

Gov. Evers: Urges Republicans to approve investments making child care more affordable, accessible

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today urged Republicans on the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) to approve significant investments proposed by the governor in his 2023-25 biennial budget to make child care more affordable and accessible for working families while stabilizing the industry to maintain support for the state's workforce.

Specifically, Gov. Evers is calling on Republicans on JFC—who have yet to announce any efforts of their own to help stabilize and support the state's child care industry or any other comprehensive efforts to address the state's longstanding workforce challenges—to approve his 2023-25 biennial budget proposal to make the Child Care Counts Program a permanent state program with a more than \$340 million investment to continue supporting Wisconsin's early care and education community, as well as the working families who depend on this care to get to work and put food on their tables. Republicans on JFC, whose districts have received nearly \$50 million in Child Care Counts Program payments since November 2021, are set to vote on the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families' (DCF) budget later today.

"I hear it everywhere I go in Wisconsin: the Child Care Counts Program has been a lifeline for families and child care providers across our state, and without this critical program, providers across our state will have to close their doors, and working parents and families will be left in the lurch without care for their kids," said Gov. Evers. "Given our state's workforce challenges and our already historically low unemployment, Wisconsin literally cannot afford not to support our child care industry and make sure child care is affordable and accessible for families across

our state. Expanding access to child care is what's best for our kids, it's what's best for our families, and it's what's best for our state's workforce and our economy, too. Republicans must do the right thing and approve my budget's critical investments to support and continue Child Care Counts today.”

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. According to data provided by DCF, as of January 2023, there are approximately 563 Child Care Counts providers in communities represented by Republican members of the JFC, representing approximately 80 percent of the providers in their districts. A full breakdown of Child Care Counts providers and payments by Senate District is available [here](#), and a breakdown by Assembly District is available [here](#). The list of JFC members and their districts is available [here](#).

	KIDS IN CHILD CARE COUNTS*	CHILD CARE COUNTS PROVIDERS*	CHILD CARE COUNTS PAYMENTS**
RODRIGUEZ (21)	1,237	22	\$3,614,355
KATSMA (26)	947	21	\$1,835,050
ZIMMERMAN (30)	1,349	27	\$3,360,530
BORN (39)	897	19	\$2,151,640
DALLMAN (41)	592	23	\$1,330,520
KURTZ (50)	674	28	\$1,483,865
FELZKOWSKI (12)	2,137	63	\$4,910,510
BALLWEG (14)	2,517	72	\$5,390,270
MARKLEIN (17)	2,317	100	\$5,181,170
STROEBEL (20)	3,493	61	\$6,686,350
TESTIN (24)	2,818	104	\$6,280,605
WIMBERGER (30)	3,560	74	\$7,742,250
TOTAL JFC GOP***	21,272	563	\$47,152,730
<p>* = Active in January 2023 ** = Total payments November 2021 through January 2023 *** = Removes double counting of overlapping legislative districts</p>			

The governor’s call today comes as a [recent report](#) from the nonpartisan Wisconsin Policy Forum further examined the perilous state of child care in Wisconsin. The report analyzed the multi-faceted challenges facing the three main stakeholders of the industry—families, providers, and child care educators and staff. The report found that while families are struggling to afford the high cost of tuition, even with state subsidies, providers are also struggling to pay their workers a living wage, contributing to ongoing salary and retention challenges. The report states, “[g]iven the state’s sizable budget surplus and overall sound financial health, the upcoming two-year budget offers the best opportunity in decades to ensure that high-quality, affordable early childhood care and education is available for all Wisconsin residents, and that the economic challenges facing early childhood centers, workers, and families are alleviated.”

Fifty-four 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.

This widespread lack of access to affordable child care has significant consequences for the state's workforce, particularly as Wisconsin businesses and employers continue to face challenges recruiting and attracting workers. With record-low unemployment, Wisconsin needs to invest in strategies that reduce barriers to employment, and if quality, affordable child care is accessible and affordable, more parents will be able to join and stay in the workforce, provide for their families, and contribute to the state economy.

In May 2023, the program entered its third and final round of payments, leaving parents and providers facing a fiscal cliff. 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.

More information regarding the governor's plan to bolster child care statewide and support working families is available [here](#).