

# Transforming Workforce Solutions in Child Care:

*Lessons Learned & Pathways Forward*



*Presented by the Montgomery  
County Commission on Child Care  
November 2025*

# Montgomery County Commission on Child Care

The Vision of the Commission on Child Care is access to high-quality, affordable child care for all Montgomery County families.

The Mission of the Commission on Child Care is to advise the County Executive and County Council on the development of government policies, programs and services that enhance community support for high-quality, affordable and accessible child care.

## The Members of the Commission on Child Care:

Jennifer Arnaiz, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Tracey Clay, Representative, Child Care

Allison Fialkov, Representative, Parent

Elka Forbes, Representative, Business and General Public

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# The Power of Collective Voices: Addressing Workforce Issues with Vision



Over the past two years, the Commission has examined workforce challenges impacting the entire child care community. To acquire a deeper understanding of the issues, the Commission hosted a virtual forum with early care educators from the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and Maryland, inviting them to share their greatest workforce challenges and most innovative solutions.


To gain a broader perspective, the Commission expanded its outreach beyond the DMV area by collaborating with early care providers and stakeholders in other states to examine workforce challenges and identify innovative solutions.

This presentation highlights the Commission's key findings.


# Key Challenges

*Throughout the Commission's work, three recurring key challenges consistently emerged*

Key Challenge 1:  
Recruiting and Retaining a  
Qualified Child Care  
Workforce



Key Challenge 2: Ensuring  
Equitable Pay and  
Compensation for Child  
Care Professionals



Key Challenge 3: Balancing  
Child Care Affordability With  
Competitive Provider  
Salaries

# Key Challenge 1: Recruiting and Retaining a Qualified Child Care Workforce



Low compensation and limited benefits, making the profession financially unsustainable for many



High levels of burnout due to long hours, high emotional demands and inadequate support



Undervalued and underappreciated contributions leading to reduced interest in early childhood education careers



High credential and educational requirements, creating barriers to entry for prospective professionals



Lack of career advancement opportunities, limiting long-term professional growth



# Key Challenge 2: Ensuring Equitable Pay and Compensation for Child Care Professionals



Intense competition from higher paying industries (e.g., Amazon, Walmart, etc.), making it harder for early care employers to attract and retain qualified staff



Persistent wage gap between child care professionals and K-12 educators, despite performing similarly essential roles



Lack of access to critical benefits such as paid leave, health insurance and retirement plans

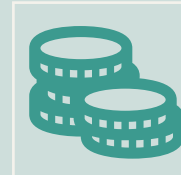


Higher burnout rates and staffing shortage impacting program quality and stability

# Key Challenge 3: Balancing Child Care Affordability With Competitive Provider Salaries



Financial burdens on both families and providers due to cuts to state and local child care scholarship (subsidy) programs



