

**In Brief:** Child Care Aware of Virginia is committed to promoting quality child care for children throughout the Commonwealth, ages birth through twelve. Children should be safe and parents should have choices among quality settings that promote their children’s healthy development.

Our recommendations for the General Assembly promote both safe settings for children and quality choices for families.

### Child Care in Virginia

Every week throughout the Commonwealth, parents of young children need child care in order to work. In too many communities, child care is difficult to find, more difficult to afford, and parents have too few choices to meet their needs.

#### In 2021 in Virginia,

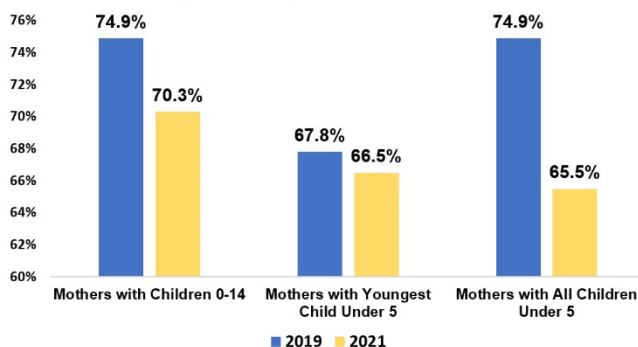
- 381,572 children under age 6 had working parents
- 518,096 children age 6-12 had working parents

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey, 1 Year Estimates.

### Child Care as an Economic Recovery Strategy

Parents need child care to work and employers depend on working parents. Virginia’s unemployment rate has declined significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic began. However, employment for mothers still lags, largely due to issues surrounding child care.

Virginia Working Mothers: 2019 vs 2021



Source: IPUMS USA – University of Minnesota, U.S. Census Bureau, and RegionTrack calculations, 2019 - 2021.



### Child Care Aware of Virginia Recommends:

**Expand Subsidy Assistance** for families who need help affording child care and build on previous efforts to stabilize the child care market. Virginia’s economic recovery relies on families’ access to child care.

As part of the state budget enacted last spring, state legislation extended through the 2022-2024 biennium, [House Bill 2206](#), which expanded the Subsidy Program to help make child care more affordable for families with children under age 5 with income below 85% of the state median.

✓ **This policy should be expanded to support families with school-age children (5-12).** Current law supports school-age children only if a family has at least one child birth to 5 (not in school). According to the most recent Census Bureau data, more than 500,000 school-age children (ages 6-12) in Virginia have working parents. Parents of school-age kids also need child care, as the work day does not end when school lets out.

### Increase Compensation for the Child Care Workforce

Child care workers earned about \$11.74 per hour in 2022 (VA minimum wage increased to \$12 on Jan 1, 2023). The operating budget of a child care program is comprised mainly of child tuition fees. Parents can’t afford to pay more, which means child care workers can’t earn more based on parent fees alone.

The labor market is tight. Child care programs continue to report record-level challenges since 2020 recruiting and retaining staff. They can’t compete with other businesses that are raising wages (and increasing benefits) to hire and

retain workers. Many programs have waiting lists for children, not because they do not have the space for them, but because they simply don't have the staff.

- ✓ Invest in **wage supplements** to support the recruitment and retention of the child care workforce (sustainable investments beyond a one-time bonus).
- ✓ Consider a **refundable tax credit** to boost wages similar to Louisiana, Colorado, and Nebraska, which reward the attainment of early childhood credentials and higher education with refundable tax credits for child care workers.

**Child care is the workforce that supports all other workforces!** And this work promotes the healthy development of Virginia's children. Economic stability and growth depend on child care and those who work in this critical industry. It's time to pay child care professionals for the important work they do.

### Support Child Care Program Flexibility to Meet Child Care Challenges

In too many communities, parents struggle to find child care. The workforce shortage, combined with the challenge of retaining employees in a low-paying field, means that many programs have waiting lists because they lack staff. Or, staff call out for a variety of reasons, but programs don't have part-time staff to cover classrooms.

- ✓ Support **provisional employment** which would enable new hires to work in a supervised capacity while their background checks are in process, when at least one screening (state or FBI fingerprint) shows the individual is cleared and eligible for employment.
- ✓ Support strategies to implement a **substitute pool system** similar to the K-12 public education substitute system. This system would allow child care programs to utilize subs when teachers call out, are sick, or otherwise take leave. Such substitutes would be fully screened and trained according to VA child care standards.

**Strengthen the Child Care Workforce** with additional training and supports to help ensure best business practices are used (by centers and home-based programs). Child care is a business, but often, providers are better-trained in early childhood practices, not necessarily solid business practices.

- ✓ Increase supports for **business-strengthening technical assistance, coaching, and training.**

**Build Quality Programs** by increasing the percentage of Child Care and Development Block Grant funds spent on quality-related activities, including training and professional development for the child care workforce.

- ✓ **Invest in the Child Care Resource and Referral system** statewide to strengthen the quality of care and assist families in finding and understanding quality child care.



**Require Safe Sleep Practices** for voluntarily registered home-based providers to ensure infants are protected from sleep-related deaths while in child care.


Licensed center and home-based child care providers, religious and other license-exempt programs identified in state statute are required to place infants on their backs to sleep, as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. However, child care providers who care for fewer than five children and who are voluntarily registered are not required by law to follow the safe sleep guidelines for infants. Instead, there is a health and safety checklist to which they self-certify. **Infant and toddler deaths can be prevented or reduced when providers understand and implement safe sleep practices.** Unfortunately, in Virginia, infants and toddlers have died in home-based care due to unsafe sleep practices.


- ✓ **Require** voluntarily registered providers to follow the American Academy of Pediatrics **safe sleep** guidance.


**Expand the Supply of Child Care** by funding new types of strategies, particularly in communities that have been identified as child care deserts. COVID-19 has exacerbated the supply gap.


- ✓ Require a workgroup to review the tax code to recommend **tax incentives** to address supply and quality challenges.

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