

Five Steps the Legislature Can Take to Help Texas Families Secure High-Quality Child Care

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High-quality child care enables parents to work and provides their children with opportunities to learn, socialize, and build new skills during the critical age for brain development. Unfortunately, Texas is experiencing a child care crisis, and many working families are unable to find and afford high-quality child care. The following bills are part of a complementary package of strategies that will help parents go to work and provide children with enriching early learning experiences.



Provide more scholarships to eligible families on the TWC Child Care Services waitlist to help more parents go to work and secure high-quality care for their children

The CCS program helps to ensure that working families can go to work and access high-quality child care for their children. Funding for the program comes primarily from the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant, but many states provide additional state dollars to reach more eligible working families. Texas does not. Because of the lack of state funds, there is a significant waitlist for the CCS program (currently over 90,000 children). When the federal funds run out, the waitlist for the Texas program grows, leaving thousands of eligible children unserved.

RECOMMENDATION: Serve more eligible families on the waitlist with additional state funding.

RELEVANT BILLS:

- SB 1 and HB 1
- SB 1739/SJR 56 by Sen. West and HB 4024 by Rep. Walle



Ensure child care programs can recruit and retain qualified staff by adding child care workers to the state's priority list for scholarships

A key challenge in enrolling more children in high-quality child care programs is a lack of available, qualified staff. When a child care program is understaffed, that program has to turn away families, and the children who are served may be in more crowded, less supportive environments. One driver for the staffing shortage is that child care educators also need to be able to access supportive care for their own children, which they often cannot afford. Texas identifies various priority groups to award CCS scholarships, including children of qualified veterans, teen parents, and children with disabilities. Children of child care educators are not currently included.

RECOMMENDATION: Lawmakers should add full-time child care workers to the state's priority list for child care scholarships to help eligible child care workers get off the waitlist and access scholarships more quickly.

RELEVANT BILLS: SB 462 by Sen. Kolkhorst and HB 3807 by Rep. Harris Davila



Support a Child Care Innovation Pilot Program to expand child care access to meet workforce needs

The CCS program is an effective tool for addressing the problem of child care affordability for working families, but it does not alone address the problem of child care supply. Without targeted investments aimed at stabilizing and expanding the supply of child care, working families will continue to struggle to find quality, affordable options. This is especially true in particular locations — such as rural counties, child care deserts, and low-income areas — and for particular kinds of child care — such as evening and weekend care and care for children with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION: Lawmakers should support the creation of the Child Care Innovation Pilot Program, which will align public and private resources to increase the supply of high-quality, affordable child care slots that meet local workforce needs.

RELEVANT BILLS: SB 2979 by Sen. Hancock, SB 3007 by Sen. Blanco, HB 5086 by Rep. Ordaz, HB 5529 by Rep. Bumgarner, and a provision of HB 3191 by Rep. Button



Establish the Texas plan to better support preschoolers with disabilities and developmental delays

Finding high-quality early learning programs is even more difficult for parents of children with disabilities. Unfortunately, the state lacks a coordinated vision for how to effectively serve young children with disabilities and their families, leading to nagging administrative barriers, conflicting rules and guidance, and missed opportunities for collaboration. These challenges make it more difficult for state leaders to identify and develop policies to help parents find the care and support they need for their young children with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION: Lawmakers should support the creation of a multi-agency strategic plan to improve early learning for young children with disabilities and developmental delays.

RELEVANT BILLS: HB 2310 by Rep. Ordaz



Allow local communities to provide reimbursement rates to child care programs at the state's established reimbursement rate to incentivize child care programs to enroll more eligible families

The Texas Workforce Commission sets an established reimbursement rate for programs that serve families receiving scholarships. However, if private-pay families are paying less than that rate, programs are reimbursed at the lower of the two rates. As a result, programs are disincentivized from enrolling scholarship recipients, and families have fewer options for care. Current Texas law ties the hands of Local Workforce Development Boards, making them unable to address this issue.

RECOMMENDATION: Lawmakers should allow Local Workforce Development Boards to reimburse at the state's established reimbursement rate.

RELEVANT BILLS: SB 972 by Sen. Zaffirini and HB 2294 by Rep. Thompson