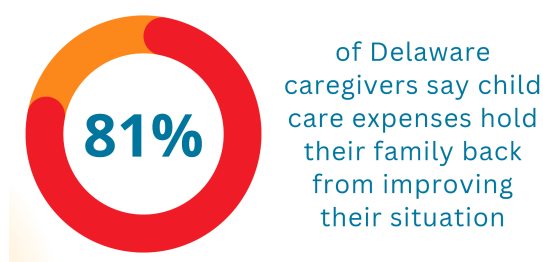


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Survey: Cost, Availability of Child Care is Holding Back Delaware Families

Delaware caregivers describe “disheartening,” “infuriating,” and “extremely overwhelming” challenges in finding and affording care



WILMINGTON, Del.—Finding care and education for children under five in Delaware is difficult, costly, and burdensome for families, according to results of a new survey of parents and caregivers. High prices for tuition, long waitlists, and a lack of options were common themes among participants in the survey, which was conducted by a coalition of advocacy groups including Rodel, the Delaware Association for the Education of Young Children (deaeyc), Delaware Readiness Teams, and the First State Pre-K coalition.

Of the hundreds of respondents, nearly 50 percent said child care is their biggest monthly expense, with more than 30 percent saying it contributes to their debt. A majority (80 percent) said child care expenses are holding their family back from improving their situation in at least one way, including taking a job or increasing hours at work, going back to school, or buying a home.

The results also point to child care challenges as a hindrance to Delaware’s economy, workforce participation, and family stability: 63 percent of parents said they would either return to work or increase their hours if they found consistent quality child care.

CAREGIVERS SAID...

SOME WAITLISTS WERE OVER 5 YEARS

MOST WAITLISTS WERE 3-12 MONTHS

They looked into two or more options for their child:



More than 1/3 were placed on waitlists by two or more centers:



They were turned away outright without being put on a waitlist:

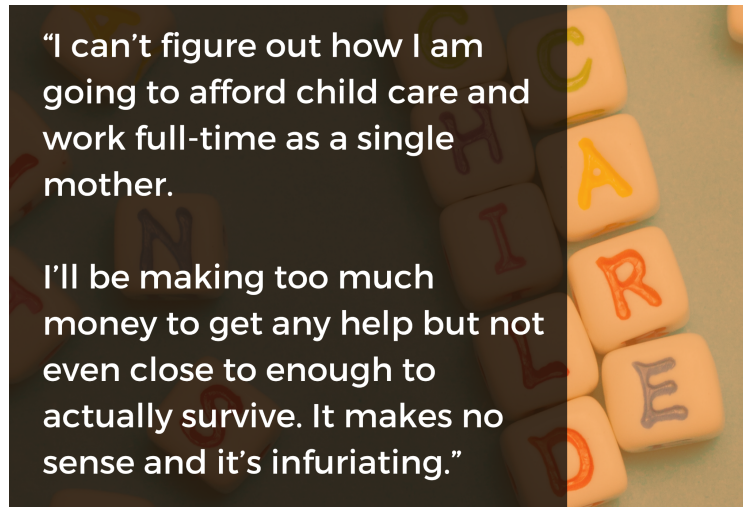


The results come at a time when [Gov. John Carney has proposed](#) renewed investments in early care. While the funding will improve access to state-funded pre-K (Early Childhood Assistance Program, or ECAP) and boost a state subsidy to child care centers called Purchase of Care—[advocates say](#) more is still needed to support parents and young children.

Children who miss out on formal care and education miss out on critical early developmental opportunities. Research proves that experiences in developmentally appropriate high-quality child care programs have a profound impact on young children’s development and success later in life.

“Our experience with finding child care has been a series of epic failures,” said one respondent. “We were put on numerous waitlists for centers in our area—most with a year-plus waiting list and insanely expensive.”

Long waiting lists continue to plague caregivers seeking child care, with more pronounced challenges in Kent and Sussex counties. Among respondents, 71 percent looked into two or more options for their child—and more than a third (37 percent) were placed on a waitlist. Some waiting lists were over five years, respondents said, with most ranging from three to 12 months. More than 20 percent were turned away outright from a program without being put on a waiting list. The child care workforce in Delaware has seen its workforce decrease 12 percent since the onset of COVID-19, and 65 percent of centers indicate they have staffing shortages—a main cause of waiting lists.



