



Hello!

This election year, there is a growing sense of urgency around child care. Voters are increasingly looking to candidates and policymakers to address the serious child care challenges facing working families, local businesses, and their communities.

Child care is a national issue with profound local implications. Its importance resonates across all demographics—party affiliation, age, gender, race, and geography. This is undeniably a breakthrough issue.

Access to affordable, quality child care is not a luxury for working families – it’s a necessity. Quality early learning and child care can be transformative, enhancing a child’s prospects for a brighter future while bolstering working parents and fostering economic stability nationwide.

First Five Years Fund (FFYF) is here as a resource for you. FFYF works with lawmakers and elected officials to build and prioritize bipartisan support for child care and early learning programs at the federal level. Our team can provide state-specific data, tested messages, polling, updates on current legislation and more; please feel free to contact us at mail@ffyf.org or 202.730.0943 to talk more.

Sincerely,

Sarah Rittling

Executive Director, First Five Years Fund

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CHILD CARE CHALLENGES

Working families need support with child care. In the United States today, 26.8 million people – or one out of every six – rely on child care so they can work or go to school.

But child care can be hard to find and even harder to afford. And when families can't find or afford child care, it's a problem for everyone. Parents miss work or have to drop out of the workforce entirely. Employers are left scrambling to fill vacancies. And these problems have a devastating impact on the overall economy.

With affordable, quality child care, however, parents have options and peace of mind that their little ones are safe and cared for while they are at work or school. Employers can rely on a stable, steady workforce. Local economies are stronger. And, best of all, young children have the chance to build cognitive and social skills during this critical period for learning and growth. Here's a look at child care today:

NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT



- **15 million** children ages 5 and under in the United States today have all available parents in the workforce.
- The average cost of child care in the United States last year was **\$11,582**.
- **89% of voters want candidates to** have a plan to help working parents afford quality child care, including **82% of Trump voters and 99% of Democratic voters**.
- According to recent studies, child care challenges cost the United States economy an estimated \$122 billion a year.

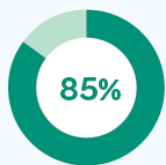
Voters make a strong connection between child care and a strong economy, with 68% of all voters saying **access to high-quality, affordable child care is “essential/very important” to strengthening the economy**.

CHILD CARE SOLUTIONS

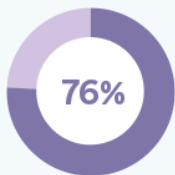
Federal lawmakers can make a real difference to support working families. Pairing tax reform with robust federal funding would help connect more working families with affordable, high-quality child care while ensuring greater economic stability across the country.

- **We need more robust funding for child care and early learning to better support working families with young children.** Every year, millions of children from birth through age five benefit from an array of federal early learning and care programs including the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start and Early Head Start, PDG B-5, and more. These programs, which have long enjoyed bipartisan support, foster the care and healthy development of children (prioritizing those from low-income families) and make child care more affordable and accessible. [Click here to learn more about federal funding.](#)
- **Updating [three provisions](#) of the U.S. tax code would help more working families afford the child care they rely on to go to work.** These provisions are designed to help offset the high cost of child care, but they are currently limited in reach. There are several bipartisan options in Congress to expand their ability to help working parents access child care. [Click here to learn about the federal tax code and child care.](#)
- **Businesses of all sizes are connecting some of their workforce and bottom line struggles back to child care challenges.** Employers and businesses suffer when parents miss work or have to drop out of the workforce entirely. This is a rare issue where Democrats and Republicans agree on the problem and the solution - and are crafting legislation together to address it. [Read more about opportunities here.](#)

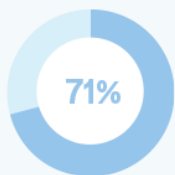
VOTER SUPPORT FOR SOLUTIONS



FEDERAL FUNDING: 85% of voters support increasing federal funding to the states which allows them to expand their child care programs (known as CCDBG).



TAX CODE: 76% of voters support increasing the federal child care tax credit (CDCTC).



BUSINESSES: 71% of small business owners think that access to high-quality, affordable child care is essential or important to strengthening the economy and helping workers.



KEY MESSAGES

As an issue, advancing child care affordability and quality connects with a broad set of key demographics. These points resonate strongly with Democrats, Republicans, and Independents: Messages that **underscore parent choice, alleviating the financial strain on working families** and, above all, **the impact quality care has on young children as they build cognitive and social skills during this critical period.**

MESSAGE 1: Child care provides a strong foundation for growing children.

Just like the foundation of a house, children's brains are built from the ground up - studies prove that the vast majority of brain development happens in the first three years of life. Building a strong foundation when they're young is critically important. Just like with a house, if someone has to go back and fix the foundation, it is more costly and problematic. It's the same way with children, if we don't invest in their first three-to-five years of life.

