

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 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.

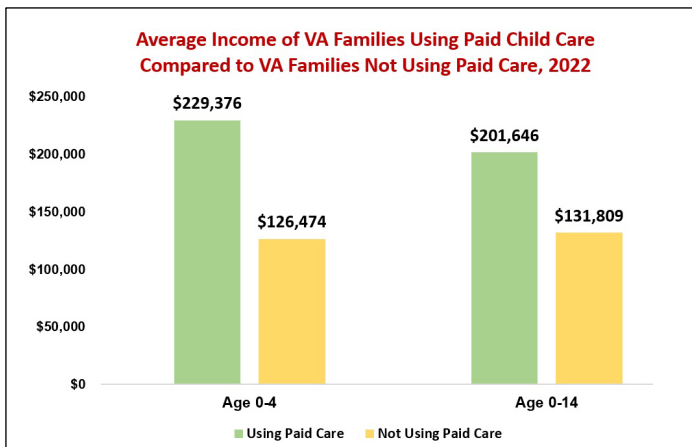
In 2022 in Virginia,

- 386,761 children under age 6 had working parents
- 397,937 children age 6-12 had working parents

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, 1 Year Estimates.

Child Care as an Economic Growth Strategy

Families need affordable care. They need child care to work, and employers depend on working parents. It’s an employment support and a setting to promote the healthy development of children. Economic growth depends on working families, businesses and child care providers. **All are interdependent for a healthy economy.**



Source: IPUMS CPS – University of Minnesota, U.S. Census Bureau



Child Care Aware of Virginia Recommends:

Address the Child Care Workforce Shortage

Despite current initiatives, child care programs throughout Virginia report difficulty recruiting and retaining employees. Due to the competitive job market, it is difficult for programs to offer wages that are on-par with local employers. In turn, this has caused programs to have waitlists of children who cannot be enrolled due to lack of staff. Ultimately, this impacts parent choices for child care in communities and the ability of parents to work.

- ✓ **Invest in compensation benefits as a recruitment and retention tool.** In 2022, Kentucky passed legislation to allow parents working in child care to receive child care subsidy for their own children’s care (regardless of income). With the high price of child care, this policy has had great success in Kentucky as a recruitment and retention strategy.

Increase Compensation for the Child Care Workforce

Virginia child care workers earn about \$13.48 per hour, or \$28,040 annually. The bulk of child tuition fees go toward a child care program's operating budget, making it difficult to increase worker salaries without raising fees for parents, and most families are struggling to cover the cost of child care as it is.

The labor market is tight. Child care wages are not competitive with area businesses and yet parents depend on child care staffing to support their ability to work.

- ✓ **Consider a refundable tax credit to boost wages.** Louisiana, Colorado, and Nebraska offer refundable tax credits to child care workers who achieve early childhood credentials and higher education. A refundable tax credit approach aims to incentivize professional development to strengthen the quality of child care, while also increasing wages.

Child care is the workforce that supports all other workforces! This profession promotes the healthy development of Virginia's children. Economic stability and growth depend on child care and those who work in this critical industry. Particularly in today's job market, compensation (benefits and pay) is important to retain and build a quality child care workforce.

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 parents have limited options when it comes to child care.

- ✓ 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 well-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 child care businesses and assist families in finding and understanding quality child care.

Require Safe Sleep Training 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 the only regulated type of child care not required by law to follow the safe sleep guidelines for infants or to complete training. 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 complete basic training** and 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.

- ✓ **Invest in public-private partnerships that engage employers.** Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, North Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin have implemented innovative grants to match employer support for employee child care. For example, North Dakota matches employer contributions of \$300 or more for employee support for infant and toddler care. Kentucky matches employer support for child care for employees above the state income level for subsidy. The match declines as household income rises but never falls below a 50% match.

Expand Child Care Subsidy Assistance for families who need help affording child care and build on previous efforts to stabilize the child care market.

- ✓ **Extend current law that allows families with children under age 5 to qualify for subsidy with household income up to 85% of state median income.** This provision expires on June 30, 2024.
- ✓ **Expand income eligibility guidelines to support families with school-age children (5-12).** All siblings in families with a child under 5 are eligible for subsidy. This expansion, however, excludes families with school-age children who do not also have younger kids. Given the equal importance of school-age child care for working parents, it is necessary to expand income eligibility to support families.