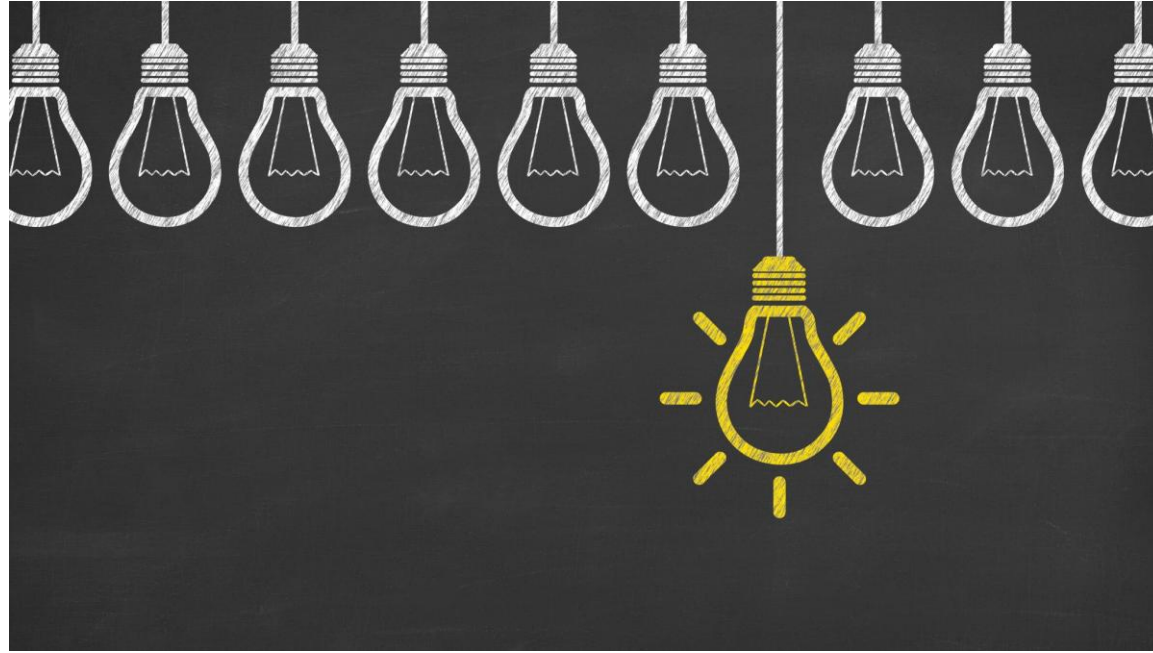
High operating costs (e.g., staff wages, facility expenses, materials and supplies, training and professional development) make it extremely challenging for child care programs to identify areas where they can reduce spending without compromising quality



Ensuring quality and safety in child care settings requires maintaining appropriate staff-to-child ratios, which in turn drives up payroll costs



Relying on market rate studies instead of cost of care studies can underestimate the true cost of providing quality child care



