

Access to Child Care: The Key to Economic Recovery in Westchester

This report commissioned by the Child Care Council of Westchester demonstrates that our child care system, fragile before COVID, is broken. We have a unique opportunity in this moment to signal that Westchester supports the accessible, quality child care system that parents and employers seek. It will take increased public investment, including supplemental federal funds.

If we make our child care more affordable for more families AND help child care programs cover the real operating costs of safe, quality child care, then we will see healthier children, a larger and more productive workforce, and an energized economy.

Key Finding #1: Child Care is Difficult to Afford for Nearly Every Parent/Family

There are 114,564 children under 13 in Westchester whose parents work. 45,007 of them are in families with incomes under 400% FPL – meaning that they do not earn enough to meet their basic needs, including child care. This number includes 26,483 children under age 6 or 41% of all young children in Westchester!

The US Dept of Health and Human Services says family payments for child care **should not exceed 7% of income.**

- Child care is often the biggest bill a family faces, more than rent or mortgage.
- A Westchester family of 4 with an infant and a preschooler – with 2 parents working 40 hours a week for minimum wage (\$14/hour) - does not qualify for subsidy. Center-based care is **55.4% of their income.**
- The child care “system” has been propped up by a workforce that makes less than 98% of all occupations!

Key Finding #2: There Is Not Enough Child Care Available

Pre-COVID, there were nearly 44,000 children in Westchester under the age of 6 with all available parents working. With child care capacity at about 21,627 spots, the need was more than double the supply. For parents of infants and toddlers, there was a licensed or regulated slot available for less than 1 out of every 5. Since COVID hit Westchester, 46 child care programs have closed.

In 2018, 59% of Westchester census tracts were found to be child care deserts, meaning that at least 50 children in those areas had either NO child care available, or there were 3 or more children for every available slot.

Our child care industry is at its breaking point. Pre-pandemic, most Westchester programs struggled to make ends meet due to low subsidy reimbursement rates and high operating costs. Now, some are turning children away because they are unable to hire and retain staff.

Funding Needed Now:

\$5,620,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act to provide some child care financial assistance to Westchester families now over-income for help, who cannot pay for child care on their own:

- \$4,120,000 for new Title XX child care subsidy slots
- \$1,500,000 for Westchester Child Care Scholarship Program awards for families over Title XX up to 85% of State Median Income

Additional funding will be needed to increase subsidy reimbursements for contracted providers, up to NYS market rates, so that child care businesses can begin to increase staff compensation.

#FundChildCare in this year’s budget to make a two-generation impact. Let’s get parents, especially women, back in the workforce, and support the healthy development of *all* children.