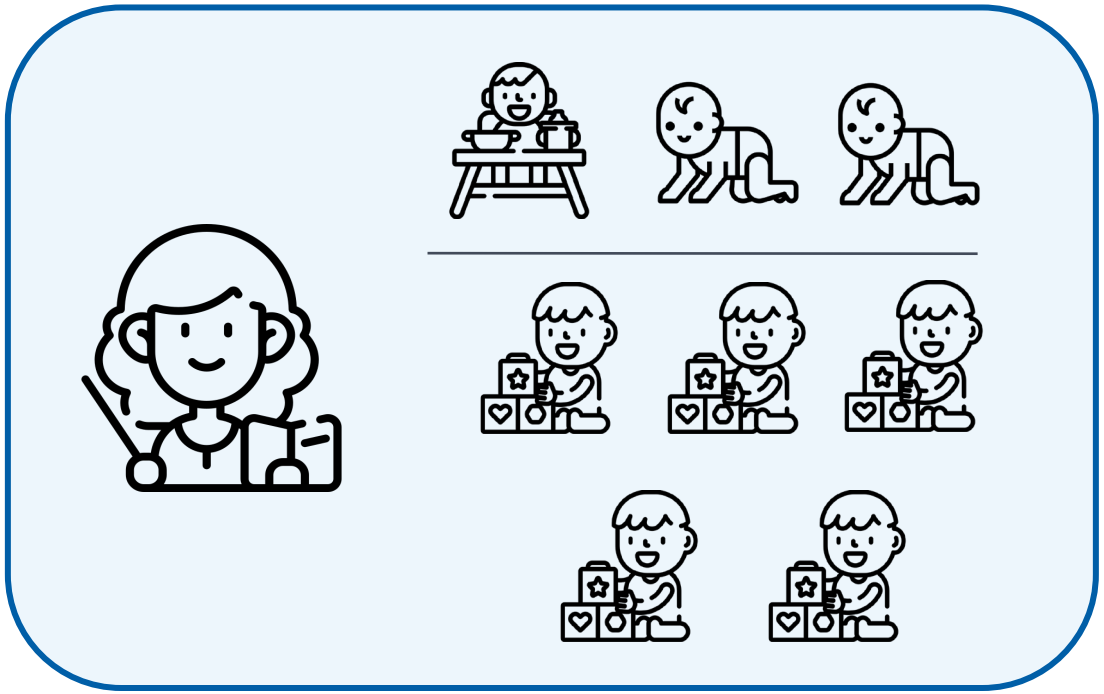


Closer Look at Ratios in Small Family Child Care Homes

Current ratio
2 teachers: 3 children under 24 mos and 5 over 24 mos

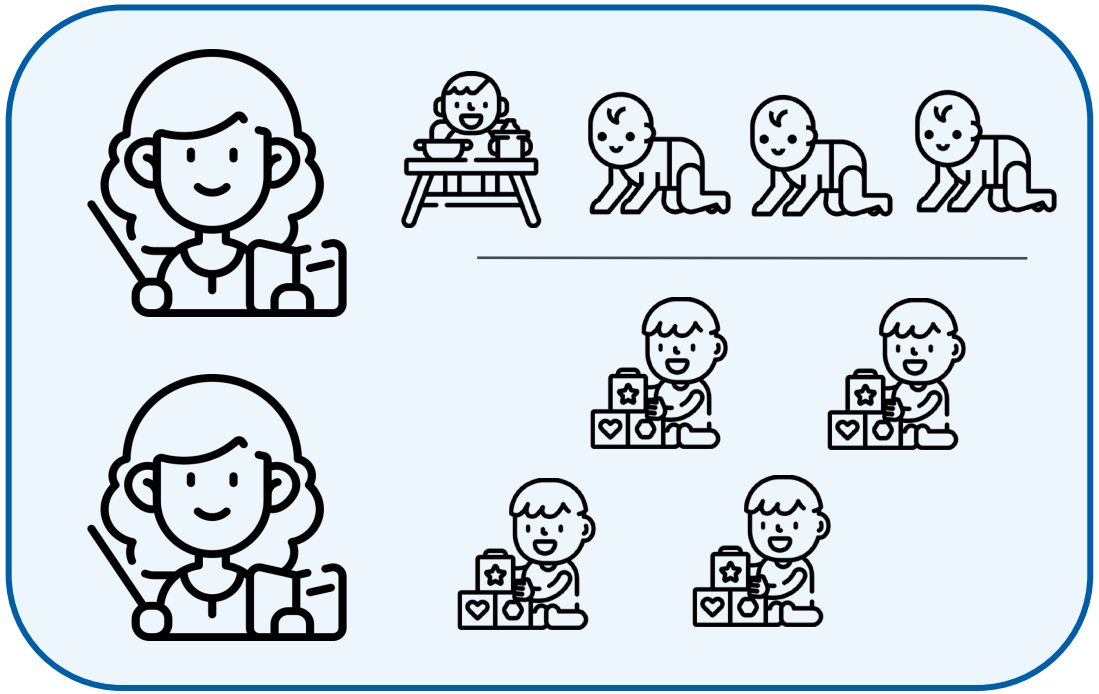


Proposed ratio
1 teacher: 3 children under 24 mos with one over 18 mos, and 5 over 24 mos (max. cap. 8)

