

# Child Care Challenges Undermine Missouri's Strength

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



## Acknowledgements

**Council for a Strong America** is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, faith leaders, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

*Supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals, and corporations.*

### **Author:**

Sandra Bishop, Ph.D., Chief Research Officer

### **Contributors:**

Megan Adamczewski, Deputy Director, Mission: Readiness

Michael Burke, Associate Director, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

Daniel Frank, Co-Global Director, ReadyNation

Tom Garrett, Director, Communications

Mariana Galloway, Art Director

**September 2021**

©2021 Council For A Strong America. All Rights Reserved.



A photograph of a man with a beard and blonde hair holding a baby. The man is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The baby is looking at the camera and has a pacifier in its mouth. The baby is wearing a dark sweater and has a small bow in its hair. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with a window.

**71%**  
**of Missouri children**  
**under age 6 have**  
**working parents**

## Summary

High-quality child care can strengthen the current and future workforce, contribute to public safety, and enhance national security. However, Missouri'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. Additionally, Missouri employers know the negative economic impact of these child care challenges. COVID-19 has exacerbated these challenges.

Our 2019 ReadyNation national study found that the infant-toddler child care crisis has an annual cost of \$57 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue. These costs impact working parents, employers, and taxpayers. As this study focused just on infants and toddlers, it severely underestimated the economic impact of shortcomings in the overall child care system.

The stakes are enormously high for the many Missouri families who depend on parents' employment, as well as for children, who depend on nurturing, stimulating environments for healthy brain development during the first three years of life to set them on the path to productive lives.

But there are other consequences. Missouri jails are full of people serving time for serious and costly crimes. It doesn't have to be that way. Providing at-risk children with high-quality early learning opportunities can help reduce the human and fiscal costs of crime in the future, by setting children up for success in school and beyond.

Further, 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 (substance abuse and crime) currently prevent 71 percent of Missouri

youth from qualifying for service.<sup>1</sup> Healthy 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.

The recent infusion of federal funds through the American Rescue Plan and other packages provides Missouri with an opportunity to shore up its child care system to better meet the needs of children and families. Our state should use these federal funds to stabilize child care programs, strengthen the early childhood workforce, and improve the quality of child care. Action and innovation now can improve the experiences of Missouri children today and strengthen our state in the years to come.

### **Most parents are in the workforce and need child care**

In Missouri, there are approximately 444,000 children under age 6, and 71 percent of these children have all available parents in the workforce.<sup>2</sup> As a result, many very young children are in child care—estimates suggest that 59 percent of Missouri children ages birth to 5 are in non-parental care for more than 10 hours per week.<sup>3</sup> Thus, child care settings are an important environment for children's development.

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

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

- **Access:** Prior to the pandemic, more than half (54 percent) of all Missouri residents lived in a child care desert, an area in which there are more than three times as

“ Ensuring that our children have enriching and productive places to go while their parents are working is key to maintaining safe communities.”



**Sheriff Mark Owen**  
Platte County Sheriff's Office

many children as licensed child care slots.<sup>4</sup> Availability is especially limited for families who live in rural areas, have infants and toddlers, or work evening and night shifts.<sup>5</sup>

- **Affordability:** Infant care in a Missouri center averages \$9,880 per year, more than public college tuition (\$8,670).<sup>6</sup> This cost represents 40 percent of the annual income of the average single parent in Missouri. Child care, particularly for infants and toddlers, is unaffordable for many families.
- **Quality:** The quality of child care in Missouri is largely unknown, as the state is one of just seven states that does not yet have a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).<sup>7</sup> A pilot system, the Quality Assurance Report, is currently being implemented.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the negative effects on children and families, problems with child care inflict a huge economic toll. Our 2019 ReadyNation national study of working parents of children under age 3 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.<sup>9</sup> These child care challenges exact an annual cost of \$57 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue. The estimate for Missouri is \$873 million per year in losses due to the child care crisis for infants and toddlers alone.

### **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.<sup>10</sup> The finding about behavior problems is particularly important, given the link between behavior problems in adolescence and the risk of later criminal behavior.

