

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Wisconsin supports Build Back Better investment in universal Pre-K and affordable child care

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Build Back Better Act will invest in Pre-K, make child care more affordable for working families, and raise wages for workers

Washington, D.C. – Wisconsin child care and early childhood education advocates are supporting the Build Back Better Act, which will lower child care costs for working families, expand access to high-quality universal preschool, and increase wages for workers. U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin supports this legislation, which passed out of the House of Representatives last month.

For decades, child care costs in the United States have risen faster than family incomes. Yet the United States still invests 28 times less than its competitors on helping families afford high-quality care. While many other nations have created strong systems of universal, high-quality, affordable child care, the shortage in America has only worsened. The lack of affordable child care is driving parents – especially women – out of the labor force in record numbers.

The Build Back Better Act will lower child care costs for working families. The legislation also establishes and expands high-quality preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds, with programs available in schools, licensed child care programs, and Head Start programs. In addition, Build Back Better increases pay and support for

providers.

“Working families in Wisconsin face rising costs and for many families, finding affordable child care has been a major barrier to re-entering the workforce. Build Back Better will lower child care costs and make high quality child care more affordable,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “Our Build Back Better legislation makes investments that build on our existing state-federal partnerships on publicly funded Pre-K programs, enabling more families to work and succeed in our economy and producing better outcome for our kids.”

“This single-largest public investment in child care and preschool in the United States is incredibly exciting because it will allow us to solve the issues that have been plaguing early care and education for far too long. The U.S. has long lagged behind other wealthy nations in the investment it makes in the early care and education of children – an unfortunate reality we have the opportunity to correct through this legislation,” **said Abby Abrisham, President of Wisconsin Early Childhood Association.** “The bill represents the multi-pronged approach child care requires: make child care more affordable and accessible, pay child care professionals in parity with their K-12 peers and allow the economic benefits of parents and guardians being able to go to work. WECA has long been positioned to see how the child care crisis has impacted the early childhood workforce, children and families, employers and our communities. The pandemic only exacerbated these effects, and WECA strongly believes Build Back Better represents the change we so urgently need. What is best for children is good public policy. It is essential, bipartisan and critical for the future of Wisconsin and the country.”

“Early childhood care and education are public goods and the foundations of our entire economy. Early care and education allow parents to work, businesses to operate and entrepreneurs to start businesses – while young children are cared for and educated. Further, they build the foundation for all future learning, employment and innovation,” **said Corrine Hendrickson, Owner of Corrine’s Little Explorers in New Glarus.** “As a child care provider, I also understand how the lack of affordable, accessible and flexible child care has negatively impacted our community. It is hard for parents to find care that works for them, and, on average, I have to turn one family away each week due to lack of space. The lack of support in our child care system does not just fall on parents. In order for parents to be able

to afford this essential care, I have to charge less than what I deserve to earn. Families and caregivers in Wisconsin desperately need and deserve the policies in the Build Back Better Act.”

“As the director of a group child care center in rural Wisconsin, the Build Back Better legislation will have immediate positive effects on our business, along with the children and families we serve. Build Back Better will reduce the high rates of inequality of care and education that our youngest children currently experience due to the high costs of quality care not being affordable to all families - nor accessible,” **said Brooke Skidmore, Director of The Growing Tree Academy in New Glarus.** “Build Back Better addresses the main issue of care shortage in our nation by providing early childcare teachers a wage worthy of the critical work they do - not only for our children’s wellness but also for our economy to grow.”

“I have been in the early education field for almost 40 years. I have been a licensed family childcare provider for 15 years. Since I have been providing care, I have seen how devastatingly undervalued this field has been. Childcare is an essential component to our economy. Parents cannot work without dependable care and cannot afford to pay more. Employers suffer when parents cannot come to work because they do not have childcare for a variety of reasons,” **said Holly Hale, Owner of Holly’s Little Red Wagon Child Care in Roberts.** “And, finally, both family and group childcare programs are barely making ends meet financially and, although there is a high need for care, there are not enough early childhood teachers to fill the positions, forcing centers to close whole classrooms. It is essential that investments into childcare are made to help ensure a stable economy and to support the early childhood workforce with the important work that they do.”

“I have been a director of a group child care center for 15 years. Our community cannot fulfill the child care needs working families have. We have had temporary support to help us through the pandemic, however, our field needs sustainable support for the long term,” **said Renae Henning, Administrator at Community Care Preschool & Child Care, Inc. in Beaver Dam.** “Families and employers NEED the child care system to be safe, quality and reliable. Your investment in Build Back Better will be the help we need to make systematic changes.”

“It is no secret that the child care industry is in crisis and now, more than ever, investment in early childhood education is needed in order to ensure the future success of our communities. As an owner of a child care center my number one challenge has always been hiring and retaining quality teachers. As a private center my budget relies on 100% parent paid tuition. This has led to a constant struggle of what in early childhood education is known as the “trifecta”: balancing affordability for families, decent wages for teachers, and high quality care for children,” **said Bekah Barrales, Owner of Bee Balm Learning Center in Madison.** “Unfortunately, because of the way child care has currently been operating it is impossible to balance all of these needs. So which one gets less priority? The stress of having to make that kind of decision on a daily basis is almost unbearable. Our children deserve better, and it is time for everyone to stand up and show how important they are to our communities and future.”

“Throughout the 17 years of work in this field, I have been reminded many times that you have to *really* be passionate about early childhood to continue this work. Teachers are pushed to their limits emotionally and poorly compensated for long hours,” **said Karli Shapiro, Director of Creative Learning Preschool in Madison.** “Families are pushed to their limits financially to have their children in quality childcare, only to be told that hours of operation need to be shortened due to staffing shortages. The struggles in this field seem to be piling up higher and higher with no end in sight, however we are still pushing forward and providing a critical service to families and children. We need to strike a balance and Build Back Better could be this balance.”

“Build Back Better will help me as a child care learning center owner ensure my staff are compensated well and can provide high quality care,” **said Macy Buhler, Main Street Alliance-Wisconsin member and owner of Yahara River Learning Center in DeForest.** “Teachers are the heart of quality care and in order for me to hire, retain and train them we need this bill to help us make sure it’s affordable for families as well.”