# *Homegrown Solutions: Innovation from DMV Child Care Leaders*



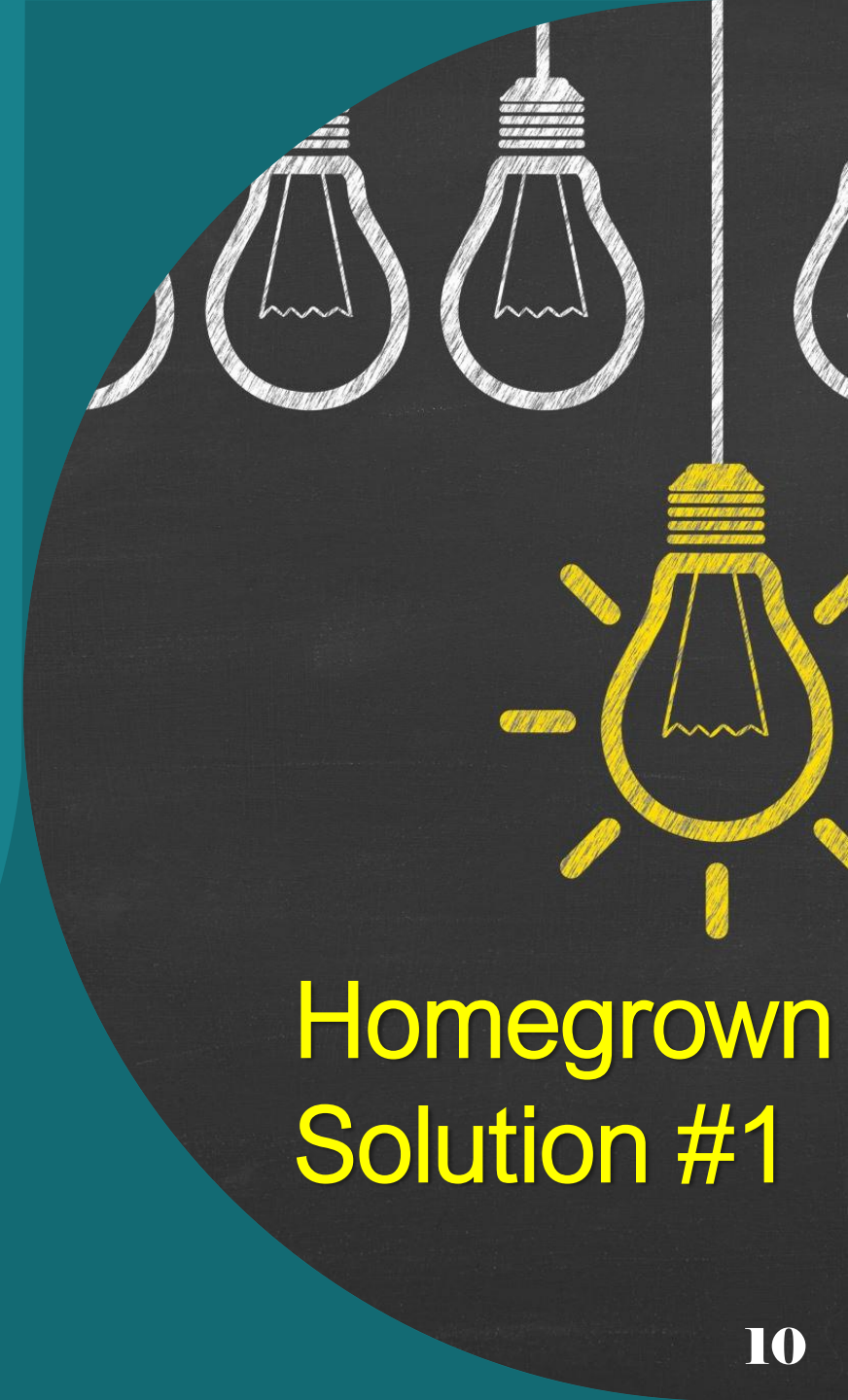


# Commission on Child Care Virtual Forum, April 2024

The purpose of the forum was to create a collaborative space where participants could openly discuss the shared workforce challenges, they face—such as staffing shortages, salary and compensation disparities, professional development barriers, and systemic inequities. More importantly, the forum served as a platform to elevate and exchange innovative strategies that are already being implemented or envisioned at the local level. These strategies, which emerged organically from within the child care community, are what the Commission refers to as *Homegrown Solutions*.

*As the poet Rumi once said, “What you seek is seeking you”—a reminder that the answers we need are often already within our reach, waiting to be discovered through collective insight and collaboration.*

