



Two-Thousand Days to Make a Difference

## **Child Care Aware® of Missouri 2022 Advocacy Focus Areas**

**1. To assist families and educators in advocating on their own behalf.**

- Provide resources to early childhood educators and families to advocate on their own behalf utilizing our data, research, and information.

**2. To engage and mobilize key legislators who will champion affordable and accessible child care for families and a significant wage increase for educators.**

- Advocate to increase the access to early care and education for parents and children.
- Educate, create awareness, provide toolkits, and create a communication plan to involve staff, board members, working families, early childhood educators, and contracted Capacity Building Partners to inform legislators/policymakers on the importance of
  - Increasing workforce and wage compensation.
  - Increasing the capacity of child care across all regions of the state.
  - Highlight policies and processes to ease the financial burden on families.

**3. To reduce the stigma associated with the early childhood profession.**

- Create and sustain access for early childhood educators to higher education through the T.E.A.C.H. MISSOURI Scholarship Program and the CDA Scholarship Project.
- Maintain the involvement of decision-makers by elevating the public profile of the child care workforce and wage compensation by disseminating information on achievements within the early childhood workforce.

**4. To support the early social and emotional development of young children.**

- Advocate for ongoing financial support of access to higher education and training, emphasizing supports for child safety, health, and well-being.
- Increase awareness of the need for social support networks for children, families, and child care educators to address trauma and crisis.
- Advocate for the physical, social, and emotional well-being of children while under the supervision of child care educators.



## **Child Care Aware® of Missouri 2022 Advocacy Focus Areas**

High-quality child care is an essential component of Missouri's economy. Suppose families do not have a quality child care program to take their children to each day. In that case, they cannot help contribute to the economy or financially provide for their family. However, quality child care programs cannot exist unless there are dedicated early childhood educators to staff these programs. Early childhood educators play an essential role in the economy and the foundational years of a child's life.

Despite their critical role, child care educators are not adequately compensated for their work, resulting in high turnover in the field. This results in many child care programs operating at a reduced capacity due to lack of staff or running the risk of burning out or overworking the current staff. When a child care program retains quality staff, it can best serve the families in their community. When families have a positive environment to take their children to each day, they can perform their best at work.

Child Care Aware® of Missouri has a unique responsibility to educate and build awareness across the early childhood landscape, including families, educators, community stakeholders, and the business community. We have identified four advocacy areas for the 2022 legislative session.

### **1. Workforce and Wage Compensation**

Early childhood educators are essential to a child's future well-being and play a significant role in a child's learning and development. As professionals, early childhood educators spend considerable time planning curriculum, supporting brain and socio-emotional development, and supporting the needs of families outside of the classroom.

- Early childhood educators are essential to the economy and allow for families to go to work each day.
- Despite their critical role, the average pay rate in Missouri for an early childhood educator is \$10.45 an hour. Compared to the average pay for a Kindergarten teacher at \$27.68, early childhood educators pay the penalty by choosing to work with younger children (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020).
- In addition to facing low compensation rates, early childhood educators are surrounded by high turnover in the field and no policies that outline minimum education requirements.
- Public K-12 teachers in Missouri receive employee benefits such as paid vacation and sick time, retirement plans, professional development days, health insurance, parental leave, etc. However, early childhood educators do not typically have access to employee benefits.



## 2. Affordability

Child care is a significant investment for most families. For some, child care costs are higher than their annual income.

- High prices put a strain on family budgets and can lead to extensive debt for families.
- In Missouri, the average cost for an infant and a 4-year-old to attend child care is around \$16,000 a year in a child care center and \$10,000 a year for family child care. A single parent could expect to pay about 40% of their income for infant care at a center-based facility. A two-parent household, living at the poverty level could expect to pay nearly 70% of their income for infant care at a center-based facility (Child Care Aware® of America, 2019).
- Families may qualify to receive child care subsidies through the state, but subsidy payments to programs do not reflect the full cost of care. This leads to high co-pays for families to help cover the cost of child care.

"I live in rural Missouri, and I make about \$270 a week at my job. I have three children, two-year-old twins and an eight-year-old. It costs me \$250 a week to send my children to child care. This is my co-payment to my child care program despite being eligible for the child care subsidy program. I take pride in my work, and having a job is very important to me. However, it seems like it would just be more beneficial for me just to be a stay-at-home mom"

**Mom in Camden County**

## 3. Investment

Without child care, Missouri does not work. However, child care choices for families are constrained by the cost of care, low supply, and high demand in significant portions of the state.

- Investments in high-quality early childhood experiences positively impact a child's well-being and governmental budget. Children who receive quality early childhood learning experiences earn higher wages as adults and draw on fewer government resources (Lynch, 2015).
- When parents have access to high-quality child care, they can increase their work hours, avoid missing workdays, and pursue further education (Hamm, 2019).
- Across the United States, working families lose more than \$8.3 billion in wages annually due to inaccessible child care (First Five Years Fund, 2022).
- Every \$1 invested in Missouri early learning areas produces an additional 87 cents in the local economy (Schaefer, 2013).



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"There are 11 child care programs in my community, and all of them are full with a waitlist. I need child care immediately so I can go back to work. I just do not know what to do." **Family in Randolph County**

#### **4. Child Well-being**

Child care educators create safe physical environments to shape social emotional development of young children ages. They play a crucial role in developing healthy habits that will follow these young children into their adult life.

- Early childhood is a time of rapid growth and development. It is very important for children to develop healthy habits, positive mental health, and coping skills that will influence their social and emotional development throughout life.
- Quality, early childhood educators with knowledge of appropriate classroom practices lay the groundwork for developing a child's physical, social, and emotional needs.



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