



Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children



May 5, 2026

The Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children voices its strong support for S-2667 (Vargas) The Rhode Island Child Care Is Essential Act.

This bill will transform Rhode Island's child care system by:

- 1. Allowing more families to qualify for the RI Child Care Assistance Program** by raising the family income limits to qualify for the Child Care Assistance Program to the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant benchmark, 85% of the state median family income and raises the "exit" income limit to 100% of the state median family income. This will allow more families to access care, which will support early learning programs by increasing enrollment. According to a survey conducted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 40% of Rhode Island early learning programs that responded indicated being under enrolled, and not for lack of demand.
- 2. Adjusting rates for the RI Child Care Assistance Program to comply with the federal equal access standards** by meeting or exceeding the current federal equal access standard (75th percentile of the 2024 RI Child Care Market Rate Survey) for all ages and settings. This investment is long overdue, as Rhode Island has cut \$46 million in state general revenue funding for child care assistance. This leaves early learning programs struggling. The same NAEYC survey found that 34% of Rhode Island based respondents feel their economic situation has worsened in the last year, 40% of early childhood educators that responded are feeling burned out, and 54% have worsening feelings of uncertainty. This is a direct result of our state's lack of investment in the sector.

Families living paycheck to paycheck in Rhode Island are forced to foot the bill for those staggering child care costs without assistance. This investment child care is an investment in working families that will transform their budgets, thereby benefitting Rhode Island's economy during this time of economic uncertainty.

The attached factsheets are provided to further convey the necessity of this investment. Please support S-2667 (Vargas) The Rhode Island Child Care Is Essential Act.

Thank You,

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Child Care is Essential 2026

H-7393 (Diaz) / S-2667 (Vargas)



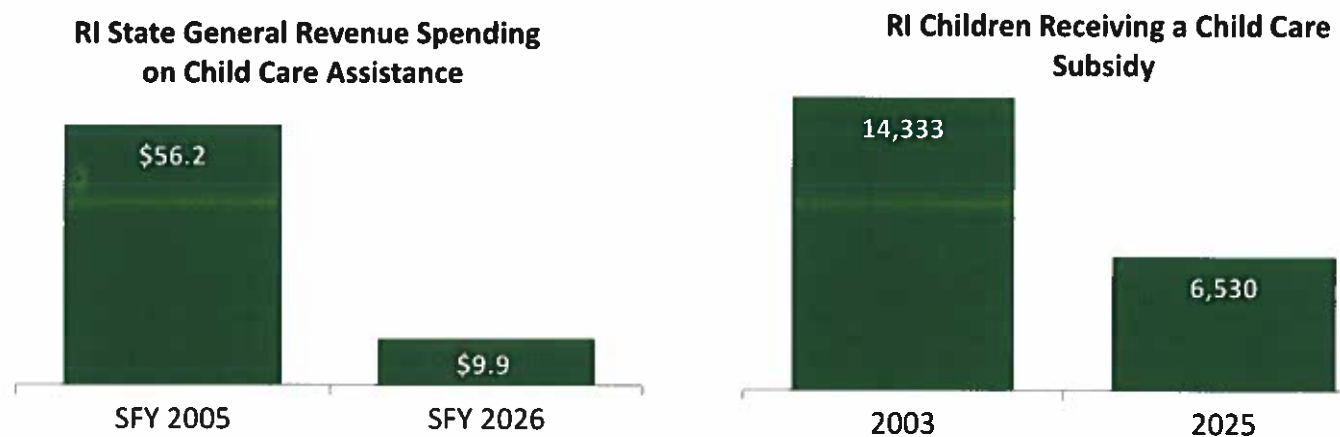
Right from the
Start

Families need access to affordable, high-quality child care so parents can work, and children can learn and thrive. **Experts agree that 9 out of 10 families cannot afford child care.** The average cost of child care for an infant enrolled in a Rhode Island licensed child care center is \$16,899/year. Using the federal affordability guidelines, this makes infant care unaffordable for any Rhode Island family earning less than \$241,000/year.

The Rhode Island Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is managed by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) and helps families pay for child care. Eligible low-income families are approved for a certificate they can use to enroll their children (birth – age 12) at a child care program that accepts the certificate. DHS pays child care programs based on rates that are set in statute. Some families are assessed a copayment that they pay directly to the child care program.