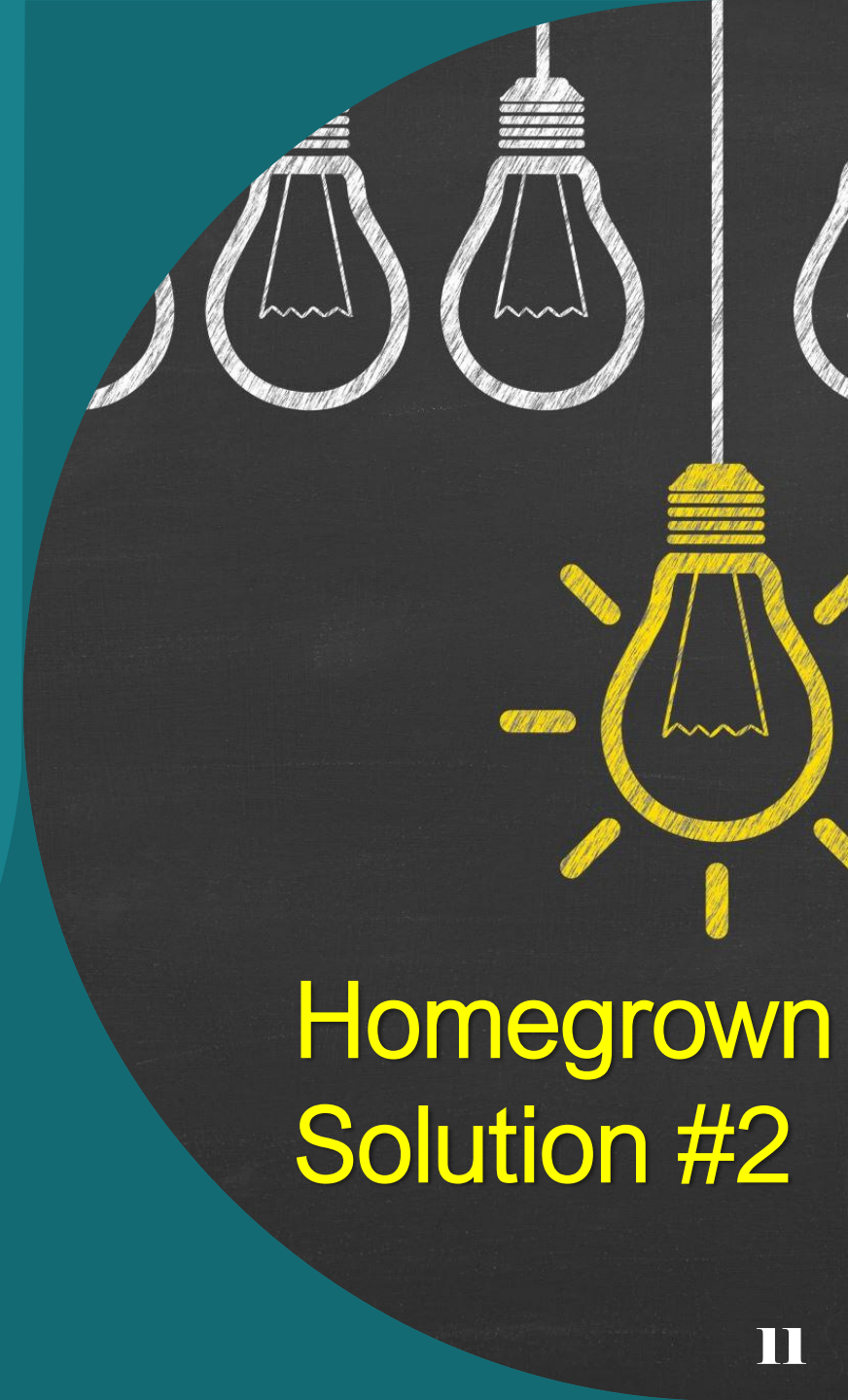
- **Identified Challenge:** Child care programs face ongoing challenges in filling vacancies with qualified, credentialed staff who are also deeply committed to and passionate about working with young children.
- **Shared Innovative Solution:** Engage students from *university apprenticeship programs* to provide immediate staffing support in early care settings, offering them valuable hands-on experience and a pathway into the early childhood education workforce. For example, University of Maryland Early Education Corps, a registered apprenticeship program is designed to support early childhood students in earning their CDA (Child Development Associate) while they work alongside child care educators in high-quality child care programs. Harford Community College offers an 18-month child care apprenticeship program, combining online classes with paid, full-time work, mentorship, and job placement support.



