

Child Care Counts Program is Critical for Families & Wisconsin's Workforce Needs

By: Senate Democratic Leader Melissa Agard (D-Madison)

Democrats are working for Wisconsin, and we know that access to affordable, quality child care is critical for the well-being of working families. It is imperative that child care providers are supported and provided with the resources necessary to grow the future of Wisconsin. Simply put, when we invest in our kids, we invest in Wisconsin's future.

As you may know, there is an impending child care funding cliff in the State of Wisconsin, impacting families with kids, child care providers, and our workforce if support is not provided to this vital industry. During the pandemic, the federal government supported the child care industry in a bipartisan fashion. Using federal dollars, the Wisconsin Child Care Counts program sent monthly payments to over 3,300 providers in Wisconsin to stay open, recruit and retain qualified staff, and provide care to over 113,000 children statewide.

However, this critical funding is set to expire in 2024, and we know that if the Child Care Counts program isn't extended 25% of Wisconsin providers said they would close permanently, 60% of providers indicated they would have to raise tuition, and others said they would cut wages for already underpaid workers.

Fortunately, Governor Tony Evers and legislative Democrats know the importance of child care access and are working to lift up Wisconsin's network of providers. The Governor's biennial budget ensures that ordinary Wisconsinites are equipped to prosper and works to make quality child care more accessible and affordable. The Governor's proposal includes \$340 million to provide a permanent investment in the Child Care Counts: COVID-19 Stabilization Payment Program.

We know that child care providers are the workforce behind Wisconsin's workforce, and the strength of our state's economy is dependent on the strength of the working folks in Wisconsin. Ensuring working families have access to quality child care at an affordable cost is critical to addressing Wisconsin's ongoing labor needs.

The costs of child care is especially daunting for moms and dads who are part of the workforce, and I firmly believe that parents should not have to choose between their career and ensuring that their kids are cared for adequately. As a mom of four boys, I understand the struggle that parents, especially moms, face when seeking child care. My boys are teenagers and young adults now, but I know that the search for child care has become even more burdensome for parents.

I will continue to be a tireless advocate for child care providers, working families, and kids in Wisconsin. My Democratic colleagues and I recently sent letters to more than

4,000 child care providers across Wisconsin to inform them of this vital funding proposal. We asked them to vocalize their support for the budget provision and share their stories using the petition link that is below.

The Governor's budget proposal will be amended by the Republican-controlled Legislature over the next couple of months before it is sent back to him for approval. If you would like to vocalize your support for the Governor's \$340 million investment in the Child Care Counts program, you can sign the petition that is available by searching: tinyurl.com/Support-ChildCareCounts