



**NATIONAL
WOMEN'S
LAW CENTER**

Justice for Her. Justice for All.

FEBRUARY 2025 FACT SHEET

Child Care is Unaffordable in Every State

By Sarah Javaid and Melissa Boteach

Access to child care is foundational for children's development, families' financial security, and the overall growth and health of our economy. Child care allows parents, especially women, to participate in the labor force, which promotes their family's economic security. It increases workers' productivity, contributing to the growth of the overall economy. And it sets children up for success in school, as quality education in children's first years yields long-term positive outcomes on their health, education, and employment.

Unfortunately, child care is also deeply unaffordable. **A family would need to make over \$180,000 per year to reasonably afford the national cost of infant care.¹**

Child care costs can vary widely by location depending on cost of living, demand for child care, and the degree of help parents and families receive from state-based policies, funding, and assistance.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, a family should have to contribute no more than 7% of their income for child care for it to be affordable.² However, parents would need to make over \$180,000 annually in order for the average national cost of infant care (\$12,655) to be 7% of their income. A single-parent household would have to make nearly \$87 per hour in a full-time, year-round position to afford child care. In some areas, such as Washington, D.C., a family's income would need to be over \$330,000 per year to comfortably afford child care for one child. Even in South Dakota, a state with lower-than-average child care costs, families would still need to make nearly \$98,000 annually.³ Families with multiple children would need to make *significantly* more to have affordable child care.

It is important to note that the cost of providing child care cannot easily be reduced, since the bulk of those costs are for compensation for child care educators, who already receive poverty-level wages. These low wages make it difficult for early educators to support their own families and child care programs to attract and retain staff.

Families' child care cost burdens can only be addressed by providing sustained, robust public investments that ensure all families have access to affordable, high-quality child care, and early educators are paid living wages with good benefits.

Annual Income and Hourly Wage Needed to Comfortably Afford Child Care for One Child by State (2023)

| Rank Based on Necessary Annual Income and Hourly Wage | State | Average Annual Cost of Infant Child Care | Annual Income Necessary to Comfortably Afford Infant Child Care | Hourly Wage for a Single Full-Time, Year-Round Worker Necessary to Comfortably Afford Infant Child Care |
|---|----------------------|--|---|---|
| | <i>United States</i> | \$12,655 | \$180,788 | \$86.92 |
| 1 | District of Columbia | \$23,140 | \$330,571 | \$158.93 |
| 2 | Massachusetts | \$19,567 | \$279,529 | \$134.39 |
| 3 | California | \$17,990 | \$256,993 | \$123.55 |
| 4 | Washington | \$17,985 | \$256,929 | \$123.52 |
| 5 | New York | \$17,984 | \$256,907 | \$123.51 |
| 6 | Maryland | \$17,113 | \$244,471 | \$117.53 |
| 7 | Hawaii | \$16,874 | \$241,050 | \$115.89 |
| 8 | Colorado | \$16,162 | \$230,879 | \$111.00 |
| 9 | Connecticut | \$15,964 | \$228,057 | \$109.64 |
| 10 | New Jersey | \$15,889 | \$226,986 | \$109.13 |
| 11 | Rhode Island | \$15,759 | \$225,121 | \$108.23 |
| 12 | Oregon | \$15,340 | \$219,143 | \$105.36 |
| 13 | Vermont | \$15,184 | \$216,914 | \$104.29 |
| 14 | Minnesota | \$14,947 | \$213,529 | \$102.66 |
| 15 | New Hampshire | \$14,326 | \$204,657 | \$98.39 |
| 16 | Virginia | \$14,278 | \$203,964 | \$98.06 |
| 17 | Illinois | \$14,032 | \$200,457 | \$96.37 |
| 18 | Pennsylvania | \$12,581 | \$179,729 | \$86.41 |
| 19 | Delaware | \$12,571 | \$179,579 | \$86.34 |
| 20 | New Mexico | \$12,543 | \$179,179 | \$86.14 |
| 21 | Wisconsin | \$11,986 | \$171,229 | \$82.32 |
| 22 | Kansas | \$11,851 | \$169,293 | \$81.39 |
| 23 | Florida | \$11,760 | \$168,000 | \$80.77 |
| 24 | Nevada | \$11,716 | \$167,364 | \$80.46 |
| 25 | Arizona | \$11,440 | \$163,429 | \$78.57 |
| 26 | Indiana | \$11,291 | \$161,293 | \$77.54 |
| 27 | North Carolina | \$10,934 | \$156,200 | \$75.10 |

