

Counting on Workers Means Counting on Childcare

By Rep. Lee Snodgrass

In the summer of 2022, I personally knocked over 5,000 doors. As I connected with people from across our community, I heard about what issues matter to them and the struggles they face. An issue that stood out to me was access to quality, affordable childcare. I talked to moms and dads and even grandparents who told me their struggles with child care, whether it be waiting lists, expense, lack of flexible hours. I talked to business owners and managers who cited losing good employees to child care issues. One thing was certain— everyone was weary.

In the Fox Cities we are lucky— we have more child care options than some. 70% of Wisconsin is considered a child care desert with virtually no options at all. Still, local providers have long waiting lists and that makes for anxious parents and parents to be. The solutions to the child care crisis are multifaceted, but I know that the Child Care Counts Program made a difference.

The Child Care Counts Program provided the financial stability needed to help over 3,300 providers to stay open, recruit and retain over 22,000 qualified staff, and continue providing high-quality care for over 113,000 kids statewide. The funding allowed centers to pay a more competitive wage to retain staff without raising rates. Guess what fully staffed child care centers mean? Workers not staying home. Grandparents not retiring early. Moms & Dads not choosing who has to leave their job and stay home.

The governor proposed more than \$340 million to provide a permanent investment in the Child Care Counts Program so providers can have the financial stability they need to keep the lights on, pay their workers fair & competitive wages, recruit additional staff, and continue to provide high quality care to kids across the state. During the budget process, legislative Republicans stripped out funding for Child Care Counts and left many families, providers, and business owners uncertain of the future. Democrats are fighting to make sure we invest a portion of the remaining 4 billion plus budget surplus in the continuation of Child Care Counts.

Whether you are a parent or employer or community member, the impact of the child care crisis will be felt if we do not continue funding Child Care Counts. If you depend on a labor force to make sure businesses run smoothly, restaurants are fully staffed, or community services are available to you, it means you count on child care too.

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