



Infant-Toddler Child Care Increases Louisiana's Success

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

Acknowledgements

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Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

Thousands of police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and violence survivors protecting public safety by promoting solutions that steer kids away from crime

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earnings, productivity,
and revenue due to
the infant-toddler child
care crisis nationwide

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 lacks accessible, affordable child care that truly benefits the development of the number of children who need it. This not only negatively impacts parents and employers, but the entire community at large. Our new national study found that the infant-toddler child care crisis costs the nation \$57 billion annually in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue. These costs impact working parents, employers, and taxpayers.

Louisiana's families benefit first and foremost from child care, as it supports parents' employment and provides children with a nurturing, stimulating environment for healthy brain development during the first years of their life. However, child care impacts other areas as well. 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 (such as substance abuse and crime) currently prevent 75 percent of Louisiana youth from qualifying for service.¹ Moreover, early brain development sets the stage for children's future academic success. Without improvements to the child care system, our state risks having an even smaller recruiting pool in the future. Further, Louisiana has the second highest incarceration rate in the country.² This could be reduced by providing at-risk children with high-quality early learning opportunities that can help reduce the costs of crime in the future, both to the state and to the individuals involved.

Louisiana lawmakers must continue to support programs that increase the availability of quality child care, especially for infants and

toddlers, and raise the state's reimbursement rates to ensure more Louisiana families are able to afford the service. Action and innovation now can improve the lives of Louisiana's 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

In the state of Louisiana, the majority of mothers with children from infants to adolescents are now in the workforce, and most are employed full time.³ Furthermore, over two-thirds (66 percent) of the state's children under age six have all available parents working outside the home.⁴ Our employees are the backbone of our economy, and supporting our state's growth means supporting the families that make that growth possible. About 73 percent of mothers across Louisiana are now breadwinners or co-breadwinners for their families, meaning their employment contributes substantially to their household's income.⁵ As a result of this dramatic increase in maternal employment over the past several decades, many families rely on childcare and our state simply must work to meet this demand or risk losing employees from its labor force.

Child care provides vital support for early brain development

Child care is pivotal to young children's brain development and in laying a strong foundation for support throughout a child's years in school. During the first three to five years of life, young children's brains develop one million synapses per second, and these are the neural connections that support learning and skills.⁶ Disadvantaged

children can already be 18 months behind their peers when they start kindergarten in both math and literacy abilities, and these gaps can persist for the rest of their schooling.⁷ By college age, African- American or Hispanic children, as well as children from low-income families, are much more likely to receive remedial instruction in math and other subjects, signifying that interventions must start early on.⁸

“An early foundation is critical to ensuring kids have a fair shot at becoming the citizens they aspire to be and that our communities need.”



Nikki Fargas
Head Coach,
LSU Women's Basketball

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:** Nearly half 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.⁹ Availability is especially limited for families who live in rural areas, have

infants and toddlers, or work evening and night shifts.¹⁰ In fact, fewer than 7 percent of birth-to-two-year-olds and less than 33 percent of three-year-olds can access quality care in our state.

- **Affordability:** Over the past 30 years, our nation's child care costs have grown almost 60 percent faster than the average cost growth of food, housing and transportation, indicating the inaffordability of child care.¹¹ In Louisiana, infant care in a center averages around \$7,500 per year, which is similar to the state's public college tuition of \$9,300, and costs 37.9 percent of the annual income of the average single parent.¹²
- **Quality:** Louisiana has made great strides when it comes to integrating its early childhood care and education network by unifying its system and focusing on quality child-teacher interactions, and has been considered a national leader in this front.¹³ These improvements have largely granted high-quality access to four-year-olds, but many kids ages three and under still do not have the same access. Many Louisiana parents are unable to find high-quality child care that allows them to continue working full-time while raising young kids. More quality child care is needed in the state to ensure our youth end up on the right track.

Beyond the negative effects on children and families, problems with child care exact a huge economic toll. Our recent study of working parents of children under age three 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.¹⁴ **These child care challenges**



inflict an annual cost of \$57 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue nationwide. Looking at Louisiana families with children under the age of 5, research found that problems with child care result in a \$1.1 billion loss annually for our state's economy.¹⁵

High-quality child care positively impacts both children's and parents' lives

High quality child care can help improve children's school readiness, as one 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 behavior¹⁶ problems, which may have resulted in lower crime rates, as behavioral issues can be a precursor of deviant or criminal behavior.¹⁶ Another study found that high-quality, full-day child care had a positive impact on children's language development at age two.¹⁷

High-quality child care and education is critical to ensuring our children get the best start possible, as it can increase their academic competence, and reduce their behavioral problems. This puts them on a path to success that can lead away from crime and toward productive citizenship and solid careers, including in the military if they choose to serve. Quality care also supports the current workforce, allowing parents to be productive at work, as women who have access to child care subsidies have been found to be more likely to work more hours, have more stable employment and earn higher incomes.¹⁸

“Investment in kids is an investment in the future. High-quality child care helps put kids on the right path early, benefiting their communities in the long-term.”



Sheriff Greg Champagne
St. Charles Parish

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

Louisiana policymakers should promote access to affordable, high-quality infant and toddler care. Louisiana parents, particularly those with infants and toddlers, often have difficulty finding affordable, high-quality child care. Quality infant and toddler care has long-term benefits for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Conversely, the lack of such care has high costs, both for children and families, and for our state's economy. Federal, state and local policymakers must promote families' access to affordable, high-quality child care, particularly for infants and toddlers. Support for high-quality child care is an investment in our future national security, public safety, and economic well-being.

Endnotes

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