| Rank Based on Necessary Annual Income and Hourly Wage | State | Average Annual Cost of Infant Child Care | Annual Income Necessary to Comfortably Afford Infant Child Care | Hourly Wage for a Single Full-Time, Year-Round Worker Necessary to Comfortably Afford Infant Child Care |
|---|----------------|--|---|---|
| 28 | Michigan | \$10,856 | \$155,079 | \$74.56 |
| 29 | Ohio | \$10,815 | \$154,493 | \$74.28 |
| 30 | Missouri | \$10,703 | \$152,893 | \$73.51 |
| 31 | Alaska | \$10,692 | \$152,743 | \$73.43 |
| 32 | Nebraska | \$10,660 | \$152,286 | \$73.21 |
| 33 | Montana | \$10,400 | \$148,571 | \$71.43 |
| 34 | Texas | \$10,374 | \$148,200 | \$71.25 |
| 35 | Wyoming | \$10,275 | \$146,786 | \$70.57 |
| 36 | Maine | \$10,270 | \$146,714 | \$70.54 |
| 37 | Iowa | \$10,172 | \$145,314 | \$69.86 |
| 38 | Tennessee | \$10,005 | \$142,921 | \$68.71 |
| 39 | North Dakota | \$9,981 | \$142,579 | \$68.55 |
| 40 | Utah | \$9,816 | \$140,229 | \$67.42 |
| 41 | Georgia | \$9,737 | \$139,093 | \$66.87 |
| 42 | Oklahoma | \$9,385 | \$134,064 | \$64.45 |
| 43 | West Virginia | \$9,230 | \$131,857 | \$63.39 |
| 44 | Louisiana | \$9,068 | \$129,543 | \$62.28 |
| 45 | Idaho | \$8,859 | \$126,550 | \$60.84 |
| 46 | Kentucky | \$8,515 | \$121,643 | \$58.48 |
| 47 | Alabama | \$8,479 | \$121,121 | \$58.23 |
| 48 | Arkansas | \$8,280 | \$118,286 | \$56.87 |
| 49 | South Carolina | \$8,099 | \$115,700 | \$55.63 |
| 50 | Mississippi | \$7,455 | \$106,500 | \$51.20 |
| 51 | South Dakota | \$6,843 | \$97,757 | \$47.00 |

Source: National Women’s Law Center calculations based on average program cost of full-time center-based and family-based care for infants using Child Care Aware, “Price of Care: 2023,” https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2023_Affordability_Analysis.pdf. The national average for infant care is the average of the three methodologies used by Child Care Aware. Needed income for affordable infant child care is the pre-tax income necessary for child care cost for one child to be only 7% of pre-tax income. Hourly wage translation is for a single full-time, year-round worker (40 hours per week * 52 weeks per year).

Families need relief from high child care costs.

Even before the pandemic, child care costs rose at twice the rate of inflation for three decades.⁴ The pandemic laid bare and exacerbated the cracks in a system glued together by parents paying unaffordable sums and early educators, nearly all women and disproportionately women of color, making poverty-level wages.⁵ The relief funding in the American Rescue Plan helped to stabilize the sector, benefitting 10 million children, boosting wages for early educators, and helping states strengthen their child care policies.⁶ Unfortunately, with that funding expired and the underlying cracks unaddressed, child care prices will likely continue to rise. In fact, one-third of parents reported seeing child care prices go up in the year after pandemic child care stabilization funding expired.⁷ Not all impacts of the funding expiration will be immediate, but the negative effects will be long-term and deeply damaging.

Child care benefits families and the economy, allowing parents, particularly women, to participate in the labor force, children to have access to high-quality early education, businesses to have a stable and productive workforce, and our economy to thrive overall. Families need more affordable child care— which is only possible through sustained and robust public investment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Ashir Coillberg, Karla Coleman-Castillo, Erin Longbottom, Sandra Markowitz, Whitney Pesek, Sydney Petersen, Karen Schulman, Shrija Shrestha, Jasmine Tucker, Julie Vogtman, Delaney Wallace, Hilary Woodward, and Sarah Yergeau for their review, design, and dissemination of this factsheet.

- 1 National Women's Law Center calculations based on average of full-time center based and full-time family-based care for infants using Child Care Aware, "Price of Care: 2023," https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2023_Affordability_Analysis.pdf. Annual income necessary to afford infant child care is the pre-tax income necessary for child care cost for one child to be only 7% of pre-tax income. Hourly wage translation is for a single full-time, year-round worker (40 hours per week and 52 weeks per year for a total of 2080 hours per year).
- 2 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "New Rule Proposed to Improve Child Care Access, Affordability, and Stability," (July 11, 2023), <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/07/11/new-rule-proposed-improve-child-care-access-affordability-stability.html>
- 3 National Women's Law Center calculations based on average of full-time center based and full-time family-based care for infants using Child Care Aware, "Price of Care: 2023," https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2023_Affordability_Analysis.pdf. Annual income necessary to afford infant child care is the pre-tax income necessary for child care cost for one child to be only 7% of pre-tax income. Hourly wage translation is for a single full-time, year-round worker (40 hours per week and 52 weeks per year for a total of 2080 hours per year).
- 4 Elizabeth Schulze, "Child care costs are outpacing inflation: Report," ABCNews, (May 31, 2024), <https://abcnews.go.com/Business/child-care-costs-outpacing-inflation-report/story?id=110688837#-:text=The%20cost%20of%20child%20care%20in%20the%20U.S.,has%20increased%20133%25%20in%20the%20same%20time%20frame.>
- 5 Brooke LePage, "The Child Care and Early Learning Workforce is Underpaid and Women are Paying the Price," National Women's Law Center, (May 31, 2023), <https://nwlc.org/resource/the-child-care-and-early-learning-workforce-is-underpaid-and-women-are-paying-the-price/>.
- 6 Shengwei Sun, Karen Schulman, Rachel Wilensky, and Melissa Boteach, "Cliff Notes: Pandemic Relief Funding Teaches Lessons About the Need for Sustained Child Care Investments," National Women's Law Center, (September 25, 2024), <https://nwlc.org/resource/cliff-notes-pandemic-relief-funding-teaches-lessons-about-need-for-sustained-child-care-investments/>.
- 7 National Women's Law Center, "Day After Expiration of Child Care Funding, NWLC Releases Survey Data Revealing One-Third of Parents Faced Higher Child Care Costs Over Past Year," (October 1, 2024), <https://nwlc.org/press-release/day-after-expiration-of-child-care-funding-nwlc-releases-survey-data-revealing-one-third-of-parents-faced-higher-child-care-costs-over-past-year/>.