**TESTED HIGHEST
AMONG
DEMOCRATS,
INDEPENDENTS**

Message 2: Child care has a serious impact on working parents and the economy.

Parents with reliable, quality care miss fewer work days, are more productive, and are better able to provide for their families. The U.S. economy loses an estimated \$122 billion annually due to parents missing work, lost productivity, and lost revenue related to child care issues.

**TESTED HIGHEST
AMONG
REPUBLICANS**

Message 3: Child care challenges cause many working families to take on debt.

Working parents in the United States are going into debt to pay for child care, and almost 3 in 10 parents have had to choose between paying for child care or paying their rent or mortgage on time.

**TESTED HIGHEST
AMONG MOMS,
PARENTS WITH
KIDS 5 & UNDER**

POLLING DATA

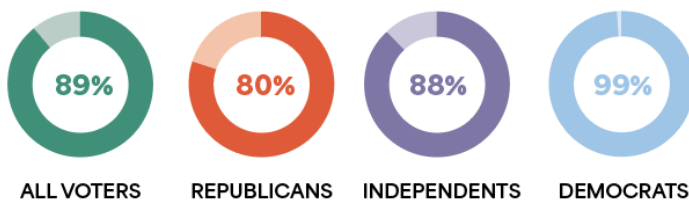
A new poll conducted on behalf of First Five Years Fund by the bipartisan research team of New Bridge Strategies (R) and Hart Research (D) found that, in this election year, voters by overwhelming margins want candidates to have a plan to address child care challenges in the United States.

The poll, which surveyed 1,000 registered voters nationwide and 530 registered voters in Senate swing states (**Arizona, Maryland, Montana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Nevada**), found voters make a strong connection between expanding access to quality child care and a strong economy. And across all demographics, voters expressed strong support for solutions including increasing funding going to states to expand child care options and modernizing the tax system to support child care and early learning.

Below are key findings. The more detailed deck from the pollsters can also be found [here](#).

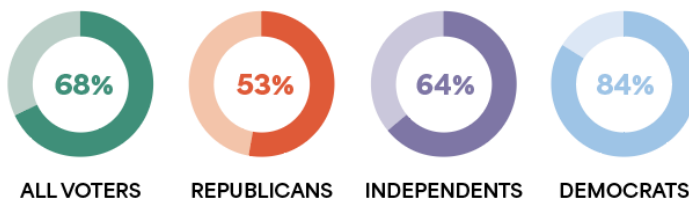
VOTERS WANT CANDIDATES TO HAVE A PLAN

In this election year, voters put a **high premium on candidates who have a plan** to help working parents afford quality child care.



VOTERS SAY CHILD CARE IS ESSENTIAL/VERY IMPORTANT TO THE ECONOMY

Voters across the political spectrum make a strong connection between child care and a strong economy, with **68% saying access to high-quality, affordable child care is “essential” or “very important” to strengthening the economy.**



VOTERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE FOR CANDIDATES WHO SUPPORT SOLUTIONS

A strong majority of both national and swing state voters say they'd be more likely to vote for a **candidate who supports increased federal funding to the states to expand child care.**

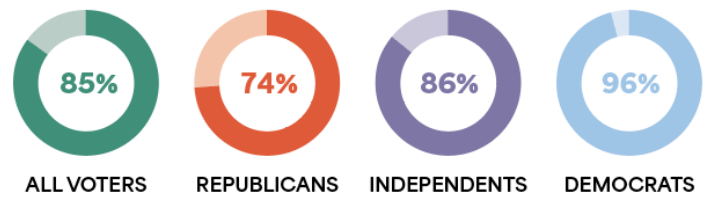
85% ALL VOTERS
85% SWING STATE VOTERS
(AZ, MD, MT, OH, PA, NV)

VOTERS SUPPORT POLICIES TO STRENGTHEN CHILD CARE

Voters overwhelmingly **support policies that help working families** with young children access affordable, quality child care.

Increased Federal Funding for States

This includes enormous support for increasing federal funding to states so they can expand child care programs and options (called the Child Care Development Block Grant).



This strong support extends to those likely to **vote for either presidential candidate.**

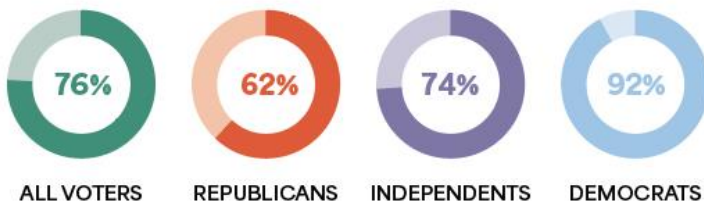
75% TRUMP VOTERS
94% BIDEN VOTERS



Voters by overwhelming margins want candidates to have a plan to address child care challenges in the United States.