Rhode Island is one of only seven states in the U.S. (other states are: Arkansas, Idaho, Missouri, Nevada, West Virginia, and Wyoming) that are investing only the bare minimum needed to receive federal child care funding. **Rhode Island has cut \$46 million in state general revenue funding for child care assistance.**

Fewer Families Get Help Paying for Child Care Now Compared to 20+ Years Ago



The 2026 Rhode Island Child Care is Essential Act

- 1. Unifies sections of state law related to the Child Care Assistance Program** into a new statute named the Rhode Island Child Care is Essential Act.
- 2. Allows more families to qualify for the RI Child Care Assistance Program** by raising the family income limits to qualify for the Child Care Assistance Program to the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant benchmark, 85% of the state median family income and raises the “exit” income limit to 100% of the state median family income.
- 3. Adjusts rates for the RI Child Care Assistance Program to comply with the federal equal access standard** by meeting or exceeding the current federal equal access standard (75th percentile of the 2024 RI Child Care Market Rate Survey) for all ages and settings.

Helping More Families - Current and Proposed Family Income Eligibility Limits for Family of 3

	Current RI Law 2026	Child Care is Essential Goal
Entrance	\$71,305 ≤ 261% of the federal poverty level	\$96,692 ≤ 85% of State Median Family Income*
Exit	\$81,960 ≤ 300% of the federal poverty level	\$113,755 ≤ 100% of State Median Family Income

*Federal Eligibility Benchmark. States use the LIHEAP method to calculate.

Note: There are at least 17 states that meet or exceed the federal benchmark for child care eligibility (85% of State Median Income), including Arkansas, California, **Connecticut**, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, **Maine**, **New Hampshire**, New Mexico, **New York**, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, **Vermont**, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Rhode Island's Child Care Assistance Program Has Fallen Behind Our Neighboring States

Our family income limit to qualify for Child Care Assistance is one of the lowest in the northeast.

Vermont: \$157,090 (575% FPL)

Maine \$118,992 (125% SMI)

Connecticut \$109,306 (85% SMI)

New Hampshire \$104,660 (85% SMI)

New York: \$97,397 (85% SMI)

Rhode Island \$71,305 (261% FPL)

Massachusetts \$66,228/\$112,584 for child with a disability or child 's parent works as an early educator

Adjusting Child Care Assistance Program Rates to Meet Federal Equal Access Standards

	1 Star	2 Stars	3 Stars	4 Stars	5 Stars
Infant Current Rate	\$334	\$341	\$355	\$364	\$378
Infant Proposed Rate	\$463	\$472	\$482	\$491	\$501
Toddler Current Rate	\$278	\$284	\$296	\$303	\$315
Toddler Proposed Rate	\$356*	\$363	\$371	\$378	\$385
Preschool Current Rate	\$236	\$247	\$255	\$263	\$273
Preschool Proposed Rate	\$312*	\$320	\$329	\$337	\$345
School-Age Current Rate	\$210	\$215	\$231	\$250	\$263
School-Age Proposed Rate	\$280*	\$287	\$295	\$303	\$310

* Equal Access Benchmark (75th percentile of the 2024 RI Child Care Market Rate Survey)

Note: As of 2025, there were 20 states that met or exceeded the federal equal access standard for infant and toddler child care rates (75th percentile of the Market Rate Survey for the base 1 star rate), including Arkansas, Colorado, DC, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, **Massachusetts**, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, **New Hampshire**, New Mexico, **New York**, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, **Vermont** and Virginia.

Addressing the Infant Care Shortage

The Child Care is Essential bill sets CCAP rates for infants 30% higher than toddler rates to cover part of the funding gap associated with the staffing requirements needed to keep infants healthy and safe (4 infants for 1 teacher) versus toddlers (6 toddlers for 1 teacher).

“A Year of Tough Choices”

The Child Care Affordability Crisis is Destabilizing Educators and Families

Rhode Island

The problems are clear: The child care affordability crisis is growing worse for early childhood educators, programs, and families, with negative impacts on supply, enrollment, and educator well-being. Current policy trends risk further exacerbating that crisis.

The solutions remain clear: Robust, sustained public investments and supportive policies in child care and early learning are needed to build a system that works, and that ensures early childhood educators are supported in joining and remaining part of the early childhood education (ECE) profession, and that parents are able to access and afford high-quality care that meets their needs and the needs of their children.

In January 2026, more than 7,000 early childhood educators from all states and settings—including centers, home-based child care, faith-based programs, Head Start, and public preschool programs—responded to a new ECE field survey from NAEYC. The survey results and accompanying stories illustrate the ongoing challenges facing the field, the ways those challenges impact both families and providers, and the need for additional and ongoing public investment in this sector.

