



The First Five Things To Know About: 2026 National Poll on Affordability and Child Care

New national polling shows persistent voter concern about the affordability and availability of child care for working parents, alongside broad support across key demographic groups for federal child care policies. The survey was conducted by UpOne Insight on behalf of the First Five Years Fund from January 13–18, 2026.

The Bottom Line:

Voters across the country are sending a clear message: investing in federal child care and early learning programs works. These programs, which continue to enjoy strong bipartisan support, help parents stay in the workforce, strengthen families, and support healthy child development. Federal child care programs ensure working families have access to affordable quality child care so they can go to work or school. Without these programs, child care will become more expensive and harder to find for all families.

Here are the First Five Things To Know about voter support for federal child care funding in the United States:

1

Affordability is the dominant issue for voters. When asked which issues were most important, affordability ranked first at 37%, ahead of jobs and the economy at 30%. Voters overwhelmingly say lowering the cost of living is the top way the President and Congress could help families in the next year, including 68% of Republicans, 80% of Independents, and 77% of Democrats.

2

Child care is widely viewed as an affordability issue. Eighty percent of voters say the ability of working parents to find and afford child care is in a “state of crisis” or a “major problem,” including 65% of Republicans, 81% of Independents, and 94% of Democrats.

3

Voters see federal child care funding as a clear solution to rising costs. An overwhelming 82% say federal funding for child care programs will help lower costs for working families, including 69% of Republicans, 84% of Independents, and 94% of Democrats. Seven in ten voters (70%) also say federal investment in child care programs will improve the economy.

4

This translates into strong overall support for federal child care funding. Nearly three out of four voters (74%) say this funding is an important priority and a good use of tax dollars, including 53% of Republicans, 77% of Independents, and 93% of Democrats. Support is especially strong among key voting blocs, including women (70%), younger Americans ages 18–34 (70%), and voters of color, including 75% of Black voters and 64% of Hispanic voters.

5

Support also remains strong for the Child Care and Dependent Block Grant (CCDBG), which makes it possible for more than million families to afford safe, quality child care while parents work or attend school. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (62%) support sending federal funding to states through a block grant so states can increase access to affordable care.

By The Numbers

- Two-thirds of children ages 5 and under in the United States today may need a form of child care because their parents work. The high cost of care shapes not just family budgets, but also workforce participation and broader economic stability.
- Raising a child now costs \$303,418 over 18 years, averaging \$16,857 per year for a middle-income family. Child care costs are a major driver of these expenses.
- Child care prices rose 29% between 2020 and 2024 due to increased operational costs and competing wages from other service sectors, or +7% more than the rise overall prices for other goods and services.
- Average cost of child care is +\$13,000 a year (+\$1,000 a month). [View state averages](#).
- With CCDBG, the average child care copay drops to \$3,400 a year (\$284 a month). [View state copay averages](#).



OUR TAKE

“Child care costs stretch household budgets to the breaking point. When the early years of raising a child are also the most expensive, it puts enormous pressure on parents who are trying to work and support their families. Congress has an opportunity to ease that burden by strengthening federal child care investments so more families can afford the care they need.” First Five Years Fund Executive Director Sarah Rittling

Learn More

- [Affordability and Child Care Take Center Stage at POLITICO Economy Summit](#)
- [The Cost of Raising a Child Tops \\$300K, and Child Care Is a Major Driver](#)
- [TOOLKIT: Address the Affordability Crisis by Supporting Child Care](#)
- OpEd, Sarah Rittling: [Parents are Cutting Back on Child Care as Costs Stretch Budgets](#)

About First Five Years Fund

The first five years last forever. At First Five Years Fund, we work to protect, prioritize, and build bipartisan support for quality child care and early learning programs at the federal level. Reliable, affordable, and high-quality early learning and child care can be transformative, not only enhancing a child's prospects for a brighter future but also bolstering working parents and fostering economic stability nationwide. Join us at www.ffyf.org.