



*Building Belonging: Valuing Family Child Care Via Licensing Systems*

## The Four C's of Family Child Care Licensing Standards: Consistency, Clarity, Communication, and Convening Systems

Within the child care system, licensing is one of the most critical pieces of infrastructure; it ensures that child care providers are seen as professionals, provides a standard of care for all children, and offers families and providers peace of mind knowing the rules and expectations.

In recognition of the important impact of state licensing policy and practice on FCC, Home Grown assembled its first-ever Family Child Care Licensing Work Group, made up of FCC professionals who developed Home Grown's understanding of state licensing for family child care and created recommendations for these licensing systems. The report's recommendations are split into seven categories: Principles, Licensing Standards and Expectations, Language Access, Monitoring and Enforcement, State-Provider Engagement, Provider Support, and Costs. To read the full report of recommendations, [click here](#).

FCC providers most value when state licensing standards are connected to their role as child care professionals who are providing child development services that are grounded in advancing the health, safety and development of the children in their care.

When state licensing systems invest in the four C's: **clarity**, **consistency**, **communication**, and **convening**, providers feel validated as experts and valued and recognized as professionals when licensed. In this publication, we share more insight, directly from our Work Group, about what this might look like in practice.

## Clarity

Providers seek clarity in the licensing standards, guidance and in materials that states prepare for providers to explain the standards, processes and expectations. Because licensing standards are understood to be requirements, providers shared that they did not find value in licensing standards that included aspirational statements. As the standards are the basis for the FCC license, and subject to monitoring and enforcement, providers believe being clear best serves states and providers.

*“My state uses some ‘may’ language. Most of the ‘may’ language occurs when talking about serious violations. In all the violation statements where ‘may’ is stated, they talk about possibly suspending a license to operate for the safety of the children. I understand the reasoning behind the ‘may’ statements, but as a provider, if my livelihood was put at risk due to an irate parent’s unjustified complaint, I would have a hard time being understanding about the whole situation.”*

— Family child care provider

## Consistency

Consistency in the application of licensing standards is highly valued. As business owners, consistent and predictable practices enable providers to build systems and processes to maintain compliance. FCC professionals see several practices that states can implement to aid in consistency including:

- providing licensing checklists to aid FCC professionals, especially pre-visit checklists;
- providing materials or opportunities that show the acceptable pathways to meeting licensing standards prior to inspection; and
- working to ensure that state licensing staff are consistent in their understanding of and interpretation of the licensing standards.

*“We are expected to be in compliance but have no formal way to seek approval for our methods to stay in compliance. It is only upon a site inspection with a licensor that we may find out that we do not have adequate documentation. Furthermore, this finding may be dependent upon the licensor. One may find that you are in compliance and another may say you are not in compliance. There should be NO room for interpretation of a regulation and what it takes to be in compliance.”*

— Family child care provider

*“I believe the value of a long-term relationship with a licensing representative is a healthy way to establish good communication and would lead to better compliance. It would certainly help with continuity and would be less stressful to the provider. Continuity should be considered of the utmost importance. Providers should not be left to feel that the regulations are up for interpretation. When a provider states that it was OK with the other licensor but not this one, the trust is broken. A trusting, safe, supportive relationship will yield better results.”*

— Family child care provider

## Communications

FCC professionals feel supported to achieve their goals when communication with state licensing staff is grounded in a shared understanding of the primary mission of FCC professionals, which is to offer quality early learning and care services to young children and their families. Communication that assumes good intentions and demonstrates respect and value of FCC professionals would go a long way to develop trust and cooperation.

FCC professionals see their number one priority as child supervision and child development even when a licensing representative is visiting. They want to work with licensing representatives who understand this and appreciate that they are juggling this responsibility while locating or sharing paperwork. Licensing systems want to visit during operating hours to observe practice; however they expect that providers can spend time talking, looking for paperwork or engaging in other activities while there are children in their care.

Family child care professionals note that a strength of their workforce is that they speak many languages. State licensing systems can do more by finding out what language the provider prefers for communication, providing licensing information in multiple languages, and assuring in-person visits meet the language needs of the FCC professional.

*“What would be of great help is for the agencies to tell us if there are changes in the regulations. They should send us the information in advance so we can be ready for the inspection.”*

— Family child care provider

*“Not receiving information in my native language was a barrier for me, even though I’m bilingual. It’s hard to find information in Spanish, for example. Right now, we have the option to translate any information in any different languages, but it’s so many people that don’t know how to use that technology. It would be nice for me to see that other people can find the information in their own language. Right now, it’s available in English only.”*

— Family child care provider

## Convening

Convening is a critical role for state early childhood system leaders. FCC professionals see ongoing opportunities for convening with states around the licensing life-cycle. States can bring together FCC professionals regularly to look at implementation of FCC licensing as well as help develop revisions and updates for child care licensing standards. For this work to be successful at including FCC professionals, it has to be done with respect to when and how meetings are held. States might consider establishing and compensating a “standing panel” of FCC professionals so that states always have access to a working group with members who can: routinely review the patterns of violations; think about how to better address frequent violations; and contribute to the development of licensing standards and their implementation. This work is particularly important as FCC professionals are well-positioned to share information on the feasibility of implementation and, as noted earlier, understand the critical role licensing plays in recognizing them as professionals who are entrusted with overseeing and impacting the development of the children in their care.

*“Having input from providers helps to understand what is achievable within the home-based environment of one person. FCC [providers] do not have the income, time and manpower to always achieve what is being asked, and yet sometimes do as much, if not more, work than centers, as there is no other staff.”*

— Family child care provider

*“When crafting licensing rules and standards, it is very apparent to me that the people who are making these rules have never done [child] care. There are too many unintended consequences to rules that don't work. Case in point, a new rule was put into effect saying pack and plays could no longer be used in daycares. Only traditional cribs. The result was home daycares did not have room to keep cribs up full time and so spots for infants vanished almost overnight. The rule was rescinded in less than a year. Any provider could have pointed out that a family using their home as a child care rarely has the room to have extra cribs up full time when their family also uses the spaces.”*

— Family child care provider

Learn more about the recommendations of the Licensing Work Group and how they can be used on a state level to improve child care and recruit and retain providers in the [full recommendation report](#).