

August Recess Toolkit: Time to Address Child Care Deserts!

Families Need Quality Child Care But There Are Too Few Options

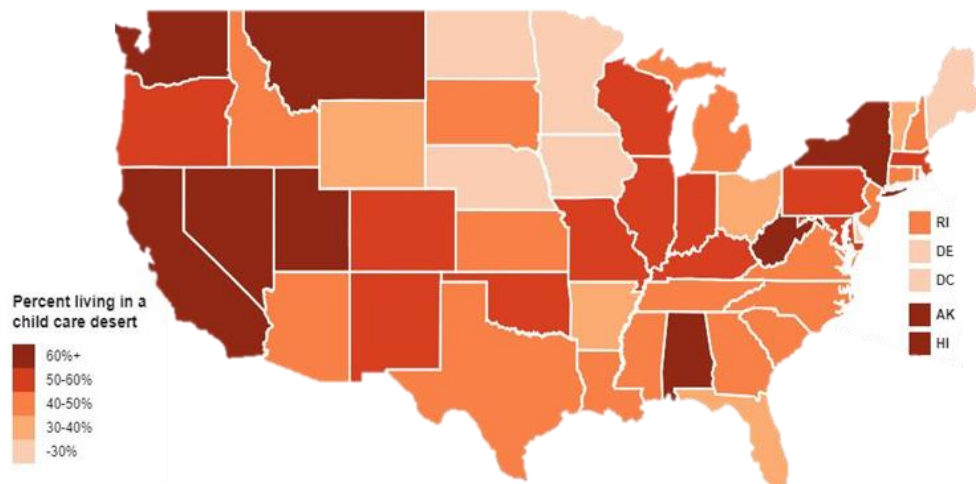
Early childhood education (ECE) programs are essential for the healthy development of young children and critical for parents to maintain stable employment. Research is overwhelmingly clear that quality ECE lays a strong foundation for the cognitive, physical and socioemotional development of children. Studies show that children who receive a high-quality early education are 20% more likely to graduate from high school and, on average, earn a 50% higher income later in life.

While parents are their children's first and best teachers, in 2017, 66 percent of young children had working parents. This means America's workforce needs reliable child care. Unfortunately, issues accessing child care costs families \$37 billion a year due to lost wages and lost job growth for parents.

Part of the problem is that 51 percent of Americans live in child care deserts. A child care desert is an area of a community where there are more than three children per licensed child care slot.

Percent of State Population Living in a Child Care Desert

Courtesy the Center for American Progress



Child care programs near parents' homes or places of work ensure that parents can enter the workforce with the peace of mind that their child is in safe, quality care. Child care is a crucial component that makes our economies, communities, and families able to thrive so it's time to address a lack of accessible, affordable options!

The Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act

Addressing the need for high-quality child care is a bipartisan issue. That's why Senators Klobuchar (D-MN) and Sullivan (R-AK) and Representatives Peterson (D-MN) and Herrera Beutler (R-WA) introduced the Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act (H.R. 1488 | S. 605). This bill would provide competitive federal grants to states to support (1) education, training, or retention of the child care workforce and/or (2) building, renovating, or expanding child care facilities in areas with child care shortages.

States could use these vital funds to:

- Increase the availability and affordability of quality child care, including during nontraditional hours.
- Help workers obtain portable, stackable credentials to foster increased mobility and opportunities for advancement in child care careers.
- Enhance retention or compensation of quality child care professionals.

Members of Congress are back home for the August recess. This is a great time to encourage them to cosponsor the Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act!

What Can You Do?

A lot! Below are ideas and tools to help urge your members of Congress to cosponsor the Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act. Specifically, this toolkit contains what you need to:

1. Meet with your members of Congress
2. Call your members of Congress
3. Write a handwritten postcard to your members of Congress
4. Write a letter to the editor

Meet with Your Members of Congress

Nothing beats a face-to-face meeting with a lawmaker! It's one of the most powerful and effective ways you can use your voice to raise awareness about the needs children and encourage your leaders to act. Follow these steps, and you'll have an amazing meeting!

