

## **No child care teachers, no work: PA must invest to stop economic bleeding**

Pennsylvania's child care teachers are the workforce behind the workforce. When they are in the classroom, parents can go to work with confidence, knowing that their children are safe and learning.

However, child care teachers are leaving the profession making it difficult for parents to find the care that gets them to work every day. This historic teacher shortage is depleting child care providers of qualified staff, forcing them to enroll fewer children or even close their doors.

It's no secret that child care is expensive, but affordability tells only half the story. The other half of this tale is about the lack of child care availability.

More than 25,000 Pennsylvania children don't have child care because at least 3,000 child care teaching jobs are unfilled – and that finding comes from a survey of only 17 percent of Pennsylvania's licensed child care programs. Surely, the real-world numbers are much higher.

Every community suffers the consequences. The lack of available child care costs Pennsylvania's economy \$6.65 billion annually in lost wages, productivity, and revenue. When families can't find child care, they can't go to work, and when they can't work, businesses can't produce the products and services that make money and create more jobs.

What's going on? It's a matter of pay. There is no county in Pennsylvania where child care teachers can make a livable wage. They earn an average of \$15.15 an hour, when they could easily earn \$20 an hour or more in retail or fast food – and those are fields that don't require credentials just to get started.

Those other, higher-paying fields also require less responsibility and fewer specialized skills, because caring for children demands trust and intensive knowledge of early childhood development.

In this environment, even the most committed child care teachers are leaving the field, making the difficult decision to find better-paying jobs so they can support their own families.

Fortunately, Pennsylvania lawmakers hold a solution in their hands. Last year, they cooperated in bipartisan fashion to enhance tax credits for families and employers, easing the financial sting of care that can cost \$14,000 a year for infants and toddlers – almost as much as public college tuition.

It's time to leverage that investment and address the other half of the story. For the 2025-26 state budget, Gov. Shapiro has proposed a critical \$55 million investment for a Child Care Teacher Recruitment and Retention Initiative.

This lifeline would stabilize the child care workforce by providing about \$1,000 per educator to Pennsylvania's subsidized child care providers. It's not a complete fix, but it's an important start and, perhaps more importantly, an acknowledgement that we can't allow this situation to fester.

In fact, Pennsylvanians overwhelmingly agree, in bipartisan fashion, with 83 percent of voters supporting state funding to recruit and retain child care teachers. This is probably because they have experienced the challenges of finding child care or have watched their own families and friends struggle.

[More than 70 Chambers of Commerce statewide also back this common-sense initiative.](#) In public letters to lawmakers, we note that child care bottlenecks are preventing us from filling open positions. Without people, we can't generate the profits that we invest back in jobs and our communities.

Nationwide, 18 states of all political stripes have invested in replenishing the child care teacher workforce. Without action, Pennsylvania risks falling behind in the race for economic competitiveness.

Pennsylvania lawmakers step up whenever they can support the intertwined interests of families and businesses, and we call on them now to back this initiative. A \$55 million investment in child care teacher recruitment and retention would be a bipartisan, sensible down payment on a more economically vibrant Pennsylvania, where families hold down good jobs and employers find good people.

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