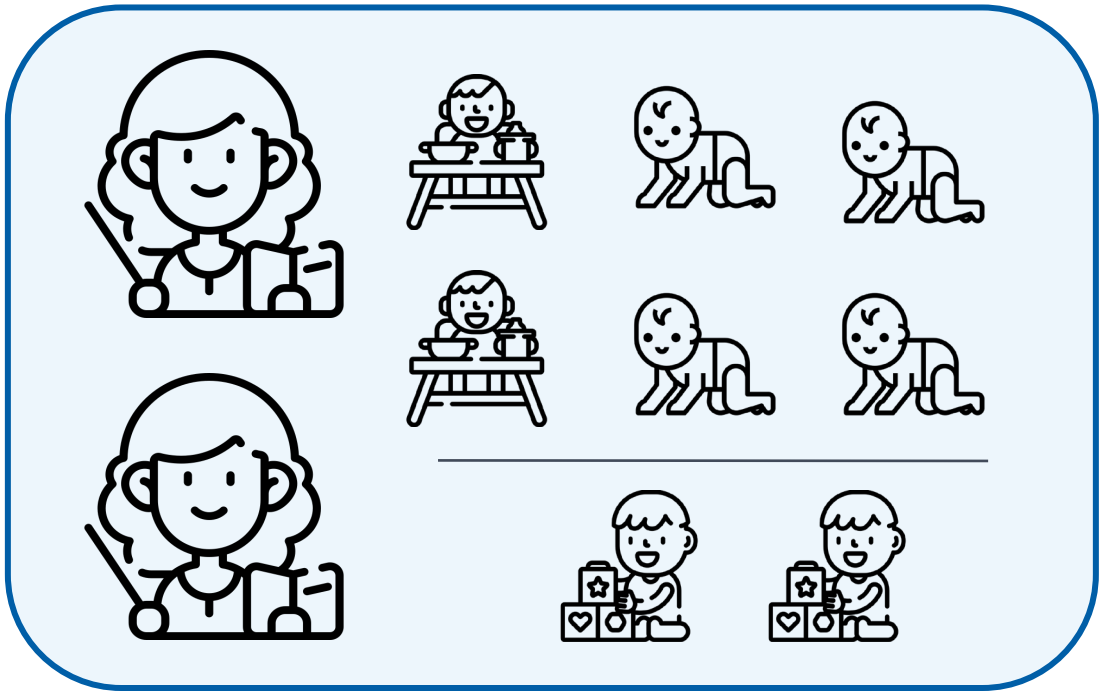


Closer Look at Ratios in Small Family Child Care Homes

Current ratio
2 teachers: 4 children under 24 mos and 4 over 24 mos



Proposed ratio
2 teachers: 6 children under 24 mos with two over 18 mos and 2 over 24 mos (max cap. 8)



Recommendation #3: Teacher Qualifications

Require all teachers in child care centers to have 750 supervised hours of demonstrated experience instead of one calendar year.

Why?

- Need for more pathways to qualification.
- Current experience requirements are based on a calendar year, making educators wait a year to qualify, regardless of hours worked.

Outcome

- Accelerate qualification for full-time educators.
- Expand workforce and child care availability while maintaining training and experience standards.

Next step: Propose revised COMAR in spring 2027.

Recommendation #5: Escalation and Review

Establish a process for providers to escalate concerns beyond the regional licensing manager, creating statewide guidance for licensors in the process.

Why?

- Licensing inconsistencies make it hard to maintain compliance.
- Interest holders want an impartial process for addressing problems.

Outcome

- A process that allows review for statewide consistency.

Next steps: Develop guidance, solicit feedback, and publish final guidance.

Recommendation #6: Hierarchy of Violations



Clarify and communicate a hierarchy of violations that distinguishes safety-critical findings from minor issues.

Why?

- Cross-state analysis showed alternative ways to distinguish violations.
- Families need easy-to-understand information about licensing violations.

Outcome

- Clearer distinctions will give families better information when choosing child care.

Next steps: Develop guidance, solicit feedback, and publish final guidance.

