

2025 Progress Across 50 States and DC: State Policy Wins in ECE Workforce

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This analysis of the year in early childhood state policy advocacy relies on data from a survey of early childhood policy advocates in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, conducted May 2025 through December 2025. The survey asked them for highlights from the year, so the results are representative and not comprehensive. Policy "wins" include legislation, funding increases, executive actions, and regulatory changes.

The survey was developed and executed by Dr. Lisa Kerber of Frontera Strategy. Frontera supports advocacy efforts nationwide by providing qualitative and quantitative research services, including needs assessments and environmental scans, program and policy evaluation, statistical analyses, and survey research for associations, foundations, and nonprofit service organizations active in state capitols.

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Pay Increases, Bonuses, and Grants

Georgia

The Georgia legislature allocated \$550,895 to support the recruitment and retention of Babies Can't Wait special instructors and service coordinators, professionals who support families who have young children with disabilities and developmental delays. These professionals have not seen a rate increase since the 1990s.

Target population: Service coordinators and special instructors who contract with Babies Can't wait to provide services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays

State funding: Relatively small increase of state funding

Quantify: 199 Service Coordinators and 293 Special Instructors will receive rate increases as a result of this new allocation to the Babies Can't Wait program.

[Link](#)

[Blog](#)

Massachusetts

Sustaining Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) operations grants funded at \$475 million in the FY26 state budget.

Target population: All licensed child care programs in Massachusetts are eligible to apply for C3. New regulations require grantees to attest to being willing to accept vouchers (enroll children who pay through the state's child care voucher system).

State funding: No change in state funding related to this win

Quantify: Nearly 8,000 licensed programs (center-based and family child care) are receiving a C3 grant. C3 has helped stabilize programs and grow total licensed capacity statewide. The grant has also led to stabilizing the workforce – increasing educator wages and decreasing turnover. There are benefits for families, as C3 grant funds help mitigate tuition increases.

[Link](#) (C3 funding appears in two line items in the FY26 state budget: 3000-1045 C3 Stabilization Grants, \$115 million)

[Childcare Grants to Providers](#) (\$360 million)

[Blog](#)

Ohio

An additional \$2.85 million in state funding was allocated to the Child Care Provider Recruitment program to increase child care access in underserved areas in the state. Providers received a rate increase as of October 2025, moving to the 50th percentile of the 2024 Market Rate Survey.

Target population: The recruitment program is focused on the creation of family child care in rural child care deserts.

State funding: Relatively small increase of state funding

Oklahoma

The state budget for the Oklahoma State Department of Education saw a 3.15% increase, totaling \$3.98 billion, for public education and teacher recruitment initiatives. To address

teacher shortages, particularly in early childhood education, the state expanded its teacher signing bonus program. Bonuses of up to \$50,000 were offered to attract and retain qualified educators in pre-K through third-grade classrooms, especially in rural or high-poverty districts.

State funding: Relatively small increase of state funding

[Link](#)

[Story](#)

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's enacted FY 2025-26 budget created a new Child Care Recruitment and Retention line item, which was funded at \$25 million. Intended to be a recurring measure, funds will begin to address the child care workforce crisis by providing \$450 payments to teachers working in programs that serve subsidy children.

Target population: Child care workers serving in programs participating in the Child Care Works subsidy program benefit most directly from this policy win. Families will also benefit from more high-quality teachers being recruited and retained in the field, allowing more programs to keep their doors open.

State funding: Relatively large increase of state funding

Quantify: The new line item was funded at \$25 million, which will provide \$450 one-time payments to approximately 53,000 child care teachers in Pennsylvania.

[Link](#), p. 293

[Link](#), pgs. 5-9

[Blog](#)

Tennessee

For the first time, a Tennessee governor featured child care as a priority in his state-of-the-state address and included recurring state general fund dollars in the budget: \$5.9 million to cover childcare for families earning between 85% and 100% of SMI, and \$7.2 million to expand the WAGE\$ early educator bonus program.

Target population: This expanded the CCDF program, which previously limited payment assistance eligibility to families earning up to 85% of SMI.

State funding: Relatively small increase of state funding

Quantify: Each year, about 3,500 early educators could receive compensation bonuses averaging \$2000. About 600 additional parents could get payment assistance for infant and toddler care annually.

[Link](#)

[Blog](#)

Wisconsin

The state invested \$110 million in one-time payments – federal funds from interest earned on relief dollars until June 30, 2026 – for child care providers. This program is the remains of Child Care Counts, the direct provider stabilization program that was created during the pandemic that disbursed monthly payments based on children served and staff employed since 2020.

