



Child Care Aware of Washington

2023

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

WA's child care system has much to be proud of! The Early Start Act created one of the country's most effective quality assurance frameworks for child care. Over 70% of all childcare programs have volunteered to join Early Achievers and 96% of rated programs have reached a Quality Level of Excellence. The Fair Start for Kids Act is providing critical relief to working families struggling to pay for child care, reducing eligible families' child care costs from 20% of their monthly income down to 7%. And most recently, Child Care Stabilization Grants have proven essential to the survival of the child care industry through the pandemic. DCYF and WA STEM estimates that over 62,000 child care slots were sustained via the grants.

Despite immense progress in child care quality and affordability, untenable market conditions and poverty wages for the child care workforce continue to undermine access for families and quality for children. Washington lost 10% of its child care workforce throughout the pandemic, and it's workers rank in the 3rd percentile of all occupational wages. The poverty rate for child care educators is more than double that of WA workers in general, and 8 times higher than K-8 teachers. This dynamic results in costly turnover, empty classrooms, a mental health crisis in programs, disrupted attachment for children, and fewer options for families, often leading them to seek care from friends and family members instead.

The WA State Legislature has made incredible progress and impact in building towards the best child care system in the nation. In 2023, the legislature can accelerate their work, by making strategic investments into stabilizing the child care workforce and creating further opportunities for families to navigate the broken market of child care.



70% of children under the age of 6 are currently not in a formal child care program



Child care workers rank in the 3rd percentile of all Washington occupational wages



4 out of 5 child care programs are experiencing staff shortages



Child care lead teachers have a 43% turnover rate

Child Care Aware of WA calls on the Governor and Legislature to do the following during the 2023 legislative session:

- Approve the recommendations from the Child Care Collaborative Task Force to require DCYF to develop an implementation plan for ensuring living wages for all child care educators
- Waive background check (\$3.1 million) and licensing (\$3.3 million) fees to reduce financial overhead for child care programs
- Expand Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation for child care programs: \$4 million
- Expand Play & Learn Groups for Family Friend & Neighbor Caregivers: \$2.4 million
- Raise Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) rates to stabilize revenue for providers and access for families
 - Raise WCCC rates to the 85th percentile for center-based (\$239 million) and family child care (\$232 million)
 - Transition from attendance-based to enrollment-based pay to make revenue predictable in alignment with the private market (\$114 million)
 - Enhance subsidy reimbursement rates for infants and non-standard hour care.