

Child Care Challenges Undermine Louisiana's Strength

High-quality child care can help grow the economy, increase public safety, and enhance national security.

High-quality child care can strengthen the current and future workforce, contribute to a strong economy and public safety, and enhance national security. However, Louisiana's working parents know how difficult it is to find child care that's accessible, affordable, and truly beneficial to their child's development during one of the most crucial periods of life, while Louisiana employers know the negative economic impact of these child care challenges.

A study found that the child care crisis in Louisiana has an annual cost of more than \$1.1 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue. These costs impact working parents, employers, and taxpayers.

The stakes are enormously high for the many Louisiana families who depend on parents' employment, as well as for children, who depend on nurturing, stimulating environments for healthy brain development during the first five years of life.

But there are other consequences. Our national security relies on qualified young adults who are ready, willing, and able to serve in the U.S. military. However, educational deficits, health issues, and behavior problems



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(substance abuse and crime) currently prevent 75 percent of Louisiana youth from qualifying for service.¹ Early brain development sets the stage for children's future success. Without improvements to the child care system, our nation risks having an even smaller recruiting pool in the future.

Further, Louisiana's jails are full of people serving time for serious and costly crimes. It doesn't have to be that way. Providing children with high-quality early learning opportunities can set them on the path to success in school, so they will be ready for college and careers, and less likely to later engage in criminal activity.

Louisiana lawmakers must improve the affordability and availability of quality child care by investing \$25 million in funding for the Child Care Assistance Program for Families (CCAP) and ensure that essential workers responding to the pandemic can continue to access the program. Action and investments now can improve the experiences of Louisiana children today and strengthen our state in the years to come.



Most parents of young children are in the workforce and need child care

In Louisiana, there are approximately 307,000 children ages birth to five and 69 percent of mothers with children in this age range work outside the home.² As a result, many very young children are in child care.³

The current child care system does not meet the needs of Louisiana's children, families, or employers

Several interrelated challenges render the child care system less than optimal:

- **Access:** Forty-two percent of all Louisiana residents live in a child care desert, an area in which there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots.⁴ Availability is especially limited for families who live in rural areas, have infants and toddlers, or work evening and night shifts.⁵
- **Affordability:** Infant care in a Louisiana center averages \$8,580 per year, similar to public college tuition (\$9,550).⁶ Child care, particularly for infants and toddlers, is unaffordable for many families.
- **Quality:** In 2015, a statewide early childhood quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) was established in Louisiana, covering all publicly-funded child care, pre-K, and Head Start.⁷ By 2017-2018, more than 8 out of 10 publicly-funded early care and education programs were rated proficient or above. However, until recently, infant classrooms were not included in the system.

Beyond the negative effects on children and families, problems with child care inflict a huge economic toll. A study of working

parents of children age four and under in Louisiana found that when families do not have the child care they need, parents' work productivity falls, resulting in costs to parents, their employers, and, ultimately, taxpayers.⁸ These child care challenges exact an annual cost of \$1.1 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue in Louisiana. A national study by ReadyNation had similar results, with child care challenges, for infants and toddlers alone, costing our nation \$57 billion each year.⁹

Research shows that high-quality child care supports children's cognitive, social, and emotional development

For example, a longitudinal study of more than 1,300 children found that children in higher-quality child care were better prepared for school at age 4 compared to children in lower-quality child care. At age 15, they were still performing slightly above their peers and had significantly lower levels of behavior problems.¹⁰

To achieve high-quality, child care providers must be well-trained, both before they start teaching and once they are on the job, and adequately compensated.¹¹ However, early



childhood teachers in Louisiana earn much less (average annual wages \$20,320 for child care providers and \$29,100 for preschool teachers) than kindergarten teachers (\$45,200).¹²

Policymakers should promote access to affordable, high-quality child care

Louisiana parents often have difficulty finding affordable, high-quality child care. Quality care has long-term benefits for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Conversely, lack of such care has high costs, both for children and families, and for our state's economy. The Louisiana Child Care Assistance Program for Families (CCAP) provides financial assistance to parents with low incomes while they are working or attending school that allows them to access high-quality child care. Louisiana policymakers must promote families' access to this program by providing \$25 million in state funding for CCAP and ensuring that essential workers responding to the pandemic can continue to access the program. Support for high-quality child care is an investment in our future national security, public safety, and economic well-being.

75%
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military service.

Endnotes

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- 4 Malik, R., Hamm, K., Schochet, L., et al. (2018, December 6). America's child care deserts in 2018. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/12/06/461643/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/>
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- 12 Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019, May). State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates Louisiana https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_la.htm#39-0000

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