2026 North Carolina Poll

Voters Across Party Lines Say Child Care Is an Affordability and Workforce Issue

New statewide polling from UpONE Insights, conducted on behalf of the WNC Early Childhood Coalition and First Five Years Fund, finds strong bipartisan agreement that child care is a serious challenge for working families in North Carolina. The poll also shows broad support for making child care a priority in state and federal policy, as well as in disaster recovery efforts.

North Carolinians also recognize child care has a strong connection to the health of the state's workforce and economy. Voters in the state overwhelmingly believe families should be able to find and afford the child care options that work best for their unique needs.

NORTH CAROLINIANS AGREE THERE IS A CHILD CARE PROBLEM

North Carolina voters across party lines overwhelmingly agree that finding and affording quality child care is a serious challenge.

- **78% of North Carolina voters** say the ability to find and afford quality child care is a crisis or major problem, including **62% of Republicans, 78% of Independents, and 90% of Democrats.**
- Nearly **8 in 10 voters** say the cost of child care is part of the nation's broader affordability crisis.
- Nearly half of North Carolinians say they do not have friends or family they can rely on to help with child care. In **Western North Carolina, that rises to 72%.**

CHILD CARE COSTS ARE HURTING FAMILIES AND NORTH CAROLINA'S WORKFORCE

North Carolina voters see child care costs as a financial strain on families and a challenge for the state's workforce and economy.

- Among parents paying for child care, **half say child care costs prevent them from saving or getting ahead financially**, while **34% are cutting back on other household essentials.** In Western North Carolina, **51% of parents** say child care costs are keeping them from getting ahead.
- Child care costs are also shaping decisions about the future: **24% of voters** say they are putting off starting or expanding their family, and **47%** are concerned young families

may leave North Carolina or choose not to have children because they cannot find affordable care.

- **77% of voters** agree that increasing access to high-quality child care will strengthen North Carolina's economy and workforce, rising to **83% in Western North Carolina.**
- More than a third (**35%**) say they or someone they know would consider entering the workforce if quality child care were available, while **one-third** say their own or their coworkers' child care challenges affect their workplace.

NORTH CAROLINA VOTERS WANT WASHINGTON TO FIND COMMON GROUND

North Carolina voters also support a federal role in helping working families access and afford child care, and they want lawmakers in Washington to work across party lines to make progress.

- **70%** say federal funding for child care and early learning programs for low-income working families is a good investment of taxpayer dollars.
- **61%** support sending federal child care funding to states through a block grant, allowing states to determine how best to increase access while preserving families' ability to choose the care that works for them.
- By more than two to one, voters say members of Congress should **do whatever it takes to pass child care legislation, even if that means compromising with the other party (54% agree / 19% disagree).**

VOTERS SUPPORT STATE INVESTMENT IN CHILD CARE

North Carolina voters broadly support state efforts to help working families afford child care and ensure providers can remain open.

- **72% of voters** support North Carolina having a state- and federally funded program that helps eligible working families afford child care while parents work or attend school — despite only **23%** saying they have heard of the program.
- **72%** support the state providing financial assistance to help low-income families afford child care.
- **62%** say the state should pay child care providers enough to cover the actual cost of providing care, rather than continuing funding at levels that are often below providers' costs.
- **62% oppose state budget cuts** that result in families losing child care assistance.

NORTH CAROLINIANS WANT CHILD CARE INCLUDED IN DISASTER RECOVERY

North Carolina voters also recognize that child care is essential when communities are recovering from natural disasters.

A strong majority (**63%**) agree that **child care should be a high priority for funding and support in recovery responses by local, state, and federal governments** when natural disasters damage child care programs and disrupt care for working families.

HEAD START HAS STRONG SUPPORT

North Carolina voters also continue to strongly support Head Start, the federally funded and locally run program that provides early learning, health, and nutrition services to young children from low-income families.

- **74% of North Carolina voters support Head Start.**
- **64% oppose eliminating funding for the program.**

BOTTOM LINE

North Carolina voters agree: child care is an affordability issue, a workforce issue, and an important part of ensuring communities can recover and thrive.

Across party lines, voters recognize that families are struggling to find and afford care, support state and federal investments that help working families access child care, and want policymakers to work together on solutions.

About this Survey

The survey was conducted by UpONE Insights on behalf of WNC Early Childhood Coalition and First Five Years Fund, among 600 registered voters across North Carolina with a margin of error of ±4% and an additional 260 registered voters in Western North Carolina. The poll was conducted August 26th - 30th.