Recommendation #7: Grace Period

Establish a grace period for new regulations so that minor violations cannot be cited for the first year after enactment.

Why?

- Regulatory changes can create operational costs and administrative burdens for providers.
- Providers may need support and training to meet new requirements.

Outcome

- Allowing an adjustment period and offering support will keep programs operational.
- Strict enforcement stays in place for violations of health, safety, and federal regulations.

Next step: Propose revised COMAR in spring 2027.

Recommendation #8: Customer Service Improvement



Improve customer service and consistency across licensors, minimize paperwork, and build cross-agency coordination.

Why?

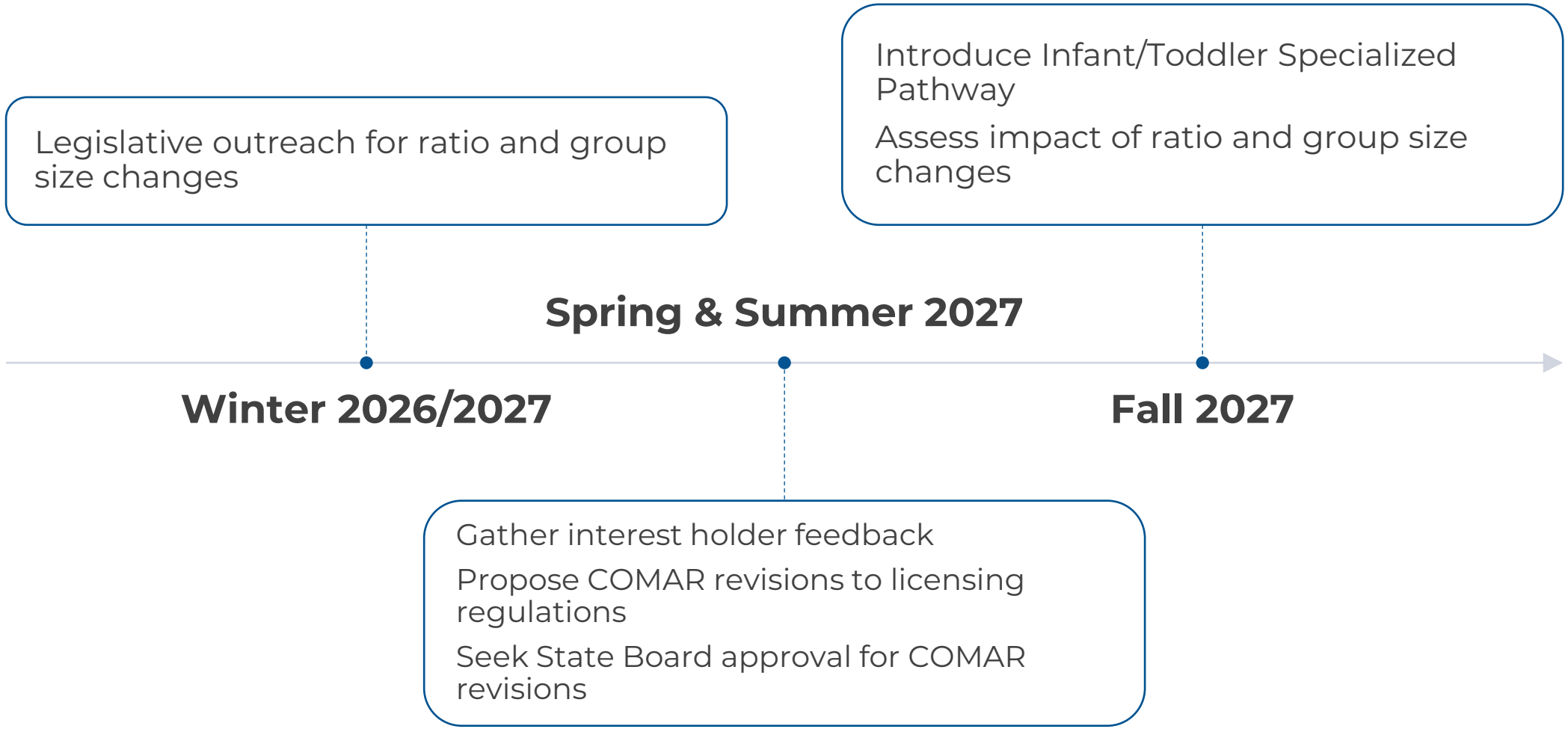
- Ineffective communication, processes, and procedures negatively impact hiring and compliance.

Outcome

- Effective customer service will allow providers to focus on operations
- Streamlined background checks will help programs onboard staff and increase capacity.

Next steps: Internal improvements are underway.

Implementation Timeline



Discussion