

Greater Milwaukee Foundation: Statement on WI budget & Child Care Counts

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Milwaukee, Wis., July 5, 2023 - We are deeply disappointed by the legislature's decision to pass a 2023- 25 state budget that doesn't include state funding for the proven, effective Child Care Counts program. This decision will have profound and lasting consequences for Milwaukee's youngest children, working families, and workforce.

Early childhood education (ECE) matters for the issues that matter most to Milwaukee, including the economy, K-12 and higher education, public health and safety, and racial and gender equity. But in Milwaukee, far too few children have access to quality, affordable ECE. This was a problem long before the COVID-19 pandemic, stemming from a broken business model in which parent fees alone cannot support the cost of providing quality child care.

Child Care Counts offered a lifeline to Milwaukee's ECE sector, with providers using program funding to recruit and retain staff, improve program quality, and reduce costs for families.

When Child Care Counts ends, over 40% of Milwaukee ECE providers report they'll have to raise rates for families and 30% will have to cut wages for staff. This will be devastating for Milwaukee's working families who can't afford to pay more for child care, and for ECE programs which are already struggling to recruit and retain the staff they need to keep classrooms open. And this decision will hurt Milwaukee's employers, because when parents of young children don't have access to affordable child care, they're far more likely to drop out of the workforce. At a time when we should all be committed to growing the economy, the legislature's failure to invest

in child care will force far too many parents of young children to the sidelines of the workforce.

The Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Milwaukee Succeeds are steadfast in our commitment to supporting Milwaukee's ECE sector. Since 2020 alone, the Foundation has invested nearly \$8.5 million in philanthropic support for ECE and the Milwaukee Succeeds-led MKE Early Childhood Education Coalition has worked alongside partners including the City of Milwaukee to direct millions of dollars in public and private resources where the sector has needed them most. In light of the legislature's failure to invest, we will redouble our efforts to support ECE in Milwaukee. But let's be clear, philanthropy and local investment alone will never be enough. We need significant, sustained state support for this vital sector. Lack of state investment in ECE will result in longer waitlists and higher fees for child care, more parents being forced out of the workforce, and fewer children experiencing the life-changing benefits of high-quality ECE.