

2021 Public Policy Agenda in Brief



January 2021

In Brief: Child Care Aware of Virginia is committed to promoting quality child care for children throughout the Commonwealth. Children should be safe and parents should have choices among quality settings that will promote their children's healthy development.

Our recommendations for the General Assembly promote both: safe settings for children and quality choices for parents.

Child Care in Virginia

Every week throughout Virginia, parents of young children need child care in order to go to work. In too many communities, child care is difficult to find, more difficult to afford, and parents have too few choices to meet their needs.

Pre-COVID in Virginia,

- 403,348 children under age 6 had working parents
- 518,096 children age 6-12 had working parents

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 1 Year Estimates.

Child Care as an Economic Recovery Strategy

Parents need child care in order to work and employers depend on working parents. Investing in quality child care is a two-generation economic development plan – assisting today's workers and the next generation.

U.S. Census Bureau Weekly Household Pulse Survey

- 219,289 Virginia parents are not working because they are caring for children not in school or child care (November 11-23, 2020)

The Condition of Child Care in Virginia

The impact of COVID-19 led to widespread child care program closures. In December of 2020, nearly 20% of licensed child care centers remain closed, nearly 30% of religious exempt centers remain closed, and about 10% of home-based child care programs are closed. Programs that are open report low child enrollment, which impacts the economic viability of operating a child care business.



Recommendations for the General Assembly

Child Care Aware of Virginia recommends that the General Assembly review state child care policies and strengthen requirements to ensure that all children whose families need child care are in safe settings that promote healthy development.

Safe Sleep for Babies in Home-based Child Care

Parents rank safety as one of their top concerns related to child care. They look for caregivers who will be warm and loving with their children and who will keep their children safe.

Licensed child care centers, licensed home-based child care providers, religious license-exempt centers, as well as license-exempt programs identified in state statute are required to place infants on their backs to sleep as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

However, child care providers who care for fewer than five children and who are voluntarily registered are not required to follow the safe sleep guidelines for infants. Instead, there is a health and safety checklist to which they self-certify. Following the back-to-sleep guidance for babies is not even on the self-check list.

Infant and toddler deaths can be prevented or reduced when providers understand safe sleep practices. Unfortunately, in Virginia, infants and toddlers have died in home-based care.

- ✓ Require voluntary registered providers to follow the American Academy of Pediatrics safe sleep guidance.

Child Care Provider Background Checks

Federal child care law requires states to have a comprehensive fingerprint-based background check for all licensed, regulated, and registered child care providers.

The General Assembly passed legislation to comply with this requirement. However, there are some common-sense gaps in Virginia's background check policies.

Background Check Portability. Public schools regularly use substitutes. Child care centers also want the ability to share subs (e.g., have a sub pool of background-checked individuals who can work in multiple centers). But, current Virginia law ties individual background checks to individual child care programs, which means that the screening results can't be shared to create a sub pool.

States such as Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, Utah, and Washington have developed portable background check processes to allow for child care substitute pools. Particularly facing the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, there is greater need for Virginia to create an approval process for screened substitute pools.

- ✓ Create a background check portability system to enable substitutes to work in child care.

Background Check Rap Back. In October of 2018, pursuant to SB 716, the State Police issued a report to the General Assembly after a thorough review of background check processing. The report recommended updating Virginia's antiquated computer systems to improve the efficiency and accuracy of the background check process and to implement Rap Back.

Rap Back processing means that instead of the current snapshot-in-time fingerprint-based checks, the State Police would be notified in real time when someone in a position of trust (i.e., in the fingerprint-based system) commits a barrier offense anywhere in the country.

Parents want children to be safe. Child care providers want to know the people they hire are not a risk.

- ✓ Support a budget amendment to modernize background check processing, which would enable Rap Back to protect children.

Inspections/Monitoring of Child Care Programs

As child care transitions from the Department of Social Services to the Department of Education, there's an opportunity to rethink monitoring in a better way. In Georgia, an internet-based dashboard enables state agencies to review monitoring results in real time to

better target training by region or topic. Particularly with regard to complaint-related inspections, real-time data collection could link to technical assistance and training for program improvements.

- ✓ Improve and upgrade a systems approach to monitoring (of all program types) and link to technical assistance for on-site support.

Child Care Business Model

Child care is a business. Temporary stabilization support helps. However, additional training and supports can help ensure best business practices are used (by centers and home-based programs).

- ✓ Increase supports for business technical assistance, coaching and training.
- ✓ Use incentives for provider networks paired with training, coaching, and on-site support.
- ✓ Fund affordable and sustainable child care management systems to meet providers where they are, while supporting choices among approaches to best meet individual provider needs.

Child Care Quality Set-Aside

- ✓ Increase the percentage of Child Care and Development Block Grant funds spent on quality related activities (beyond the federal minimum) including training and professional development for the child care workforce.
- ✓ Invest in the Child Care Resource and Referral system statewide to strengthen the quality of care and assist families in finding and understanding quality child care.
- ✓ Invest in business technical assistance and training for child care providers to promote strong business models.

Tax Incentives

Prior to COVID-19, a 2019 statewide, county-level needs analysis found that 47% of Virginia families live in a child care desert. COVID-19 has exacerbated the supply gap.

- ✓ Require a workgroup to review the tax code to recommend tax incentives to address supply and quality challenges, including a refundable tax credit for the child care workforce to incent certifications and higher education achievements to support high-quality child care.