

PRESS RELEASE: Schuylkill Chamber Officials Participate in National Briefing on the Economic Impact of the Child Care Crisis

New national research underscores urgent need for continued federal and state investments in child care sector

WASHINGTON, DC / SCHUYLKILL COUNTY, PA — Robert S. Carl, Jr., President and CEO; and Samantha Chivinski, Executive Vice-President of the Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce, joined economists and business leaders from across the country today at a national briefing on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. examining the escalating economic toll of America's child care crisis.

The event marked the release of a new ReadyNation report finding that the lack of access to affordable, high-quality child care now costs the U.S. economy \$172 billion every year in lost productivity, earnings, and tax revenue. The analysis expands earlier research to include families with children under age five, capturing the full economic impact prior to kindergarten.

Carl and Chivinski participated in the panel discussion as representatives of a coalition of nearly 75 Pennsylvania-based local chambers of commerce to highlight how child care shortages affect workforce availability and economic growth in counties like Schuylkill and across the commonwealth.

“Employers across Schuylkill County consistently tell us that child care challenges limit their ability to recruit and retain workers,” Carl said following the event. “When families cannot find stable, affordable care, businesses feel it immediately through absenteeism, reduced productivity, and constrained growth.”

The ReadyNation report underscores that instability in the child care system is driven in large part by workforce shortages, low wages, and high turnover among early childhood educators. These challenges are particularly acute in rural regions, where providers struggle to remain open and families often have few or no alternatives.

“The Schuylkill Chamber began working on this issue three years ago, with a chamber-led survey to our county's working parents,” Chivinski shared at the briefing. “The results of that survey were eye-opening: 63 percent of local parents reported being stuck on child care waitlists, with some facing delays as long as three years; 79 percent of families did not have a backup plan if their child care provider closed its doors; 84 percent of parents said they would be faced with a hardship to keep their jobs if their child care provider closed.”

The recently passed FY 2026 federal funding bill included modest increases in federal funding for child care and early learning through the Child Care and Development Block

Grant (CCDBG) program and Head Start while funding the Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (PDG B-5) program at the same levels as FY 2025. Participants praised the bipartisan support from Congress that led to these increases but cautioned that additional investment is needed to stabilize the sector and address the needs of parents, businesses, and child care providers.

A Call to Action for State Policymakers

In Pennsylvania as part of his proposed 26-27 state budget, Governor Josh Shapiro boosted the new Child Care Teacher Recruitment and Retention initiative by an additional \$10 million, bringing the total appropriation to \$35 million. The initial \$25 million investment made in the current fiscal year provides \$450 to each licensed child care teacher and paraprofessional participating in the Child Care Works program. With this additional investment, the benefit would grow to \$630 per teacher. The state budget proposal also includes an increase of \$9.5 million for state-funded pre-k programs: \$7.5 million for Pre-K Counts and \$2 million for the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP).

The Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce supports and encourages the passage of a final state budget that includes these additional allocations, which will help ensure competitive wages, professional development, and long-term sustainability for early learning providers.

“Investing in child care teachers is an economic development strategy,” Carl said. “When Pennsylvania supports the professionals who care for and educate young children, we support working families, local employers, and the future workforce.”