Here are some reflections from survey respondents in Rhode Island

“Increasing costs, difficulty in finding insurance, and the need to increase staff salaries in order to attract and retain staff has significantly cut into my salary. I now make the same as many of my teachers and as an owner/directors I am working 60+ hours a week. Its beginning to be not worth it for me to stay open when I can easily make the same money with a far better work/home balance and LESS STRESS.”

—Director/Administrator, RI

“It is very hard for parents when they want to register the child but because of the economic situation they cannot afford it.”

—Home-Based Child Care Owner/Operator, RI

	STATE	NATIONAL
Total sample size	87	7,045
Total sample of Early Childhood Educators	37	2,697
Total sample of program Directors/Administrators and Home-based Child Care Owner/Operators	31	2,741
AMONG ALL RESPONDENTS:		
% reporting they are considering leaving the ECE field	*	22%
% indicating their program was under-enrolled relative to capacity (nationally the top reasons for under enrollment were related to affordability and staffing challenges, not a lack of demand)	40%	43%
% indicating that changes in immigration enforcement contributed to under-enrollment at their program	*	19%
Over the last year . . .		
% indicating federal or state funding for their program decreased	23%	29%
% indicating their program's child care subsidy payment rate decreased	14%	16%
% indicating families' access to child care subsidies decreased	14%	28%
Over the last year . . .		
% reporting their economic situation was worsened	34%	36%
% reporting they are more burned out now	40%	47%
% reporting their feelings of uncertainty have worsened	54%	54%

AMONG CHILD CARE CENTER DIRECTORS AND HOME-BASED CHILD CARE OWNER/OPERATORS:	STATE	NATIONAL
% reporting their program requires private-pay families to pay for days when their child is absent	*	80%
% reporting their program collects out-of-pocket fees or tuition at the beginning of each week or every two weeks of care	*	77%
% indicating their program would be more likely to accept or continue accepting child care subsidy funds if providers were paid upfront	*	68%
% indicating their program would be more likely to accept or continue accepting child care subsidy funds if providers were paid based on enrollment	*	68%
Over the last year . . .		
Facility-related changes		
% indicating an increase in facility materials costs (e.g., food and supplies)	*	91%
% indicating an increase in facility maintenance costs (e.g., needed repairs)	*	79%
% indicating an increase in liability insurance costs	*	68%
% indicating an increase in property insurance costs	*	66%
% indicating an increase in rent or lease costs	*	44%
% indicating an increase in program tuition costs	*	58%
Family-related changes		
% indicating an increase in families struggling to afford tuition	*	65%
% indicating an increase in families facing job loss or financial instability	*	59%
Compared to this time last year . . .		
% indicating they had more difficulty recruiting qualified educators	*	59%
% indicating they had more difficulty retaining staff	*	39%

Methodology

This online survey, created and conducted by NAEYC using SurveyMonkey, represents the responses of a non-randomized sample of 7,078 individuals working in early childhood education settings who completed the survey in English or Spanish between January 8-26, 2026. To generate a more representative national sample from the pool of responses, a probability proportional to size (PPS) methodology was used to pull samples by state that are benchmarked to the share of the total early childhood workforce by state. The authors relied upon the methodology from the [CSCCE's Early Childhood Workforce Index](#) to select the American Community Survey (ACS) occupation and industry codes that define the ECE workforce. Using these codes, they analyzed public-use microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2023 five-year ACS, accessed through IPUMS USA (<https://usa.ipums.org>), to estimate the size of each state's ECE workforce. The final sample size for analysis is 7,045. In contrast, for the state-level analysis, the entire sample of responses from each state were used. We are unable to supply detailed analysis in states for which there are very small sample sizes across sub-groups.

The survey links were shared widely through email newsletters, listservs, social media, and via partnerships, and 10 randomly selected respondents were provided with a \$100 gift card for participation in a sweepstakes. Given the constantly changing and widely varying nature of the crisis, the broad analysis from this survey is intended to present the experiences of the respondents, as captured in the moment that they take the survey, with extrapolations for the experiences of the field and industry at large. Additional briefs available at [NAEYC.org/ece-workforce-surveys](https://naeyc.org/ece-workforce-surveys).

* Due to the small state-level sample size not all data points can be reported alongside the national data. All percentages reported throughout the brief represent the valid responses to each individual question as not all respondents were required to respond to each survey question. For response sample sizes by question, please reach out to the authors.