

Document retention guide

Maintaining compliance and avoiding citations



Hello from Playground!

Paperwork is one of child care's quietest operational burdens. Providers must collect, organize, and retain dozens of records – often for years – to stay organized for daily operations and ready for both routine and unannounced inspections.

Missing or incomplete forms rank among the most frequent licensing citations, causing child care providers to divert their attention to remediation and corrective action plans. Incorrect attendance or subsidy documentation can also cost programs thousands in lost reimbursements each year, typically due to manual reporting errors.

Physical files add further friction: they take up space, risk damage or misfiling, and still need to be instantly retrievable when an inspector arrives or your staff needs important information quickly.

This guide gives you a clear, practical map of the prevalence and best practices regarding paperwork in child care operations, including:

- ✓ **Real citation data showing the true cost of paperwork gaps**
- ✓ **The key documents you need to collect and store, plus typical retention periods**
- ✓ **Simple steps to close the most common compliance gaps before they become findings**

Use the pages ahead to strengthen your systems, reduce risk, and keep your focus where it belongs: on the children in your care.

Warmly,

The Playground Team

The Real Cost of Paperwork Errors

Incomplete or missing paperwork is one of the most common reasons child care providers get cited. These gaps often trigger corrective action plans, extra inspections, and potential impacts on quality ratings or funding.

Ohio Case Study

The most frequently cited paperwork issues alone made up nearly half of all the 18,963 state-wide citations for 2022.

14.5%

Enrollment forms not compliant
2,754 violations

8.9%

Missing medical information
1,683 violations

7.3%

Incomplete employment records
1,381 violations

5.9%

Incomplete or unfollowed plans
1,128 violations

5.3%

Background-check documentation
1,002 violations

4.9%

Emergency plan form problems
937 violations

Texas Case Study

Multiple paperwork-related issues ranked among the top 10 deficiencies across facility types in 2025.

LICENSED CENTERS

Employee turnover report 616

Background clearance prior 452

Immunization records 359

Infant feeding instructions 311

LICENSED HOMES

Child health statement 81

Policies include parent rights 73

Immunization records 58

CPSC recall certification 53

Background clearance 46

REGISTERED HOMES

Child health statement 119

Operational policies 101

Background clearance 92

Admission information 91

Parent rights in policies 85

The bottom line: Routine paperwork mistakes around enrollment, medical records, staff files, and required plans remain a major source of compliance findings.

Childcare Record-Keeping Reference

CHILD RECORDS

RECORD / DOCUMENT	WHO NEEDS IT / PRIMARY PURPOSE	TYPICAL RETENTION PERIOD
Enrollment/registration forms, admission info, parent agreements, handbook acknowledgments	Licensing inspectors; parents; internal operations	30 days-3 years after child's last day
Health exam/physician statement, immunization records, TB screening (if required), health history	Licensing & health inspectors; parents; emergency responders	30 days-3 years after last day (often longer for health records)
Emergency contacts, authorized pickup/release lists, emergency medical treatment consent	Staff (daily use); licensing; parents; emergency responders	30 days-3 years after last day
Allergy action plans, special-needs/individual care plans	Staff (daily care); licensing; parents	30 days-3 years after last day (or while active + retention period)
Medication authorizations (parent + prescriber) and administration logs	Staff; licensing; parents	While active + 2-3 years (or folded into child health record); some short-term logs 3 months post-use
Permissions (field trips, transportation, photos/video, sunscreen/topicals, etc.)	Staff; licensing; parents	30 days-3 years after last day
Daily attendance / sign-in & sign-out records (arrival/departure times)	Licensing inspectors (ratios, compliance); subsidy auditors; internal	1-5 years (often 1-3 years; WA = 5 years)
Incident, injury, illness, or accident reports	Licensing; insurance; parents; potential legal claims	2+ years (often longer than general child records)
Developmental assessments or evaluations	Staff/teachers; licensing (curriculum); parents	1-3 years after last day

