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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Looming end of Child Care Counts Program already devastating for child care programs, families

Initial survey results show likely tuition hikes for parents, concerns for future of the child care field

MADISON, WIS. – The upcoming end of the Child Care Counts Program in early 2024 is already prompting concerning effects for programs and families, including tuition hikes for working parents, according to preliminary statewide survey data released this week.

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association surveyed child care providers and parents and found nearly 87 percent of program directors and owners are considering raising parent fees as a result of the current reduction in Child Care Counts (CCC) payments and eventual end of the program, which was confirmed with the July signing of the 2023-25 state budget.

Nearly one-third of the 525 surveyed program directors/owners also say they are considering closing their doors, which would represent a loss of care for at least 19,790 families with young children. At least 13,178 children already are on waiting lists at surveyed programs, according to WECA data.

“The data is troubling but not surprising,” said WECA Executive Director Ruth Schmidt. “The end of the program will have lasting ripple effects for the child care field, families, businesses and the overall economy.”

The survey began shortly before the signing of Wisconsin’s 2023-25 biennial budget, which did not include any funding to continue CCC beyond early 2024. Advocates across Wisconsin, including the Raising Wisconsin coalition, called for \$300 million in state general purpose revenue to support the continuation of the program. CCC has been entirely funded by federal dollars and provided stabilization payments to nearly all Wisconsin child care programs to increase provider compensation, offset other operating costs and keep tuition as reasonable as possible for families since the start of the pandemic in 2020.

Data of 960 respondents show there is a striking pivot taking place in Wisconsin’s child care field. In fall 2022, a nationally administered survey measured the anticipated impact of the loss of pandemic-relief funding on early childhood wages and potential rate increases. At that time, 33 percent of Wisconsin respondents said they were or maybe were considering leaving their job or closing their family child care program because of provider wages, a figure now up to 47 percent in the newest WECA data.

In terms of parent fee increases, earlier data show 61 percent were considering raising rates, a figure now at 87 percent in the WECA data – and even more than 90 percent in some regions of the state.

“Child care is already expensive. Asking families to carry more of a burden when there are options to help and support them is insanity,” said a parent from Dodge County who works as a K-12 teacher. “As a public educator in the state, I already see a teacher shortage. I see myself adding to that number because I won’t be

able to afford child care for my child. As a veteran teacher, this breaks my heart. Funding Child Care Counts isn't funding families – it's supplying your workforce with the means necessary to continue going to work and building our economy.”

Public opinion on support for child care remains clear, especially in light of record-setting advocacy efforts over the last year in support of public investment by providers, parents, and employers. Yet, the Legislature failed to fund CCC after receiving at least 95,000 letters calling for funding Child Care Counts, meeting with constituents on Child Care Advocacy Day, and receiving a letter of support from 100 employers.

“The data confirms what we already knew is true – state funding for child care is absolutely necessary, which makes the Legislature’s inaction on Child Care Counts in the state budget especially troubling,” Schmidt said. “Not investing in child care is exceptionally short-sighted when we consider there is a record-setting state surplus available.”

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About Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) is a leading state non-profit organization, founded in 1971, that supports and advocates for the early childhood workforce and early care and education in Wisconsin. It is the state affiliate of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). A statewide organization with local reach, WECA administers and leads several key programs for child care providers and programs. Most recently, it launched Raising Wisconsin, a multi-sector statewide advocacy initiative and coalition that advocates for significant public investment in child care and optimal child health and well-being.

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association Survey Collection

The online survey, created and conducted by WECA using Microsoft Forms, represents the responses of a non-randomized sample of 960 early childhood professionals working in the child care field and parents who have child(ren) in regulated care in Wisconsin. The initial results shared are from those individuals who completed the bilingual English-Spanish survey between June 26, 2023, and Aug. 3, 2023. The survey was distributed via email listservs to early childhood professionals and programs enrolled in one of more of WECA’s programs/services and/or who are members of WECA/National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). It also was promoted on WECA’s social media channels, with the encouragement for those who received it to also share within their professional networks.