

Infant-Toddler Child Care Challenges Undermine Georgia's Strength

High-quality child care can help enhance national security and increase public safety

High-quality child care can contribute to a strong economy and public safety, and enhance national security. However, Georgia's working parents with infants or toddlers 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.

The stakes are enormously high for the many Georgia 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.

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 (substance abuse and crime) currently prevent 73 percent of Georgia youth from qualifying for service.¹ There is scientific consensus that 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 nation's infant-toddler child care crisis has an annual cost of \$57 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue.”

Further, Georgia's jails are full of people serving time for serious and costly crimes. It doesn't have to be that way. Providing at-risk kids with high-quality early learning opportunities, including child care, can help reduce the human and fiscal costs of crime in the future.

Georgia lawmakers must protect and expand programs that enhance the affordability and availability of quality child care—particularly for infants and toddlers—by expanding the child care subsidy program and providing incentives to providers to increase quality. Action and innovation now can improve the experiences of Georgia children today and strengthen our state in the years to come.



Most parents of infants and toddlers are in the workforce and need child care

The majority of American parents with very young children are now in the workforce. Of the 14 million American parents with children under the age of three, 11 million —78 percent—are working.² In Georgia, there are approximately 395,000 children under age three and 63 percent of mothers with infants work outside the home.³ As a result, many very young children are in child care.⁴

The current child care system does not meet the needs of Georgia families

Several interrelated challenges render the child care system less than optimal for children and families:

- **Access:** In Georgia, 15 percent of all residents—1.5 million people—live in a child care desert, defined as an area in which there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots.⁵ Availability is especially limited for families who live in rural areas, have infants and toddlers, or work evening and night shifts.⁶
- **Affordability:** Infant care in a center in Georgia averages \$8,327 per year, compared to \$8,573 for public college tuition.⁷ This cost represents 36 percent of the annual income of the average single parent in Georgia. Child care, particularly for infants and toddlers, is unaffordable for many families, especially those with low incomes.
- **Quality:** 75 percent of child care providers participate in Georgia's Quality Rated system, but just 36 percent have been rated to date.⁸ So the quality of care of many providers is not yet known.

Beyond the negative effects on children and families, problems with child care inflict a huge economic toll in Georgia: \$1.75 billion in lost economic activity every year, as well as more than \$105 million in lost state income tax revenue annually.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

High-quality child care is critical to ensuring our children get the best start possible, putting them on a path to success that can ultimately lead away from crime and toward productive citizenship and solid careers, including in the military if they choose to serve.

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Policymakers should promote access to affordable, high-quality infant and toddler care

Georgia parents, particularly those with infants and toddlers, 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 to our state's economy. Federal, state and local policymakers must promote families' access to affordable, high-quality child care, particularly for infants and toddlers. In particular, Georgia lawmakers should expand the child care subsidy program and offer providers incentives to increase the quality of care. Support for high-quality child care is an investment in our future national security, public safety, and economic well-being.

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- 2** U. S. Census Bureau (2018). Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) of the Current Population Survey.
- 3** KIDSCOUNT (2017). <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/> ; Zero to Three (2015). State baby facts. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1139-georgia-state-baby-facts>
- 4** Child Trends (2016, May). DataBank: Child care. http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/21_Child_Care.pdf
- 5** 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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- 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/>

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

