



# Quality makes a Difference

*An Overview of Licensure Violations in Mississippi's Child Care Centers in 2016*  
January 2018

Quality care during the early years is critical for children's positive well-being, cognitive growth, and healthy development. Many families across the country turn to child care centers to care for their young children while parents work or attend school. For a parent considering enrolling their child in a center, a likely first question will be: "How well will my child be cared for in this center?" Answers to questions about the quality of care in Mississippi's child care centers, however, have not historically been readily available for all centers.

Child care in Mississippi centers is licensed and monitored by the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH). All center-based child care facilities providing care to six or more children under thirteen years of age (who are not related to the caregiver), must meet minimum health and safety standards as outlined by the MSDH.<sup>1</sup> For some child care centers, these Health Department Licensure Standards constitute the only form of regulation and inspection standards to which they will be held accountable. In order to assure compliance with state regulations, the MSDH states that it conducts inspection visits at least twice a year to all licensed child care facilities.<sup>2,3</sup> Before December 1st, 2017 only four types of child care violations were made publicly accessible online, for a limited time period.<sup>2</sup> These included: 1.) Failure to maintain the minimum staff to child ratio; 2.) Leaving children unattended; 3.) Failure to conduct a background check; and 4.) Lack of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or first aid training.

As of December 1, 2017, detailed inspection reports may be accessed for centers inspected after July 1, 2017 which include information on the status of other types of violations. Inspection and violation reports are accessible via website using the Child Care Provider search option.<sup>4,5</sup> Reports made prior to July 1, 2017 are only accessible by making a written request through a public records request form.<sup>4</sup>

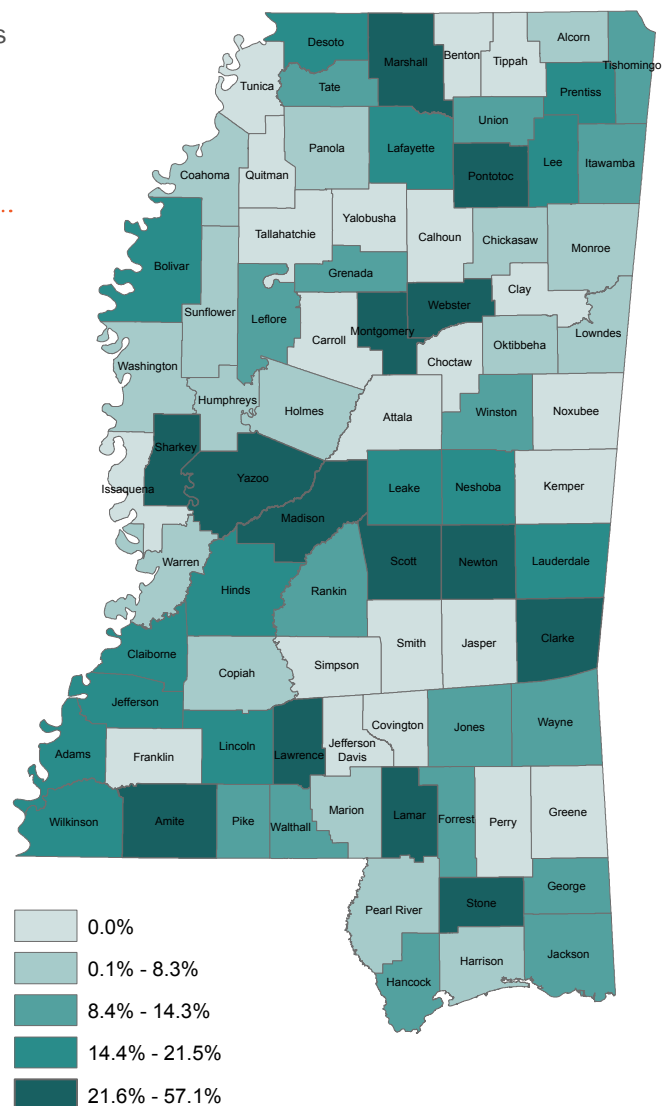
## 2016 Licensure Violations

In 2016, there were 1,524 total licensed child care centers in Mississippi. In total, 201 (13%) of these facilities had 262 reported violations of the state's licensure standards. These violations represent a failure to comply with the state's minimum standards for operating a child care facility. The map to the right illustrates the geographic distribution of these centers across the state, as a percentage of the total child care centers in each county. The table below highlights the ten counties with the largest proportion of centers with violations for 2016.