STAFF / PERSONNEL RECORDS

RECORD / DOCUMENT	WHO NEEDS IT / PRIMARY PURPOSE	TYPICAL RETENTION PERIOD
Staff applications, employment history, references, qualifications/credentials	Licensing (qualifications); internal HR	1-3 years after employment ends (often ≥2 calendar years)
Background checks, fingerprints, and clearances	Licensing (mandatory); insurance	2-4+ years after employment ends
Staff health records (e.g., TB tests, physicals)	Licensing; health inspectors	1-3 years after employment ends
Training certificates (CPR/First Aid, medication admin, orientation, annual PD hours)	Licensing (compliance audits); internal	2-3 years after training date or employment ends
Staff time/attendance, hours worked, break records	Licensing (ratio compliance); payroll; IRS	1-3 years after employment ends (overlap with payroll)
Disciplinary actions and related notes	Internal HR; potential legal/insurance	1-3 years after employment ends

Note: Retention guidelines may vary depending on your state. Always consult local state licensing authorities and regional employment/tax bureaus for mandatory local updates.

FACILITY / PROGRAM RECORDS

RECORD / DOCUMENT	WHO NEEDS IT / PRIMARY PURPOSE	TYPICAL RETENTION PERIOD
Current license, applications, correspondence, and inspection reports (licensing, fire, health/sanitation)	Licensing inspectors; internal compliance	While license is active + 2-5 years (recent ones on-site)
Policies/procedures and parent handbook	Licensing; parents; staff	While current + 1-3 years after revision
Emergency preparedness plans and fire/evacuation drill logs	Licensing; fire inspectors; internal	1-3 years
Safety/maintenance logs (playground, equipment, smoke/CO detectors, fire extinguishers, hazard checks)	Licensing; fire/health inspectors	1-3 years (recent 12 months usually on-site)
Menus/snack lists (with substitutions) and food temperature logs (CACFP if applicable)	Licensing; health inspectors; CACFP auditors	3 months-1 year
Visitor logs	Licensing; internal security	1-3 years
Video surveillance footage (if used)	Licensing; internal investigations; insurance	30-90 days (state-specific)
Reports of alleged abuse/neglect or other mandated reports	Licensing; child protective services	3+ years (or per state child abuse reporting rules)

FINANCIAL / BUSINESS RECORDS

RECORD / DOCUMENT	WHO NEEDS IT / PRIMARY PURPOSE	TYPICAL RETENTION PERIOD
Tax returns and supporting documentation	IRS; state tax agencies; internal	3-7 years (IRS general rule 3 years; 7 years for certain claims)
Invoices, receipts, bank statements, checks, receivables/payables	IRS; auditors; internal accounting	5-7 years
Payroll records, timesheets, employment tax records (W-2s, withholdings, etc.)	IRS; state labor agencies; licensing	3-7 years (employment taxes often ≥4 years)
Contracts, leases, insurance policies/proof of coverage	Licensing; insurance; legal; internal	While active + 5-7 years after expiration
Subsidy/billing claims and related attendance verification (CCDF or state assistance)	Subsidy agencies; auditors; licensing	At least 3 years (CCDF floor; some states longer)
Business registration, licenses/permits, asset/depreciation records	Tax agencies; licensing; internal	3-7 years or permanent for certain items

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How Playground helps reduce paperwork violations and compliance risks

Playground turns the most common sources of licensing citations — including missing forms, incomplete records, and outdated documentation — into simple, automated workflows.



Stay compliant by design

Customize required forms and fields, or start with pre-loaded templates already aligned to state rules.

 **Built-in staff & parent reminders**



Find what you need in seconds

Store every record digitally and securely in one place. Search or ask the built-in AI instead of digging through folders during an inspection.

 **Powered by Playground AI**



Cut manual work and errors

Automate subsidy reporting and connect with many state-level programs directly to reduce painful data-entry mistakes.

 **State program integrations**

Leverage Playground for:

- Fewer citations
- Streamlined daily operations
- Less time spent on paperwork
- More time focused on children
- Other functions like billing, payroll, enrollment, and much more... all under one roof

Book a free demo by scanning the QR code below or visiting

tryplayground.com/getdemo