To achieve the high quality necessary to positively impact child development, child care providers must be well-trained, both before they start teaching and once they are on the job, and adequately compensated.<sup>11</sup> However, early childhood teachers in Missouri earn much less (average annual wages \$25,150 for child care providers and \$34,470 for preschool teachers) than kindergarten teachers (\$53,690).<sup>12</sup>



**“ We cannot overlook the significance of a child's brain development early in life. If we nurture our kids from a young age, they are more likely to succeed in life.”**



**Chief of Police  
Paul Williams**  
Springfield Police Department



## Conclusion

Missouri 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, for children and families, our state's economy and public safety, and our national security.

With the passage of the American Rescue Plan, estimates indicate that Missouri will receive nearly \$722 million in child care relief funds: \$278 million in additional CCDBG dollars and \$444 million in child care stabilization funding.<sup>13</sup> This is in addition to funds to support child care and early learning provided through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. Missouri should utilize these funds to ensure that more families can access affordable child care programs, providers can recruit and retain talented staff, and programs are high-quality. To achieve these goals, our state should use federal funds to provide grants to child care providers so that they can remain open, recruit and retain staff, and provide staff with adequate compensation and benefits. Missouri should also consider providing incentives to providers to accept children whose families utilize child care subsidies, and to improve the quality of their programs. Missouri must capitalize on this moment by making investments that protect and strengthen the child care sector, so that parents are better able to access affordable, high-quality care.

Missouri policymakers must promote families' access to affordable, high-quality child care. Support for high-quality child care is an investment in our future public safety, national security, and economic well-being.

## Endnotes

- 1** Department of Defense. (2017, November). Qualified Military Available (QMA). Data acquired from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Also see Jordan, M. (2014, June). Recruits' ineligibility tests the military. Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/recruits-ineligibility-tests-the-military-1403909945>
- 2** KIDSCOUNT (2019). <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>
- 3** Committee for Economic Development (2019). Child care in state economies. <https://www.ced.org/assets/reports/childcareimpact/181104%20CCSE%20Report%20Jan30.pdf>
- 4** Center for American Progress (2019, September 16). Early learning in the United States: 2019. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2019/09/16/474487/early-learning-united-states-2019/>
- 5** Howe, S. & Oncken, L. (n.d.) The third pillar of care: Availability. New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/care-report/third-pillar-care-availability/>
- 6** Child Care Aware (2019). The US and the high price of child care. <https://www.childcareaware.org/our-issues/research/the-us-and-the-high-price-of-child-care-2019/>
- 7** The Hunt Institute (2020). The early childhood landscape in Missouri. <http://www.hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/MISSOURI-2020.pdf>
- 8** Child Care Work Group (2019, June). Ensuring safe and quality child care in Missouri. <https://health.mo.gov/safety/childcare/pdf/cc-work-group-report.pdf>
- 9** ReadyNation. (2019, January). Want to grow the economy? Fix the child care crisis. ReadyNation. <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/780-want-to-grow-the-economy-fix-the-child-care-crisis>
- 10** Vandell, D. L., Belsky, J., Burchinal, M., et al. (2010). Do effects of early child care extend to age 15 years? Results from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development. Child Development, 81, 737-756. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2938040/>
- 11** Connors-Tadros, L. & Daily, S. (2018, April). Strategies to improve Instructional practice in early childhood settings [http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2ceelo\\_fast\\_fact\\_LA-Instruction-LCT\\_041218\\_final.pdf](http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2ceelo_fast_fact_LA-Instruction-LCT_041218_final.pdf) ; Child Trends (2018, April). High-quality preschool can support healthy development and learning. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/high-quality-preschool-can-support-healthy-development-and-learning>
- 12** Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020, May). State occupational employment and wage estimates, Missouri. [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_mo.htm](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_mo.htm)
- 13** The Center for Law and Social Policy. (2021, March 10). Child care relief funding in American Rescue Plan: State-by-state estimates. <https://www.clasp.org/publications/fact-sheet/child-care-estimates-american-rescue-plan>

**Council for a Strong America** is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

1212 New York Avenue NW / Suite 300 / Washington, DC 20005 / 202.464.7005