## Homegrown Solution #1



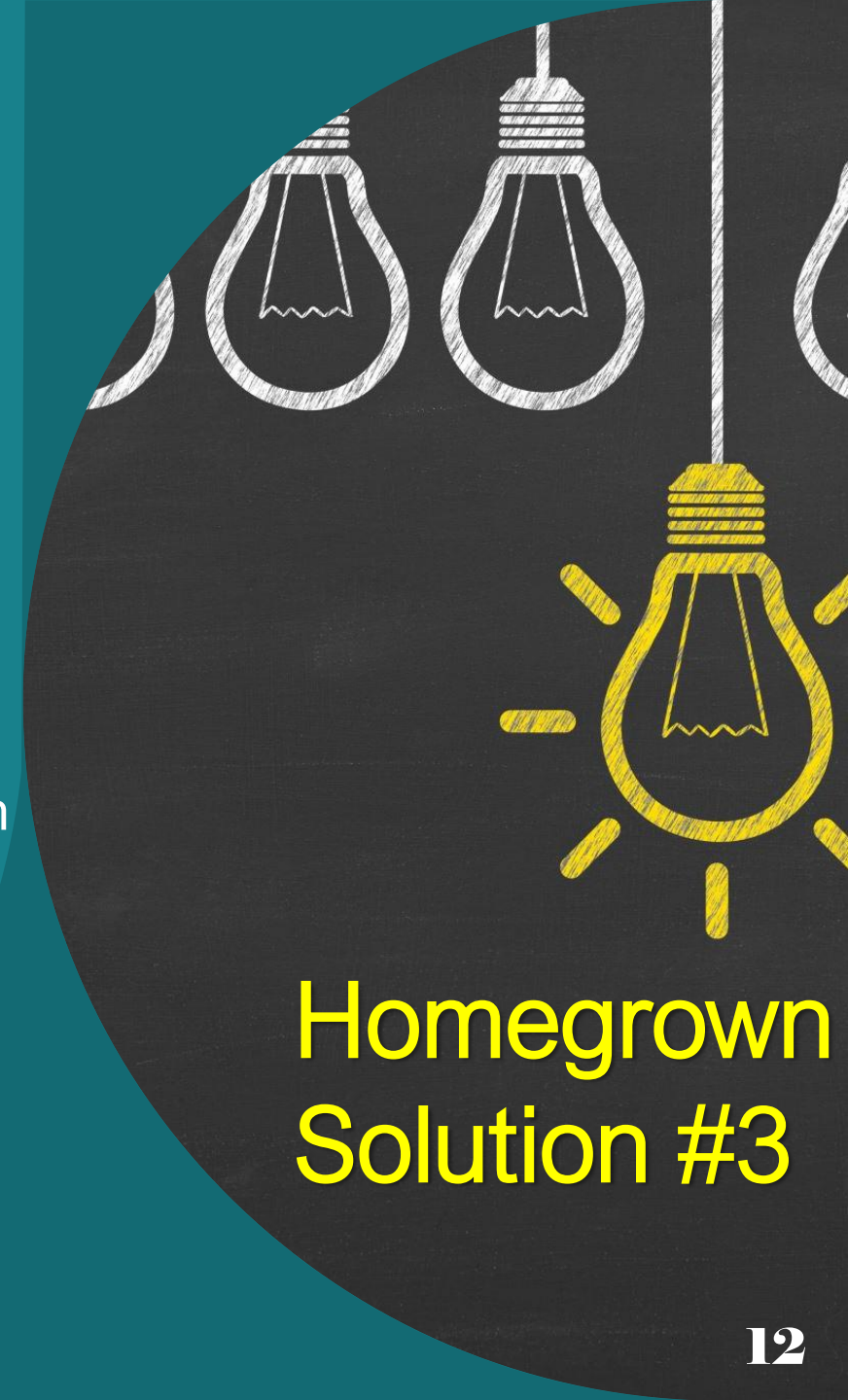
- **Identified Challenge:** Child care programs—both center-based and family-based—face significant expenses related to staffing, facilities, materials, and training. These high operating costs make it challenging to provide affordable care while maintaining quality and long-term sustainability.
- **Shared Innovative Solution:** Encourage the development of *shared services alliances* through collaboration among state and local early care agencies and private entities, to strengthen the infrastructure and capacity of child care providers. For example, in August 2025, Montgomery County Early Childhood Services launched the first cohort of the [Montgomery County Shared Resource Collaborative](#). The Collaborative is designed to strengthen and support both family and center-based educators and operators by offering centralized access to critical business and operations services, helping providers save time, reduce costs and focus more on delivering high-quality care. In the Fall of 2025, [Maryland Family Network](#) announced plans to launch a statewide program called the Maryland Shared Services Alliance.