MODERNIZING TAX BENEFITS

There is strong support for modernizing the tax code to strengthen child care. **A large majority of voters (76%) support increasing the federal child care tax credit (CDCTC)**, the tax credit specifically designed to help ease the burden of child care costs for working families. This includes:



This strong support extends to those likely to **vote for either presidential candidate**.

62% TRUMP VOTERS

90% BIDEN VOTERS

And there is strong support for **expanding federal tax credits to employers** to encourage them to provide child care benefits.

84% ALL VOTERS

84% SWING STATE VOTERS

(AZ, MD, MT, OH, PA, NV)

CONCERNS OVER CHILD CARE REMAIN HIGH

Voters are just as likely now as they were during the height of the pandemic to say **Congress and the White House should make expanding access to quality child care a top or high priority**.

54% VOTERS APRIL 2024

51% VOTERS SEPTEMBER 2020

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Voters see expanding access to quality child care as something **very important to our economy** and an issue the next Congress and president should make a high priority.
- Voters are concerned about the impacts a lack of access to affordable, quality child care can have on **children's education and development** as well as **families' economic prospects**.
- Voters overwhelmingly support policies that help families with children access child care, including **increasing funding to states** to expand their existing child care programs and **increasing the federal child care tax credit**.
- Top messages in support of increasing federal funding for child care and early learning include giving children a **strong foundation**, **reducing financial strain** on families paying for child care, **addressing low wages for child care workers**, and overcoming the **limits placed on parents** in the workplace when they cannot find quality, affordable care.





CHILD CARE & EARLY LEARNING IN THE UNITED STATES*

In the United States, federal and state early learning opportunities serve more than 4,218,475 children and families,¹ or 18% of children ages 5 and under.²

High quality child care and early learning programs support child development and offer parents peace of mind while they work or attend school.

Unfortunately, the demand for quality care far outweighs the supply, so many families struggle to access and afford the care options they want or need. While there are several federally funded programs that provide working families with access to quality child care opportunities, limited funding leaves many eligible children unserved. The impacts of these challenges extend beyond families and carry over to the workplace. As a direct result, the national economy loses **\$122 billion annually** in the form of lost earnings, productivity, and revenue.³

Below is a list of existing child care and early learning programs which together form a mix delivery system that supports parental choice and aims to meet children's individual needs. These programs have unique eligibility requirements and service delivery models. However, at current funding levels, each only reaches a fraction of eligible families.

STATE OF CHILD CARE IN THE U.S.

22,882,579

Children 5 & Under⁴

65%

Children 5 & Under with All Available Parents in the Workforce⁵

92,786

Licensed Child Care Centers in 2023 (+1204 compared to 2022)⁶

94,227

Licensed Family Child Care Homes in 2023 (-728 compared to 2022)⁷

\$14,257

Annual Price of Center-Based Infant Care (\$1,188 per month)⁸

\$10,456

Annual Price of Home-Based Infant Care (\$871 per month)⁹

\$121,394

Median Income of Married-Couple Family¹⁰

12%

Portion of Income Spent by a Married-Couple Family on Center-Based Infant Care¹¹

\$36,492

Median Income of Single-Parent Family¹²

39%

Portion of Income Spent by a Single-Parent Family on Center-Based Infant Care¹³

CHILD CARE & DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CCDBG)

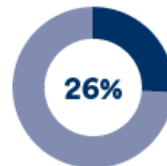
6,280,772 CHILDREN 5 & UNDER ELIGIBLE¹⁴
839,226 CHILDREN 5 & UNDER SERVED¹⁵



13% ELIGIBLE CHILDREN 5 & UNDER SERVED¹⁵

HEAD START

2,019,026 CHILDREN ELIGIBLE¹⁶
531,450 CHILDREN ENROLLED¹⁷



26% ELIGIBLE CHILDREN SERVED¹⁷

EARLY HEAD START

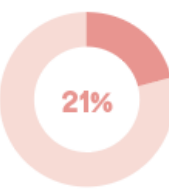
2,019,026 CHILDREN ELIGIBLE¹⁶
206,316 CHILDREN ENROLLED¹⁸



10% ELIGIBLE CHILDREN SERVED¹⁸

STATE-FUNDED PRE-K

1,606,415 CHILDREN ENROLLED¹⁹



21% 3-AND 4-YEAR-OLDS SERVED¹⁹

MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START

20,169 CHILDREN ENROLLED²⁰

MATERNAL, INFANT, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD HOME VISITING (MIECHV)

