

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association: New child care legislation does nothing to address long-term challenges of the field, jeopardizes child care safety and quality

Posted on Friday, Sep 1, 2023

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MADISON, WIS. – Wisconsin Early Childhood Association says the package of child care bills released into circulation this week completely fails to address the needs and challenges of providers, our youngest children, families and communities in terms of access, quality and affordability.

“These new bills offer no real solutions,” said WECA Executive Director Ruth Schmidt. “It is disappointing, especially at a time when this industry is feeling totally unsupported and is reeling from the effects of the state budget decision to not fund Child Care Counts. We have to do better for this field, for families and, most importantly, for the children in care.”

The Legislature in July failed to allocate any state funding to continue Child Care Counts (CCC) past January 2024 when it finalized the 2023-25 state budget – even after a significant and record-setting advocacy push that included nearly 100,000 letters in support of \$300 million to sustain the program. Several legislators have referenced they “invested \$90 million” in funds to support child care in the budget, but in reality, \$75 million of that was federal funding allocated by the Legislature.

The state budget only included \$15 million in state general purpose revenue for

child care that remains in the Legislature's supplemental account and is currently proposed in this package as a revolving loan program. WECA believes this legislation would be more impactful with the funds distributed as grants.

The state already is feeling the effects of the reduction in CCC payments and the upcoming end of the program. The initial results of a recent WECA survey show 86 percent of program directors and owners already are or are considering raising parent fees, 47 percent of early educators are considering leaving the field and 32 percent of programs are considering closing.

The Republican-drafted legislative package does not provide the sustainable financial support child care programs so desperately need. The proposed deregulation and licensing changes in the bills also endanger the safety of young children. Regulations in child care, including teacher-to-child ratios and ages of assistant child care teachers, are in place to ensure there are safety measures that protect children.

[Wisconsin's current group-child ratios align with national best practices](#) and are similar to several neighboring states, including Indiana, Michigan and Illinois. It also is important to note the child care industry at large did not seek these changes because they know high-quality, safe care depends on sound regulatory standards.

"The new bills would do little more than create a few headlines," Schmidt said. "It is totally unacceptable."