Schedule your meeting

- Reach out in advance of the August recess to request a meeting.
- Different offices have different scheduling processes but you can start by calling the local office.
- If you don't get a meeting with the member of Congress, that's ok! Meeting with the staff is also important.
- If you can't get a meeting with the member of Congress, look for other opportunities to engage him or her directly, like at a local townhall or community event.

Prepare for your meeting

- Practice your key talking points. Remember that state-specific information about child care deserts and the cost of care can help make the impact of this issue real to the lawmaker.
- Practice your "elevator pitch." Tell your personal story about why you are involved with SCAN and why you care about this issue. Try to do this in 90 seconds or less.
- Designate people in your delegation to open the meeting, convey specific points, keep track of time and ensure that asks are made and materials are delivered.
- Remember that your member of Congress and their staff want to hear from you and appreciate knowing more about your concerns.

During the meeting, be polite and positive

- Engage in conversation and ask questions. Even if you disagree, do not lecture the member of Congress or staff or engage in a debate.
- Be aware of the members' and the staffs' tight schedules and limited time availability.
- You or your team members may be nervous. This is okay! Just share why you care and you'll do well.
- Don't know the answer to a question? Don't fake it! Write it down and promise to follow up.
- Collect business cards from the staff to facilitate follow up and future communication.

- Take a picture at the end of the meeting. If you can't take one inside the office, take a photo outside of the office, preferably in front of a nameplate or sign that shows where you are.

After the meeting, follow up!

- Send a thank you note or email to the local office staff and/or member of Congress you met with.
- Follow up with any promised information.
- Depending on how the meeting went, you could also take additional steps such as asking other volunteers to make calls to the office or submitting a letter to the editor on the issue. (See a sample phone script and letters to the editor in the next section of this toolkit.)

Meeting Flow and Roles

1. Introduction
 - a. Thank the member of Congress and/or their staff for meeting with you.
 - b. Introduce the group and mention that you are advocates with Save the Children Action Network (SCAN).
2. Share a personal story
 - a. Explain why you are passionate about helping more children and families access to high-quality child care.
3. Make your ask
 - a. Share facts and statistics that support your ask.
 - b. Make the policy "ask"
4. Close
 - a. Thank the member of Congress and/or their staff again for their time.
 - b. Hand them a leave-behind folder. Your SCAN staff contact will bring this to the meeting or provide it to you ahead of time.
 - c. Let them know if they have any questions, you will follow up.

Call Your Members of Congress

Your members of Congress are just a phone call away! To find your representative's and senators' phone numbers, visit <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members>.

A sample phone script to guide your call is below. The person who answers the phone may ask for additional information, such as your full mailing address. They ask that so they can confirm you are a constituent and so they can send you a follow up email or letter.

Sample Phone Script

Hello. My name is **NAME** and I'm from **CITY, STATE**. I'm calling to ask Senator/Representative **NAME** to cosponsor the Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act (H.R. 1488 | S. 605). In our state, **XX%** of families live in a child care desert, which means there aren't enough child care slots to meet the need. The Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act would provide competitive federal grants to states to test strategies to expand child care options. I hope Senator/Representative **NAME** will cosponsor this legislation. Thank you!

Write a Handwritten Postcard

Handwritten postcards make a big impact on lawmakers because they know that they are from real people living in their district who took time out of their busy lives to write them a postcard. When volunteers from your community visit with your members of Congress, they will deliver the postcards in person to district offices.

You can write a postcard by yourself, but it's more fun to do with friends! Invite a few friends over to your house or work with your Save the Children Action Network (SCAN) staff contact to organize a letter writing party in your community. SCAN can even provide you with postcards and pens for your party.

Below is a sample letter, but please modify it to make it your own. For example, if you are a parent who has struggled to find affordable child care, write about that. The more personal you can make it, the better! A sample message on the next page is written from the perspective of a parent, so personalize it to make it work for you.

Child Care Deserts and Cost in Your State

You can make your case for accessible, affordable child care even stronger by talking about the situation in your state.

Here are two great resources:

1. The Center for American Progress has research on [child care deserts in every state](#).
2. Visit [Child Care Aware](#) to find out the average cost of child care in your state.