68,917 FAMILIES SERVED²¹

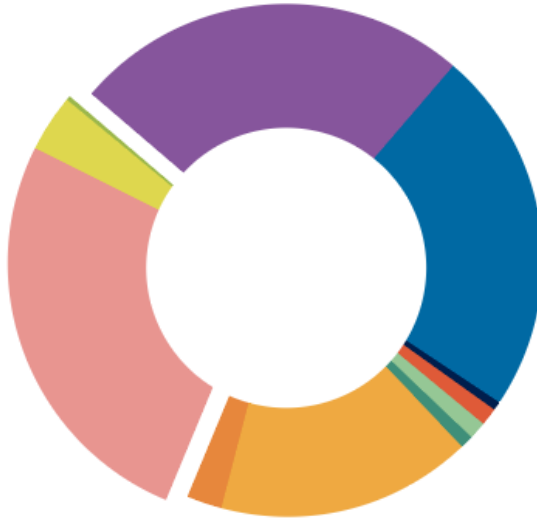
IDEA PART C (EARLY INTERVENTION)

438,988 CHILDREN SERVED²²

IDEA PART B, SEC. 619 (PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION)

527,163 CHILDREN SERVED²³

FEDERAL AND STATE CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING FUNDING IN THE U.S.



Note: Amounts reflect total program funding. In some cases these levels include funding that is allocated to technical assistance, research and evaluation, and other administrative supports.

\$11.27B	CCDBG and Mandatory Funds
\$10.25B	Head Start and Early Head Start (includes AIAN HS/EHS and MSHS)
\$300M	PDG B-5
\$428.4M	MIECHV
\$514.8M	IDEA Part C
\$416.6M	IDEA Part B, Sec. 619
\$7.1B	TANF Early Care and Education
\$976.2M	TANF Transferred to CCDBG

STATE INVESTMENT

11.7B	State-Funded Pre-K
\$1.6B	CCDBG State Match
\$89.2M	PDG B-5 State Match

ELEMENTS OF PROGRAM QUALITY

Program quality varies substantially within and across states.

Quality child care and early learning relies on a strong workforce, yet early childhood educators have some of the lowest paying jobs in the U.S., making it difficult to recruit and retain educators. Child care workers earn **\$14.60 per hour (\$30,370 annually)**.

Teacher-child ratios are crucial for ensuring safety, quality, and individual attention. Ratio requirements for licensed center-based care vary significantly across the United States:

- **Infant** 1:3 to 1:6
- **Toddler** 1:4 to 1:12 for age 2
- **Preschool** 1:8 to 1:20 for age 4

Only 5 state pre-K programs met 10/10 of NIEER's Quality Standards Benchmarks, which represent minimum standards to support quality preschool programs.

Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5) is a competitive federal grant designed to improve states' early childhood systems.

- **In January 2023, 42 states were awarded grants (21 "planning" grants and 21 "renewal" grants).** This round prioritized investments in the child care and early learning workforce. The renewal grantees are implementing their strategic plans, through efforts like statewide compensation reforms and expanding professional development opportunities.
- **In May 2024, PDG B-5 Renewal Grant funding opportunity was announced.** It adds priorities around bolstering infant and toddler services and supporting children's social-emotional development and mental health.

CHILD AND DEPENDENT CARE TAX CREDIT (CDCTC)

The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) directly helps working parents offset the cost of child care.

In its current form, the credit only reaches a small percentage of families and has been swiftly outpaced by the escalating cost of child care as it lacks any adjustment for inflation.

Last permanently updated in 2001, the current credit averages \$500-\$600 a year.

CDCTC IN THE U.S. BY TAX YEAR

2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5,113,710: Number of taxpayers claiming the CDCTC • \$552: Average credit
2021	<p><i>The CDCTC was temporarily expanded and made refundable for one year in response to the pandemic.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6,345,380: Number of taxpayers claiming the CDCTC (an additional 1,231,670 from 2020) • \$2,099: Average Credit (an additional \$1,548 from 2020, on average)
TODAY	<p><i>The temporary expansion expired; the CDCTC reverted back to 2001 levels.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$500-600: Average credit

NOTE: Major provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 (TCJA) expire at the end of 2025, giving Congress the opportunity to modernize the CDCTC and other tax provisions to better help working families offset the cost of quality child care.



Scan or click the QR code for full references and links. For more information contact FFYF at mail@ffyf.org.

*This fact sheet includes data from 50 states and Washington, D.C.



Stay Connected!

This resource has been created to help candidates for office better understand this important issue—both from a policy and political perspective. First Five Years Fund is here as a trusted resource for your campaign, with more data-tested messages and ideas for further elevating child care and early learning in a way that effectively reaches voters across the political spectrum.

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