### Top Ten MS Counties by Percent of Centers with Violations

County	Total Centers in County	Centers with Violations	Percent of Centers with Violations
Clarke	7	4	57%
Pontotoc	9	5	56%
Amite	2	1	50%
Sharkey	2	1	50%
Yazoo	10	4	40%
Marshall	8	3	38%
Lawrence	3	1	33%
Montgomery	6	2	33%
Stone	6	2	33%
Madison	51	16	31%

Percent of Child Care Centers with Licensure Violations, by County



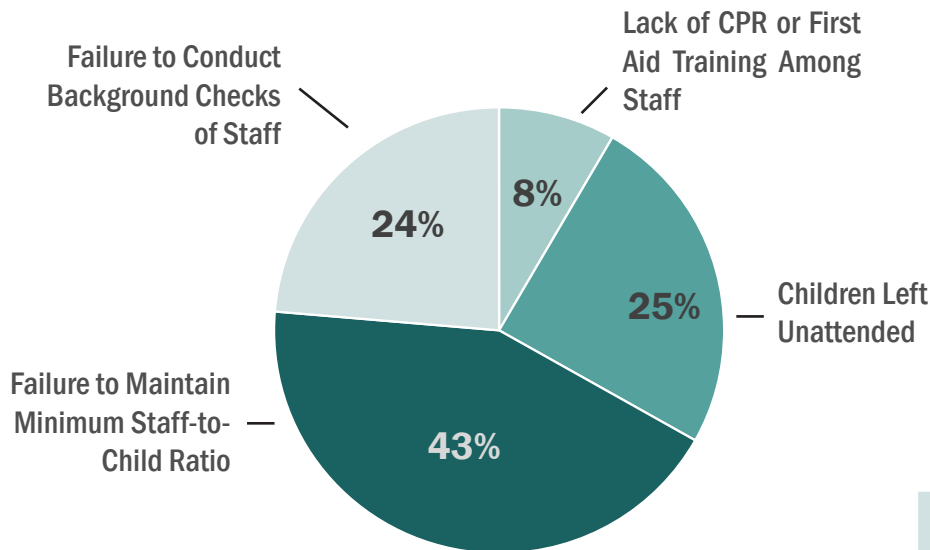
# Violations of Mississippi's Licensure Standards

The data used for this report include the 2016 ratings achieved by participating centers in the Mississippi Quality Stars voluntary rating program and a database containing violations of child care licensure standards reported by the Mississippi Department of Health in 2016.\* Because these violations were only posted to the Mississippi Department of Health's website for a limited time, the data are sourced from a database compiled and made public by journalists at *The Hechinger Report*. More information, including the database of child care violation reports, is available at: <http://hechingerreport.org/has-your-child-care-center-left-children-unattended/>

\* This database is the most comprehensive publicly available source of violations data for 2016. Due to variability in state reporting mechanisms, however, the database may exclude 1 - 3 weeks of violation reports for the year.

## Licensure Violations by Type

The chart to the left illustrates the frequency of each of the four types of violations reported online in 2016. At 43%, failure to maintain adequate staff-to-child ratio constituted the largest share of reported violations. Children left unattended comprised 25% of violations, and failure to conduct staff background checks comprised 24% of violations. The smallest share of violations, at only 8%, were lack of CPR or first aid training among staff.

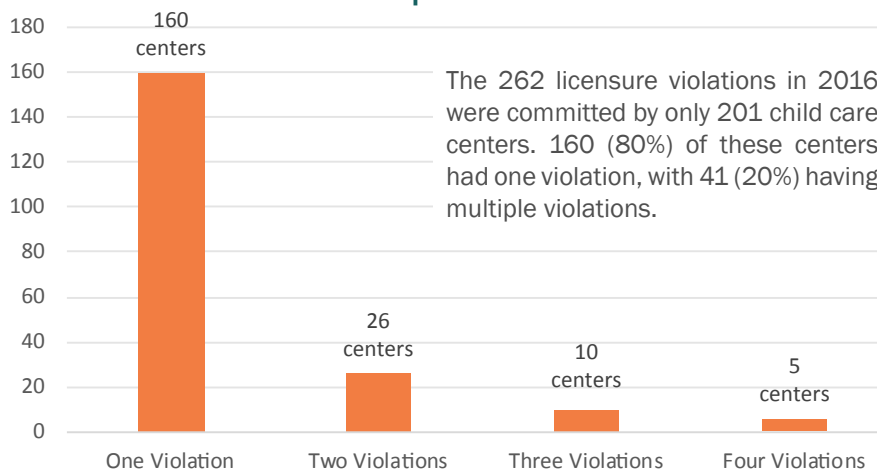


## Staff-to-Child Ratios

Age of Children	Max. Number of Children per Caregiver
Less than 1 year	5
1 year	9
2 years	12
3 years	14
4 years	15
5 to 9 years	20
10 to 12 years	25

The minimum staff-to-child ratio varies by age group and is determined by the age of the youngest child present. The table above outlines these ratios. Violations of this ratio were the most common type of child care licensure violation in 2016.