Families in Kent and Sussex counties echoed what data and research bear out—there are even fewer child care options downstate. Of respondents in Kent and Sussex counties, 73 percent reported being placed on two or more waitlists, compared to just 45 percent in New Castle County. In fact, 37 percent of caregivers in Kent and Sussex reported being turned away from at least three centers compared to only 29 percent of New Castle County families. Only 12 and 13 percent of children in Kent and Sussex counties, respectively, have access to state-supported child care, compared to 16 percent of children in New Castle County.

The responses aligned to what data and anecdotes from the business community have shown: lack of child care options is also holding back our economy.

Early childhood advocates also released two new data-centric one-pagers that highlight the challenges Delaware families face finding care. In one [highlighting affordability](#), data show that child care, per child, costs 20 percent of the median income in Delaware. Even those who qualify for public assistance can expect to pay 10 percent of their family income on care. The majority of respondents (61 percent) affirmed that cost is a barrier to accessing child care.

Another data sheet focused on [child care accessibility](#) noted that waiting lists are as high as 1,500 families and years long in some cases. In the survey, 45 percent of respondents said that programs in their area are full. As the legislative session begins in Delaware, lawmakers are being encouraged by advocates to continue developing solutions for local families and caregivers like paid family and medical leave (PFML), introduced in Delaware legislation last year. According to the survey, 30 percent of parents returned to work in eight weeks or less after welcoming their new child, and only half had PFML offered through their work. The new state policy to be implemented in the coming years will improve this situation during the early stages of childhood—but parents returning to work will still need child care.

This survey collected input from 227 Delaware caregivers of children ages zero to five between November 2022 and January 2023. [Rodel](#) and [deaeyc](#) are just two of many organizations that comprise [the First State Pre-K coalition](#), which advocates for increased state investments in early learning.

[Click here to see the full results of the survey.](#)

Quotes from Delaware Caregivers:

- “The waitlist is five months and [child care] costs more than our mortgage. We are keeping our fingers crossed we are accepted for POC (Purchase of Care) to help with the expense. If not, we will have to remove our son from child care altogether because we cannot afford it.”
- “I find it disheartening at the least and infuriating daily to see how parents/kids/families are treated by this country. Without early child care, how will parents work to afford their mortgages/groceries/utilities/basics? If parents don't work, who will keep our economy running?”
- “Child care is so expensive. We have another child on the way and the thought of two children in daycare is extremely overwhelming. We love our daycare and don't want to leave it. Daycare should be subsidized and paid for 100% by the state, or at least greatly reduced. Parents shouldn't have to throw \$20,000 a year toward daycare! It's outrageous.”

- “Child care is insanely expensive. I pay \$1,000 more a month than my mortgage for child care. I had to increase my hours at work to afford it. We may not be able to have a third kid because of this. We can’t save money for college, we have no savings, and are in debt. We make too much money to qualify for assistance.”
- “I can’t figure out how I am going to afford child care and work full-time as a single mother. I’ll be making too much money to get any help but not even close to enough to actually survive. It makes no sense and it’s infuriating.”
- “For my child with a disability, early childhood education seems to be failing. My child who has autism has been turned away from plenty of child care centers because either the teachers have no knowledge or capability on how to care for a child with disabilities, or they just fail to have it in their center.”
- “No es lo mismo desde casa que asista a una escuela. Además aprende a socializar y sobre todo aprenderá el inglés que yo no sé y por tanto no le puedo enseñar.” *[Child care] is not the same from home as attending a school. [At school] she learns to socialize and above all she will learn English that I do not know and therefore I cannot teach her.]*
- “Time is a major issue because of schedules and child care hours. It’s hard to do shiftwork.”
- “It’s been a challenge to ensure I’m providing the best for our children and I wonder if they are/will be behind academically.”
- “We cannot save or afford to improve our home as quality child care costs force paycheck to paycheck living for two working parents with good jobs.”

Visit us online at [First State Pre-K](#), [Rodel](#), [Delaware Readiness Teams](#), and [deaeyc](#).
