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**State Awards Child Care Expansion Grants to
Four Early Care and Education Organizations**

Grants Help Child Care Programs Serve More Children with High Needs

ATLANTA, Ga., (April 6, 2016) – According to Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has awarded Child Care Expansion Grants to four early childhood care and education organizations located in the state’s Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs).

With funding from the federal Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant, DECAL and DCA are partnering to offer economic development incentive packages for child care programs to expand or open new child care programs to serve infants and toddlers with high needs in Georgia’s E3Zs. The E3Zs are regions of the state that work with DECAL and other state agencies to pilot early education system reform initiatives and partnerships that support better outcomes for young children.

Grants totaling \$346,179 in economic development incentives were awarded to: Athens Regional Health System in Clarke County; Bright Start Preschool Learning Center, Inc. in Lowndes County; Destiny Starr Academy in Clarke County; and Little Angels Pre-School & Child Care Center, Inc. in Lowndes County.

“I am excited to see these four high quality child care programs expand and benefit from these economic development incentives from DCA,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “Child care is an industry that creates jobs within its own industry and enables parents and families to provide the necessary workforce for the state’s other industries also. These economic development incentives will make it possible for child care programs to serve more children with high needs, thereby strengthening their community’s economic health.”

Athens Regional Health System will use grant funds to equip a new child care program it is constructing – Athens Regional Early Learning Academy – for its employees at Athens Regional Medical Center. Bright Start Preschool Learning Center requested funding for equipment to expand their center to serve an additional infants and toddlers. Destiny Starr Academy will receive funds to open a new child care program that will create eight new jobs and serve 125 children. Little Angels Pre-School & Child Care Center, Inc. will expand their existing facility and create six new jobs.

A third round of funding is currently open for applications until May 13, 2016. To access an application, go to <http://dca.ga.gov/communities/CommunityInitiatives/programs/E3Z.asp>. To be eligible for a Child Care Expansion Grant, applicants must have earned a two or three star rating through Quality Rated, Georgia’s system to assess, improve, and communicate the quality of care a child care program provides. The applicant must also be located in one of Georgia’s E3Zs.

Eligible applicants can apply for a maximum of \$100,000 and must create a minimum of two new full time jobs to serve a minimum of 10 additional infants and toddlers. Families looking for child care can learn more the importance of selecting a Quality Rated child care program at www.qualityrated.org and can search for Quality Rated child care programs on the DECAL website at www.decals.ga.gov.

About Bright from the Start

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia’s children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia’s Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia’s Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, federal nutrition programs, and manages *Quality Rated*, Georgia’s community powered child care rating system.

The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to www.dec.state.ga.us.