## Multiple Violations



2016 by the numbers:

**1,524**

total child care centers in Mississippi

**262**

violations of Mississippi's child care licensure standards were reported

**201**

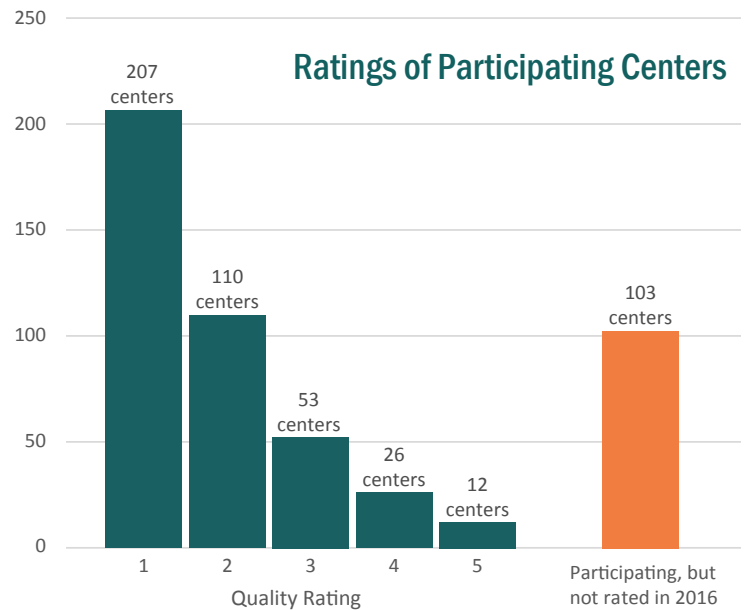
child care centers committed these reported violations

## Quality Ratings of Mississippi's Child Care Centers

Across the country, additional quality rating systems are typically available to child care facilities above and beyond the minimum state licensure standards. A standardized quality rating system helps the average parent become more aware of the quality oversight of the center, how “quality” is defined and rated by the overseeing entity, and how the center is held accountable when standards are not met, or worse, when misconduct or serious infractions occur. In its Policy Statement “Quality Early Education and Child Care from Birth to Kindergarten”, the American Academy of Pediatrics asserts that state licensing standards set a “minimum standard that is typically considerably less than the recommendations of health and safety experts” and therefore recommends each state support its quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) and encourage robust standards on child health and safety.<sup>6</sup> From 2007 until December 2016, Mississippi used the “Mississippi Quality Stars Program” as its QRIS.

All Mississippi licensed child care facilities were eligible

to participate in the Mississippi Quality Stars program through a statewide voluntary system. Participating licensed child care facilities could earn quality ratings of 1 to 5 stars, with 5 stars being the best. Monetary rewards were provided dependent on the star rating received. Earned scores for 2016 are illustrated in the graph above.<sup>7,8</sup>



## Violations and Quality Stars Ratings

Participation in the voluntary Mississippi Quality Stars Rating program was a meaningful predictor of whether or not a child care center had any licensure violations in 2016. Among the 511 participating centers, only 33 (6%) had reported licensure violations. Comparatively, 191 (19%) of Mississippi's 1,013 non-participating centers had reported violations. Compared to non-participating centers, participating centers had 3.4 times lower odds of having any reported violations. No participating center had more than one violation in 2016. While participation alone was a predictor of violations, the actual rating achieved by a center was also a meaningful indicator of the probability of violations. Among the 38 centers with five and four star ratings, none had any reported licensure violations in 2016. Of the 33 participating centers with violations, 17 were 1-star, 3 were 2-star, 3 were 3-star, and 10 were enrolled in the program, but not rated.

## Transitioning to a New System

In 2017, the Mississippi Quality Stars program was replaced by the “Family-Based Unified and Integrated Early Childhood System” which is advised by the State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) and the MS Department of Human Services (MDHS).<sup>9</sup> This system divides child care centers into two categories: standard and comprehensive. It does not, however, provide a rating for them - thus, as of 2017, Mississippi was the only state in the country without an existing QRIS and/or without one in planning or pilot stages.<sup>10</sup> As of this policy brief release date, the state's new early childhood plan is still in the process of being developed and rolled out to MS child care providers.

*\*\* Comparative likelihood calculated via relative risk of licensure violation by participating centers compared to non-participating centers*



Compared to non-participating centers, participating centers were **3x less likely** to have had a reported licensure violation in 2016\*\*

**19%**

of centers not participating in Mississippi's quality rating program had licensure violations.

**6%**

of centers participating in Mississippi's quality rating program had one reported licensure violation.

**0**

centers participating in Mississippi's quality rating program had multiple reported licensure violations.

## Policy Recommendations

- Structure the state’s new child care classifications to be consistent with national best practices and evidence-based standards to advance child care quality
- Promote a classifications system with sufficiently differentiated categories and ensure that these categories are understandable and easily accessible to the public
- Develop and implement a strategy for recruiting all child care centers’ participation in the new voluntary classification system
- Conduct research regarding child care classifications and their relationship to violations and report findings to the general public as well as state agencies responsible for licensing and training of child care staff
- Target the federal funds designated to quality improvement to mitigate conditions that precipitated the most often cited violations such as children left unattended or non compliance with maintaining the minimum staff-to-child-ratio
- Promote adequate allocation of state funds and resources for all child care providers in Mississippi so that child care centers may continually improve the quality of their care
- Continue to promote the new website through which parents and members of the public may access child care inspection reports and a center’s record of licensure compliance or non-compliance



## References

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Additional details about this report, including study methodology, are available at: [www.msdataport.com](http://www.msdataport.com)  
For more information, contact: [MsDataProject@gmail.com](mailto:MsDataProject@gmail.com)

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