



**UNDER EMBARGO Until June 14, 2023 at 12:01 a.m. ET**

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**Inaccessible and Unaffordable: Lack of Child Care, High Cost Hurt Families, Workers, Economy**

*Data From Delaware Show 8,000 Children have Family Members who had to Miss, Quit, or Scale Back Work Due to Child Care Problems, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds*

**NEWARK, DE** — Delaware’s early care and education network – a system integral to keeping the state’s economic engine running – is facing numerous challenges, according to the **2023 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how children and families are faring. Each year, the report presents national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains – economic well-being, education, health and family and community factors – and ranks the states according to how children are faring overall. This year, the report focuses on how expensive, hard-to-find child care affects parents. It also describes low pay leading to a chronic shortage of providers and demands that policymakers at the state and national levels enact real solutions.

Our country’s lack of affordable and accessible early care and education short-changes children and creates workforce stability challenges for businesses by causing parents to frequently miss work or even quit their jobs, while those who can find care are paying dearly for it. Systemic challenges faced by the nation’s early care and education network cost the American economy billions of dollars a year and stymie women professionally.

“Pre-pandemic concerns of child care availability, quality, and affordability have all been exacerbated in recent years, both nationally and here in Delaware,” said Janice Barlow, policy scientist with the University of Delaware’s Center for Community Research & Service, Delaware’s member of the KIDS COUNT network.

The *Data Book* reports too many parents cannot secure child care that is compatible with work schedules and commutes. With added pandemic challenges related to balancing work and caregiving, some parents have opted to leave the workforce. The *Data Book* reports that in 2020–21, 13% of Delaware children birth to age 5 lived in families in which someone quit, changed, or refused a job because of problems with child care. And women are five to eight times more likely than men to experience negative employment consequences related to caregiving.

Delaware families with young children have long struggled with child care affordability. The average cost of center-based child care for a toddler was \$11,695 in Delaware. This expense represents 10% of the median income of a married couple and 34% of the median income of a single mother in the state.

While the cost of care burdens families, child care workers are paid worse than 98% of professions. Median national pay for child care workers was \$28,520 per year or \$13.71 an hour in 2022, less than the wage for retail (\$14.26) and customer service (\$18.16) workers. In Delaware, median wage for child care workers was \$12.84 per hour in 2022, even lower than the national pay rate. Inadequate wages and a lack of benefits for early educators – compounded by the health and safety risks associated with working in person with children who were the last to be eligible for vaccines and, in many cases too young to be

masked – made recruitment, hiring, and retention challenging for providers. This in turn has translated into decreased capacity, large wait lists, reduced operating hours, and center closings.

The failings of the child care market also affect the current and future health of Delaware’s economy, costing \$415 million a year in lost earnings, productivity and tax revenue, according to one study. All of these challenges put parents under tremendous stress to meet the dual responsibilities of providing for their families and ensuring their children are safe and nurtured.

“The early years of a child’s life are an important time for growth and development during which the foundation for language acquisition, academic ability, habits, and socio-emotional development is built,” according to Barlow. “Research shows that access to high quality early care and education programs help young children grow up ready to succeed in school and life. When properly working, the early care and education system ensures that employers have a robust, stable workforce from which to draw talent, allows parents the opportunity to support their families while knowing their children are safe and cared for, and provides children an opportunity to reap benefits from positive nurturing relationships with consistent early care and education providers.”

Transitioning from an underfunded, fragile early care and education system to creating a flourishing, sustainable one will take new thinking and investing at the local, state, and national levels. An executive order issued by President Biden in April is aimed at expanding access, lowering costs, and raising wages. It could prove to be a helpful framework, but more is needed:

- Federal, state, and local governments should invest more in child care. State and local governments should maximize remaining pandemic recovery act dollars to fund needed child care services and capacity. Congress should reauthorize and strengthen the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act, and increase funding for public pre-kindergarten and Head Start.
- Public and private leaders should work together to improve the infrastructure for home-based child care, beginning by lowering the barriers to entry for potential providers by increasing access to start-up and expansion capital.
- To help young parents, Congress should expand the federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which serves student parents.

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#### **RELEASE INFORMATION**

The 2023 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://www.aecf.org/databook). Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at [datacenter.aecf.org](http://datacenter.aecf.org).

#### **ABOUT KIDS COUNT IN DELAWARE**

KIDS COUNT in Delaware, a project of the Center for Community Research and Service within the Joseph R. Biden, Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware, is a collaborative effort of over forty organizations to enrich local and state discussion concerning ways to secure better lives for all of Delaware’s children by providing policy makers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being. Learn more at [www.dekidscount.org](http://www.dekidscount.org).

#### **ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation’s young people by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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