

2022 Public Policy Agenda in Brief

January 2022



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.



Child Care Aware of Virginia Recommends:

Expand Subsidy Assistance for families who need help affording child care and build on previous efforts to stabilize the child care market. Virginia’s economic recovery relies on parent access to child care.

- ✓ In December, Governor Northam extended through May 2022 [House Bill 2206](#), sponsored by then-Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn, which expanded the Child Care Subsidy Program to help make child care more affordable for families with children under age 5 with income below 85% of the state median. To boost economic recovery, this legislation should be extended through the full calendar year 2022.
- ✓ In addition, HB 2206 should be expanded to support families with school-age children. The current policy supports school-age children only if they have siblings younger than age 5. According to the most recent Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey (December 1-13, 2021), in the past month, 59,568 VA parents took unpaid leave to care for children 5-11; 42,104 parents cut their work hours to care for children 5-11; and, 38,289 parents supervised 1 or more children age 5-11 while working from home.
- ✓ Eliminate the 72-month family cap on child care assistance, as proposed in Governor Northam’s budget. Child care is a work support, but it is also an important early learning setting for children. Eliminating the family cap will promote the healthy development of all children, not just the oldest.

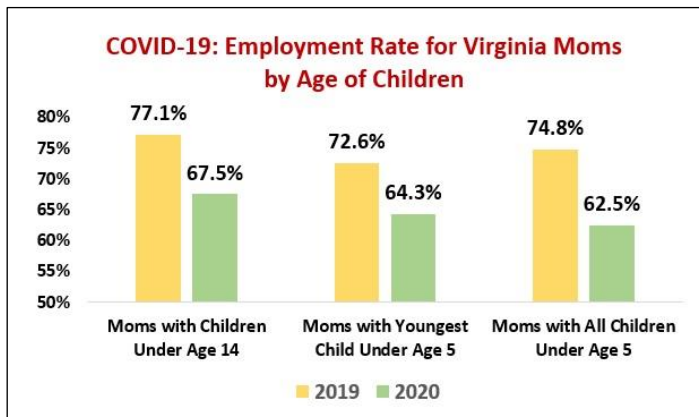
Pre-COVID in Virginia,

- 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 to work and employers depend on working parents. The good news is that Virginia’s unemployment rate has greatly declined since the COVID-19 pandemic first began. But, employment for mothers still lags behind.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment-Population Ratio, Virginia.

Increase Compensation for the Child Care Workforce

Child care workers earn about \$11.30 per hour. Their pay is based on parent fees, which comprise the operating budget of a child care program. Parents can't pay more and yet, child care workers can't earn more based on parent fees alone. **Child care workers are the workforce that supports all other workforces!** As important, their work promotes the healthy development of children.

The labor market is tight. Child care programs report difficulties recruiting and retaining employees. They can't compete with other businesses in the community that are raising wages (and increasing benefits) to recruit and retain workers. Many providers report that they have a waiting list of children, but cannot open classrooms because they simply don't have the staff.

- ✓ Invest in wage supplements to support the recruitment and retention of the child care workforce (sustainable investments beyond a one-time bonus).
- ✓ Consider a refundable tax credit to boost wages similar to Louisiana, Colorado, and Nebraska, which reward the attainment of early childhood credentials and higher education with refundable tax credits for child care workers.

It's time to pay child care workers for the important work they do. Economic recovery depends on child care and those who work in child care programs.

Build the Child Care Workforce by expanding access to free community college for individuals who commit to working in child care programs.

- ✓ Support Governor Northam's proposal to increase the G3 program by \$38 million to provide tuition free community college for low and moderate income students who pursue jobs in high-demand fields (such as child care).

Require Safe Sleep Practices for voluntarily registered home-based providers to ensure infants are protected from sleep-related deaths while in child care.

Licensed center and home-based child care providers, religious and other 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. 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.

Strengthen the Child Care Workforce with additional training and supports to help ensure best business practices are used (by centers and home-based programs). Child care is a business, but too often, providers are steeped in early childhood practices, not necessarily solid business practices.

- ✓ Increase supports for business-strengthening technical assistance, coaching and training.

Build Quality Programs by increasing the percentage of Child Care and Development Block Grant funds spent on quality-related activities, 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.

Expand the Supply of Child Care by funding new types of strategies, particularly in communities that have been identified as 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.

Promote Firearm Safety by working across public safety and public health sectors to collect data and publish information on firearm-related injuries and deaths.

- ✓ Support \$27 million to establish the Center for Firearm Violence and Intervention and Prevention to inform the public, as well as the General Assembly, about policies to promote safety related to the purchase and use of firearms - particularly to promote the safety of children.