Target population: Regulated child care providers

State funding: No change in state funding related to this win

Quantify: About 76% of child care providers (3624) participate in this program.

[Link](#)

Wyoming

The Interagency Childcare Working Group launched a Childcare Provider Grant. The grant supported costs associated with establishing a new in-home or center-based facility or with increasing the number of children a provider can serve. The Wyoming Community Foundation distributed the \$10,000 grants with funding - \$188,200 total - from DFS, the Ellbogen Foundation, the Wyoming Council for Women, and the Wyoming Community Foundation.

Target population: Child care providers and families

State funding: Relatively small increase of state funding

Quantify: In total, around 100 providers applied during the two grant cycles, with 23 being awarded.

[Link](#)

[Story](#)

Training, Certifications, and Coursework for Providers

Illinois

HB3446 (Rep. Canty / Sen. Cappel) requires the Department of Early Childhood, in collaboration with ICCB, IBHE, and DCFS, to publish and update, at least annually, a comprehensive list of early childhood coursework needed to become a qualified early childhood teacher or director.

Minnesota

The Workforce and Labor Development Omnibus bill (SF 17/HF 15) included funding for grants to local communities to increase the number of quality child care providers, especially in Greater Minnesota where communities are experiencing significant provider shortages. The bill also included direct funding to the six Minnesota Initiative Foundations to sustain and increase regional providers, and to two nonprofits to train providers and subsidize child care costs.

Target population: Child care providers

State funding: Relatively large increase of state funding

Washington

House Bill 1648 addresses challenges faced by child care providers in meeting certification and training requirements by introducing alternative pathways and extending deadlines. HB 1648 acknowledges the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the child care industry and delays the requirement for child care providers to meet certification and training qualifications until at least August 1, 2030. Additionally, it introduces a work equivalency option, allowing providers to substitute five years of cumulative work experience in licensed child care for formal education credentials. The legislation also mandates the development of a noncredit-bearing, community-based training pathway that aligns with core competencies, is offered in multiple languages, and is accessible to providers in both rural and urban settings. This pathway is designed to be low-

cost and available online. Additionally, the bill requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to convene a stakeholder group to assist in identifying strategies to improve staff qualification requirements and verification processes and report to the State Legislature by December 1, 2026. By implementing these changes, HB 1648 aims to retain experienced child care professionals, reduce barriers to entry for new providers, and enhance the quality of early learning services across the state.

Target population: Experienced child care providers, providers in rural and under-resourced communities, providers who do not speak English

State funding: No change in state funding related to this win

Quantify: Washington has almost 6,000 licensed child care providers, and the bill's provisions are applicable to these providers, particularly those who may face challenges meeting traditional certification and training requirements.

[Link](#)

[Link](#)

Health Care Coverage

Maryland

HB 859 will promote access to health insurance for child care professionals. This bill requires the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE) to promote access to health insurance for child care professionals by (1) partnering with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), prekindergarten provider hubs, child care associations, and relevant nonprofit organizations; (2) helping child care professionals obtain health insurance through MHBE or Medicaid; and (3) assisting child care professionals who lose Medicaid coverage with finding alternative health insurance options.

Target population: Child care providers

State funding: Relatively small increase of state funding

Quantify: The State committed \$250,000 in FY26 to outreach, with the goal of connecting more child care providers to health care benefits.

[Link](#)

Montana

HB 245 lifts the Medicaid expansion sunset/termination date and continues Medicaid expansion. It also includes some minor changes to the HELP Link program (the Montana Medicaid workforce program) to provide voluntary workforce development assistance.

Target population: Montanans on Medicaid expansion (and their children)

State funding: No change in state funding related to this win

Quantify: By extending Medicaid expansion, Montana better supports parents' health, enabling them to care for their children effectively, and ensures child care providers—essential to the workforce—can continue their critical roles, strengthening both Montana's economy and child care system.

[Link](#)

[Story](#)

Retirement Accounts

Arkansas

Act 587 allows early childhood workers to participate in the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System. Participation is voluntary. This will allow members of the ECE workforce an important opportunity to plan and save for their retirement.

Target population: Early childhood workers

State funding: No change in state funding related to this win

[Link](#)

Hiring Interim Conditional Teachers

Illinois

An administrative rules change will allow child care centers to hire interim conditional teachers who are actively working toward meeting the educational requirements outlined in administrative rules. This provision includes several safeguards and will be implemented through the JCAR (Joint Committee on Administrative Rules) process rather than through legislation.