Gov. Evers, Dept. of Children and Families: Announce final Child Care Counts funding proposal submitted for approval

Posted on Thursday, Jun 29, 2023

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today submitted a formal request to the Wisconsin State Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) to use remaining federal relief dollars to support Wisconsin's early care and education (ECE) community through the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families' (DCF) Child Care Counts payment program. The Child Care Counts Program has been a lifeline for local child care providers and has helped make child care more affordable and accessible for working families while stabilizing the industry to maintain support for the state's workforce. The request, if approved, will help continue provider payments through January 2024, when the program is set to end due to legislative Republicans' refusal to permanently fund the successful program in the 2023-25 biennial budget.

"Two weeks ago today, I urged Republicans on the Joint Committee on Finance to approve my budget's foundational investment to support and continue Child Care Counts, and they carelessly rejected the investment—putting Wisconsin families, our workforce, and our economy at risk," said Gov. Evers. "Without this program, Wisconsin faces a perilous state of child care that will not only impact our current workforce and economy but also our future generations. With our state's longstanding workforce challenges, we simply cannot afford not to support our child care industry. I am again urging Republicans to urgently make the necessary investments in this critical program."

According to a [survey](#) of nearly 1,200 Wisconsin early care and education providers from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, more than 27

percent of providers reported that their program would have closed without the stabilization grants, and when the grants end, more than 60 percent of child care directors say they will have to raise tuition on families and another more than 33 percent say they will have to cut wages or will be unable to sustain wages/salary increases for their staff. According to Kids Forward, the median pay for child care workers in Wisconsin is $12.66 an hour.

Additionally, 54 percent of Wisconsinites today live in a child care desert—where there are few to no high-quality options for child care in their neighborhood or community—and even if there is a nearby child care provider, it still might not be affordable for a working family. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual Kids Count report, the average yearly cost of center-based child care in Wisconsin is $12,415.

"Early care and education professionals are the backbone of our economy and help parents enter and remain in the workforce," said DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson. "I know that our legislators have heard from them, as well as from business and community leaders and parents, about the importance of child care and its connection to strong communities, which is why the committee's vote was so disappointing. As we have always done, we will all continue to work across party lines to build a stronger ECE system that supports Wisconsin families."

To date, the Child Care Counts Stabilization Payment Program has distributed more than $378 million to 4,345 child care providers, ensuring 22,000 child care professionals remain or become employed and enabling providers to continue to provide high-quality care to 113,000 kids. This funding is in addition to the $230 million that was distributed through previous Child Care Count programs, which occurred between May 2020 and November 2021.

More information regarding the governor's efforts to save the Child Care Counts program, bolster child care statewide, and support working families is available here.

An online version of this release is available here.