



For Release: Wednesday, June 14, 2023

Contact: Emily Miota | emiota@kidsforward.org | 262-853-6863

Inaccessible and Unaffordable Child Care Pushes Wisconsin Families to the Breaking Point

State Legislature Has Opportunity to Stabilize Children and Families

Wisconsin's lack of accessible child care short-changes children and makes getting to work for parents difficult, while those who can find care struggle to pay for it. This costs the economy billions of dollars a year and holds women back professionally, especially women of color. That's according to the 2023 KIDS COUNT® Data Book — a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and released today.

"The child care crisis in Wisconsin has reached a boiling over point," stated Michele Mackey, Kids Forward CEO, "If the state legislature wants to address the hiring shortage, they need to start with ensuring accessible and affordable child care."

The Data Book reports that too many parents cannot secure child care compatible with their work schedules and commutes. In 2020–21, almost one in 10 children under age 6 lived in families in which someone had to quit, change or refuse a job because of problems with child care.

"My husband works as lead supervisor at one of the factories here. He starts at 4:30 AM. No places in town take children that early (they open between 5-6 AM). Places are offering big incentive bonuses to sign on, but if people don't have a place to put their kids, they can't take the job," stated [Melissa Biel, a parent in Beaver Dam](#).

To make matters worse, the number of [family child care providers has decreased dramatically](#) over the past few decades, which disproportionately impacts families of color.

"When family care providers close because of financial constraints, parents have an even harder time getting to work," stated Daithi Wolfe, Senior Early Education Analyst at Kids Forward, "Family care is typically more flexible, allowing parents to drop off and pick up children at times that match their employers' schedules."

Even if parents can find an opening for child care near their home, they often can't afford to pay for it. Wisconsin's average cost of center-based child care for a toddler was \$12,415, 11% of median income for a married couple and 36% of a single mother's income in the state.

This cost burden is even greater for families of color in Wisconsin. Systemic and historical racism over decades have driven disparities in earnings. As a result, families of color in Wisconsin pay a larger share of their income for child care than white families do.

“There were weeks when I was scrambling to find a babysitter. I would have to use my personal time from work to try to find child care that we could afford. It was very hard to do,” shared [Leanna Johnson, a mother living in Racine](#).

While the cost of care burdens families, child care workers are some of the lowest paid professions - 98% of professions pay better. Median pay for child care workers in Wisconsin was \$12.66 an hour in 2022, less than the wage for animal caretaker (\$12.70), retail (\$14.14) and customer service (\$18.80) workers.

Transitioning from a faltering child care system to creating a flourishing one will take new thinking and investing at the local, state, and national levels.

State leaders should use state funds in the 2023-25 budget to continue the Child Care Counts program (and other programs for families and providers) to stabilize the early care and education system throughout Wisconsin. This is only the first step. State leaders must continue to support this essential component of children's lives, families' economic security, and businesses' success, with additional and ongoing funds.

Additionally, Wisconsin's federal delegation needs to present a unified front and reauthorize and strengthen the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act, and increase funding for public pre-kindergarten and Head Start. They should also expand the federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which serves student parents.

Each year, the *Data Book* presents national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community factors — and ranks the states according to how children are faring overall.

###

RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2023 *KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book* will be available at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the *KIDS COUNT* Data Center at datacenter.aecf.org.

ABOUT KIDS FORWARD

Kids Forward inspires action and promotes access to opportunity for every kid, every family, and every community in Wisconsin, notably children and families of color and those furthest from opportunity. We envision a Wisconsin where every child thrives.

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's young people by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. *KIDS COUNT*® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.