## Homegrown Solution #2

- **Identified Challenge:** Child care programs continue to face persistent staffing shortages, making it difficult to provide adequate coverage when staff are absent due to illness or personal needs. This shortage also limits opportunities for professional development, as providers are often required to complete continuing education outside of work hours because programs cannot afford to release staff during the day for training or conferences.

- **Shared Innovative Solution:** Advocate for the State of Maryland to develop a statewide or regionally managed workforce registration system that supports professional development and regulatory compliance for educators. This system would enhance the early childhood workforce by monitoring individual career development, credentials, and skills, while also improving workforce reliability by providing licensed child care programs access to a vetted pool of qualified substitutes to cover short-term staffing gaps caused by illness, leave, or professional development.



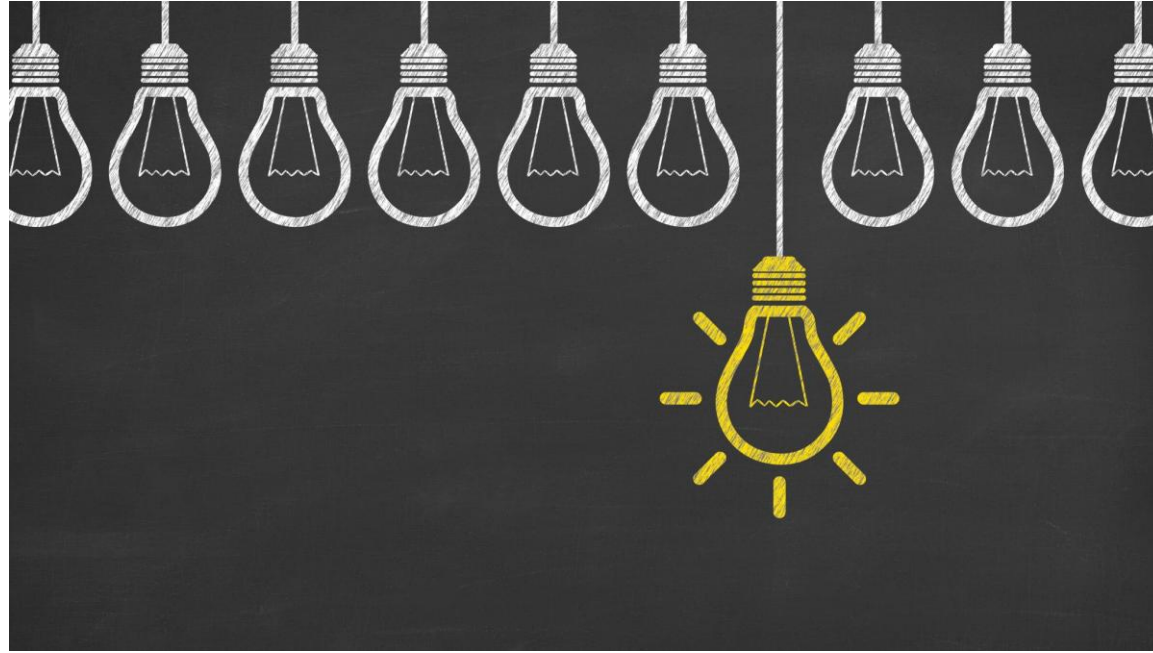
## Homegrown Solution #3



- **Identified Challenge:** Some child care providers report feeling underprepared to effectively support children with special needs, diverse abilities, and social-emotional or behavioral challenges due to a lack of specialized training and skills. Some providers have shared that, if given the time and appropriate incentives, they would pursue additional training to better meet the needs of this population.
- **Shared Innovative Solution:** Partner with state and local child care scholarship and subsidy programs to implement tiered reimbursement models that provide rates reflective of the actual cost of care for children with diverse abilities. These enhanced payments can help offset the expenses associated with specialized staff training, adaptive equipment, and reduced classroom ratios required for individualized support. Basing reimbursement on the actual cost of care ensures providers are adequately compensated for the resources needed to deliver inclusive, high-quality services.