Be sure to have these two facts ready when you communicate with your members of Congress.



Sample Postcard

Dear [Senator/Representative] **NAME**:

I am writing today to urge you to cosponsor the Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act (H.R. 1488 | S. 605).

As a parent, I can know how hard it is to find high-quality, affordable child care. The average cost of child care is a whopping **\$XX,XXX** in our state and **XX%** of families in our state live in a child care desert.

We need to fix this issue for our workforce, our kids and our economy. The Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act would begin to address this issue by providing competitive federal grants to states to test strategies to expand child care options.

I look forward to your response.

Thank you.

Your name
Street address
City, State, Zip

Tips for Writing a Great Letter to a Lawmaker

1. Start with your “ask.” In this case, you will ask your members of Congress to cosponsor the Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act. Remember to include just one ask in your letter to keep the letter focused.
2. Keep it simple and short. You only have the back side of a postcard to make your case.
3. Make it personal by including your personal story and/or how it affects your state or community.
4. Include your address so the congressional office knows you are a constituent and knows where to send a response.

Write a Letter to the Editor

Submitting a letter to the editor (LTE) to your local or regional newspaper is an effective and easy way to reach members of Congress and a large audience with your message. LTEs are printed on the editorial page, which is one of the most read pages in the paper. Elected officials and their staff monitor local newspapers every day to track the mood and views of constituents, making it a valuable way to use your voice to support critical kids' issues.

Below is a sample letter to the editor. Remember to personalize it by sharing why you care or adding [state-specific information about child care deserts in your community](#). Also, before drafting your letter, review the length guidelines from the newspaper to make sure you don't submit a letter that is too long

Sample Letter to the Editor

Feel free to personalize your letter based on your experience!

Letter 1:

To the editor:

The average cost of child and infant care in [STATE]** is higher than the annual cost of in-state college tuition. There are also nearly [NUMBER] children under the age of 6 whose parents work, despite there only being [NUMBER] available licensed child care slots.

The fact that working families are facing higher child care costs and a deficit of nearly [NUMBER] licensed child care slots across the state is both alarming and unacceptable. Without child care, parents are forced to choose between leaving the workforce or finding unlicensed care through family or friends.

Senators Dan Sullivan (R-AK) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) have joined Representatives Collin Peterson (D-MN) and Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA) to recently introduce the Child Care Workforce & Facilities Act. As a [PERSONAL DETAIL], I hope that [your U.S. representative and senators] will join them.

This legislation will expand access to quality child care, ensuring that more parents can enter or remain in the workforce, while knowing their children are enrolled in the type of suitable child care that lays a strong foundation for their future.

Child care deserts are harming our children and limiting [STATE]'s potential for economic growth. I urge [your U.S. representative and senators] to join those already fighting for young families and children in Congress. I encourage [him/her] to co-sponsor the Child Care Workforce & Facilities Act. Our children's futures depend on it.

**** Note:** This is true in 28 states. State specific information can be found via Child Care Aware starting on page 24 <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/appendices%2010.19.18.pdf>. Alternatively, you can say that child care costs more than in-state college tuition in every region of the country.

Letter 2:

To the editor:

Working families in [CITY], and thousands more across [STATE] face a daunting decision each and every day. Without access to licensed child care, parents are forced to find unlicensed care through family or friends or leave the workforce. Their decision doesn't just impact individual families, it also threatens [STATE]'s potential for economic growth.

A "child care desert" exists when there are more than three children for every single licensed child care slot. In [STATE] there are nearly [NUMBER] children under the age of 6 whose parents work. However, there are only [NUMBER] licensed child care slots.

The Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act, bipartisan legislation presently before Congress, would provide competitive grants to states like [STATE] to support the training and retention of the child care workforce. It will also help to build and expand child care facilities in areas with child care shortages.

As a [EMPLOYMENT/PERSONAL DETAIL] I encourage [your U.S. representative and senators] to co-sponsor this legislation that will expand access to quality child care. If parents are able to remain in the workforce, and can feel confident their children are receiving adequate and safe child care, our communities will continue to thrive.

[NAME]
[CITY]