

**GOVERNOR'S STATEMENT UPON SIGNING
ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 4544
(First Reprint)**

Today I am signing Assembly Bill No. 4544 (First Reprint), which will expressly expand eligibility for the State's Child Care Assistance Program ("the program") to full-time graduate and post-graduate students. The program is administered by the Department of Human Services ("DHS") and provides subsidies for child care that are funded through State appropriations and the federal Child Care and Development Fund. The bill makes effectuation of the expansion contingent upon the appropriation of funds for this specific purpose.

Under the bill, a graduate or post-graduate student is defined as an individual who has been accepted to pursue a course of graduate or post-graduate study, respectively, at a public or private institution of higher education and is in good standing. The bill requires these students to meet all other income, asset, and residency criteria for the program and directs DHS to apply for any State plan amendments or waivers necessary to secure federal financial participation.

Affordable, exceptional child care is a vital part of a stronger and fairer New Jersey economy. Since 2018, my Administration has invested over \$1 billion in expanding access to high-quality, affordable child care across New Jersey. Indeed, my proposed budget for the current fiscal year recommended an increase in funding for child care assistance payments, subsidizing child care for an estimated 70,000 children and paying providers 104% more than 2018 rates. At the same time, reductions in federal assistance and increasing enrollment necessitated a limitation on program growth. As a result, new admissions to the program among eligible households were halted on August 1st of this year and continue to be paused, but existing participants remain enrolled, consistent with the funds appropriated pursuant to the Annual Appropriations Act signed in June.

I commend the sponsors' goal of expanding access to child care to more New Jersey households, particularly as costs rise across multiple sectors around the country. However, against the backdrop of a pause in new enrollments under existing criteria, and given that the bill does not provide any new funding – on which its effectuation is contingent – those newly eligible under the bill will not be able to immediately receive assistance. Moreover, DHS may have to establish new policies and procedures, as permitted by federal law, which will require time and resources.

Despite these limitations, I am signing this bill today because I believe that it is crucial to enshrine this expansion in the law and provide the legal authority for its implementation if and when funds become available for this specified purpose. We should always aim to bring New Jersey families closer to accessing

safe, high-quality child care. It is my hope that an improved fiscal environment will soon allow us to provide this critical support to residents across this State and that New Jersey can continue its legacy as the best state in the country to raise a family.

Date: October 1, 2025

/s/ Philip D. Murphy

Governor

Attest:

/s/ Kate E. McDonnell

Chief Counsel to the Governor