## Homegrown Solution #4



# *Beyond the Beltway: Innovation in Action Across the States*





## State of Kentucky

Kentucky recognized that low wages in early care and education were undermining workforce stability and causing financial hardship for many providers. In 2022, the state responded by offering child care subsidies to all employees working in licensed child care programs, regardless of household income.

This policy also benefitted child care programs financially as many centers absorbed the cost of tuition for their employees' children. With the state subsidy now covering those costs, programs can continue offering this benefit without incurring a financial loss

# State of Iowa

Similar to Kentucky, the State of Iowa recognized that low compensation in the early care sector was contributing to workforce instability and financial hardship. In 2023, the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services introduced a pilot initiative granting full-time child care professionals' access to child care Assistance (CCA) for their own children, regardless of income.

*Chad Dunkley, CEO of New Horizon Academy, shared a powerful example of how Iowa's child care Assistance pilot program is making a difference. He spoke about a director at one center who had recently gone through a divorce and was suddenly facing the challenge of raising three children on her own. Unsure if she could afford to stay in the field, she considered leaving. However, thanks to the state's pilot program, which provided free child care for her children, she was able to remain in her role. Mr. Dunkley emphasized that this kind of support is critical for retaining experienced professionals.*







## State of New Mexico

The State of New Mexico has implemented one of the most innovative and far-reaching approaches to making child care affordable—though it may be difficult to replicate in other states. This initiative is funded through the state’s Land Grant Permanent Fund, established in 1912 and supported by taxes on nonrenewable resource revenues, primarily oil and gas. Following a 2022 constitutional amendment, 1.25% of the fund’s year-end market value is now allocated to early childhood and public education. As a result, families earning up to 400% of the federal poverty level—approximately \$124,000 for a family of four—are eligible for free child care, with all copayments waived.

Sources: New Mexico Early Education & Care Department  
Sienra, R. (2025, May 9). New Mexico started offering free childcare and reduced the state’s poverty rate.

# State of Minnesota

The State of Minnesota has taken a significant step to strengthen its early childhood workforce through the enactment of the Minnesota Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program. Signed into law in May 2023, this initiative is recognized as one of the most comprehensive state-level compensation strategies in the nation. The program provides permanent, state-funded monthly payments to eligible child care providers, specifically aimed at increasing wages and enhancing workforce stability across licensed and certified child care settings. The program was funded with \$316 million for fiscal years 2024–2025 and will receive \$260 million every two years following.

Sources: [Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families great-start-compensation-support-payments.pdf](#)







## State of Washington

As a result of collective bargaining between the State of Washington and SEIU 925 (Service Employees International Union), eligibility for health and dental benefits was extended to family child care providers.

To qualify, a licensed family child care provider must serve at least one child whose care is funded through the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC), Seasonal Child Care (SCC), or Child Welfare subsidy programs. If a provider is eligible for the health and dental coverage, a \$30 premium is deducted monthly from their subsidy payments.

# Empowering Change—And Continuing the Journey



As we wrap up this phase of our work, one thing is clear: solving the workforce challenges in early childhood education takes both local experience and broader collaboration. By listening to early care educators from the DMV and beyond, we've gained valuable insight into the real struggles they face—and the creative ways they're tackling them. Their dedication and ideas have helped shape a clearer path forward.

The Commission would especially like to thank Mr. Chad Dunkley, CEO of New Horizon Academy, and Jennifer Washburn, Owner and Executive Director of iKids, for the thoughtful insights they shared during this process. Their contributions were instrumental in helping us better understand the challenges and opportunities facing the child care workforce. The Commission remains committed to supporting efforts that strengthen and uplift this essential field—because when we invest in early educators, we invest in our children and our future.