

WisDems: ICYMI: Democrats call for Child Care Counts funding ahead of Thursday budget meeting

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MADISON, Wis. — Today, Wisconsin Democrats called on JFC Republicans to do the right thing for Wisconsin families by fully funding the Child Care Counts program, ensuring child care is affordable and accessible for working Wisconsin families.

In his 2023-25 biennial budget, Governor Evers proposed investing \$340 million to make the Child Care Counts Program permanent. To date, child care providers have received more than \$378 million through the Child Care Counts Program, enabling caretakers to provide high quality care to over 110,000 Wisconsin children.

Wisconsin Examiner: [Democrats call for Child Care Counts funding ahead of Thursday budget meeting](#)

Wisconsin Democrats and advocates demanded Thursday morning that Republicans on the Joint Finance Committee include \$340 million in the budget to fund the Child Care Counts program ahead of the committee meeting later in the day.

The Child Care Counts program, which provides assistance to child care providers to help them increase pay for their employees and keep tuition costs manageable, was created by Gov. Tony Evers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic using federal assistance. As the federal aid runs out, advocates have been calling on lawmakers to fund the program using state dollars, as Evers proposed.

As children surrounded her at a press conference outside the state Capitol, Brooke Skidmore, co-owner of The Growing Tree child care center in New Glarus, said that

the funding is one of the only things that has helped her center stay open during this time. She said the funding is to stabilize the current system, which has wait lists a mile long and trouble hiring teachers.

“I have rooms that sit empty because I can’t get the teachers. I can’t get the teachers because of the pay and the only thing that has helped right now is the Child Care Counts funding,” Skidmore said. “Because of the funding the state of Wisconsin was able to raise the average teacher wage, [from] \$10.66 an hour to \$12.66 an hour, and that is sad. And it’s sad that there are people in this building, today, that are going to make a decision whether or not to take that two dollars from the teachers and essentially decrease our workforce.”

Gov. Tony Evers put out a statement on Thursday afternoon urging Republican lawmakers to pass funding for the program.

“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,” Evers said. “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.”

The Child Care Counts program has to date distributed over \$378 million to 4,345 child care providers and helped ensure 22,000 child care professionals remain or become employed and enable providers to continue to provide high-quality care to 113,000 kids, according to Evers’ statement.

Sen. LaTonya Johnson (D-Milwaukee) said Wisconsin is experiencing high staffing shortages in child care, but the current situation would be worse had it not been for the Child Care Counts program. She said it allowed for 3,300 child care providers across the state to remain open throughout the pandemic.

Johnson compared the money being spent on juvenile detention centers like Lincoln Hills — \$1,246 per day, per child — to the amount necessary to keep the Child Care Counts program running.

“There’s something wrong with that. There’s something wrong when we are reluctant to fund something that would help an entire state remain employed, that

would help qualified centers keep their doors open but more importantly, it would give our children safe places to go,” Johnson said.

Sen. Kelda Roys (D-Madison), who became tearful as she spoke, said she wouldn’t be at the press conference if not for those that provide care for her children, and that if Republicans eliminate the program, it would have drastic consequences for people across the state.

“It means we will lose at least a quarter of our child care slots.” Roys said. “It means that child care workers who are already some of the lowest-paid workers in any industry — wages averaging \$11, \$12, \$13 an hour — will be paid even less. Even fewer people will be able to afford to go into a career that they love and that they’re good at and that often require degrees. But what’s most likely going to happen is that that gap is going to be too big and people are going to have to drop out of the workforce.”

According to a report by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and UW-Madison Institute for Research on Poverty, over 60% of child care providers have indicated that they will need to raise tuition if the program ends and 32% of providers are considering leaving their jobs or closing their programs in the future.

“If they end this program, if they kill it in this building today, I guarantee you, we are going to have mass daycare closures,” Roys said.

It’s unclear whether Republicans on the committee plan to dedicate funding to the program. The committee was scheduled to meet Thursday afternoon to take action on the budget for the Department of Children and Families, Department of Health Services and the Department of Military Affairs, but the last several sessions have been delayed by hours.