

Pinellas County License Board for Children's Centers & Family Day Care Homes

Our mission is to protect and promote the health, safety, and mental development of children cared for in children's centers and family child care homes in Pinellas County

Patsy Buker, Executive Director
Elise Minkoff, Chairman



Greetings!

Message from Patsy Buker, Executive Director

I am happy to announce that I am celebrating my first six months with the Child Care Licensing Program (CCLP) of the Pinellas County Health Department! It has been a true pleasure to get to know the wonderful staff here at the Health Department and I have very much enjoyed meeting many of the child care providers. Truth be told, it has been an interesting experience to learn the various rules and regulations, but it is coming along nicely with time and exposure. The good news is that I am surrounded by a tremendous and talented staff, so I am well supported as I learn. I can appreciate the great deal of thoughtful consideration that has gone into developing the regulations over the years, and I am sure that those efforts have saved lives and increased quality of child care.

My plan has been and continues to be to devote as much time as possible to being in the field with our Licensing Specialists, attending provider meetings, and meeting with individual providers. I have been listening carefully and trying to gather a well rounded view of the history of the Pinellas County License Board (PCLB). No organization exists in a vacuum, so it is important for me to understand the various perspectives and perceptions of child care licensing and child care providers in Pinellas.

From what I have seen so far, the PCLB has a rich history dating back to the 1950's. It appears that it has been through more significant changes over the last four years than in the entire rest of its history, having downsized considerably and moving from JWB to the Health Department. The PCLB also has had three different Executive Directors during that short time, compared with only having four different leaders over the six prior decades! We all know that change can be stressful, and from what I understand this has not only been stressful to the organization and staff, but to the provider community, as well. We are consciously attempting to reduce the stress through applying thoughtful and strategic planning and through fair and consistent enforcement of the licensing rules.

We plan to send out information to child care providers periodically, and we hope to develop an accurate list of e-mail addresses so that we can also communicate electronically with those who prefer that method. We will continue to let you know about new developments like the availability of fingerprinting at our Center Bay office, and we will let you know about trends that we are seeing in the field. Our goal is to help each child care provider to be successful and be in compliance with regulations. A good inspection report is a goal that we share with each of you!

New Location for Fingerprinting!

PCLB is pleased to announce that the Pinellas County Health Department is now offering fingerprinting services for child care providers for background screening through **Live Scan** at the Center Bay Offices. The cost to providers is **\$27.25**, and **appointments** can be made for **Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.**

To schedule an appointment at Center Bay, **4175 East Bay Drive, Suite 350, in Clearwater**, please feel free to contact us at: **(727) 507- 4857 ext. 1113**.

Payment is made by check or money order payable to the Pinellas County Health Department in the amount of \$27.25 and is accepted at the time of the screening. Credit cards and cash are also accepted.

Helpful hints and reminders

Capacity Changes for Family Child Care Homes

As many of you may have heard, there is currently a bill going before the Florida Legislature about the number of children that can be cared for in a Pinellas Family Child Care Home. Currently, the maximum is still five (5) children in child care homes. The proposed bill is recommending eight (8) children. **This proposed law has not been approved, so it is not yet in effect.** Please know that if capacity is changed, we will send you information on the changes through the mail as quickly as possible, together with instructions for applying for an increase in capacity and a new license, should you choose to apply for an increase on your license. Please note that the children's age limitations, space requirements, etc. will continue to be in effect, so not every provider will be able to increase their licensed capacity. Your current license has the capacity that you have been approved for; any changes would require a new license. We will also post all of this information on our web site, which is www.pclb.org.

Infants Sleeping

There have been two instances recently of infants having serious breathing problems while in child care, and 911 had to be called. Both children completely recovered, thanks to quick thinking and CPR application by the providers. Please **ensure that infants only sleep in cribs or play pens**. Infants need to be **placed on their backs, with no soft items in the crib**. This means no pillows, fluffy blankets or toys. If a parent wants you to position their child differently while sleeping, they must supply you with a doctor's note for you to be able to do so. Please ensure that your CPR and First Aid certifications are current at all times, and that you are comfortable with supplying CPR in an emergency situation.

Standing Water on Playgrounds

As the rainy season approaches, please make sure that there is no standing water in any equipment before you let children go to the outdoor play space. Besides being a potential drowning risk, standing water is a breeding ground for mosquitoes that not only are annoying but have the risk of carrying diseases. Water also can make equipment slippery and unsafe. If it rains during the day, the same procedures should be in place, so that when the weather clears and children are able to go outside, there is no standing water.

Hand Washing

Operators, substitutes, employees, and children must wash their hands with soap and running water after any personal hygiene procedures (bathroom, blowing noses, etc.) for themselves or when helping others, and immediately when coming in from outside. Best practice is for everyone to wash their hands before and after serving, touching or eating food. When you are in a place without running water, like on a field trip, hand sanitizer is a great alternative until you get to running water. Hand washing is one of the most effective means of stopping the spread of germs, and it can stop the spread of disease that can be harmful to a child. Hand washing can be made fun for children by using a song, a chant, or having a chart of pictures to look at while washing their hands.

Mandatory Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

All providers, employees, and substitutes in family child care homes are required to sign an Acknowledgement Form each year verifying that they understand that they are mandated reporters. They must report any suspicions of abuse, neglect, or abandonment to the DCF Abuse Hotline **1 (800) 96-ABUSE**. It doesn't matter if the suspected incident happened at a child care home or at the child's home, it must be reported. Some examples might be a lack of supervision (physical neglect), bruising (physical abuse), or observing inappropriate discipline being used (physical or mental abuse). **Reports must be IMMEDIATELY, which at a minimum means on the day that it is observed.** Remember, the primary reason to report abuse or neglect is to protect children.

Employees are encouraged to follow any internal procedures set up by their provider. However, they need to understand that even a direct order from the child care home provider will not relieve them of their legal requirement to report suspicions, and they should not assume that someone else will make the call for them, nor should they wait to see if it happens again before calling in the report. Mandated reporters need to understand that once they have a suspicion and do not report it, that they may have left a child in danger, that they have personally committed a misdemeanor, and that a serious violation has occurred that can result in costly fines to the family child care provider. The identity of the reporter is kept confidential by law. PCLB staff members will be glad to provide advice if you have a question regarding reporting. PCLB should also be notified as soon as the call to the hotline is made.

Closing Thoughts...

The Board of Directors of the Pinellas County License Board and the staff at the Child Care Licensing Program continue to support the mission of protecting and promoting the health, safety, and mental development of children cared for in children's centers and family child care homes in Pinellas. The only way to successfully carry out this mission is through an active and supportive partnership with child care providers. We are placing a renewed emphasis on providing technical assistance to providers, and we are reviewing regulations in an effort to ensure relevance and clarity.

Our goals for 2011 include:

- Conducting a thoughtful review of Pinellas regulations and proposing changes as appropriate in order to ensure quality care for children
- Strengthening relationships with providers and community partners with a goal of increasing trust and mutual respect
- Increasing opportunities for direct and open communications with providers
- Providing technical assistance for individual provider's situations
- Providing community training on subjects of interest to child care providers and potential providers

We welcome ideas and suggestions from individual child care providers, provider associations, and our community partners, and we look forward to working together on behalf of children.

