

# Early Learning and Care Policy Platform for Mono County

adopted by the First 5 Mono Commission on 11.20.2024

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## Executive Summary

- Children require high quality early care and education to thrive
- Childcare providers cannot afford to stay in the field with the current standard rates of pay. Without equitable pay, providers are forced to exit the field.
- When providers exit the field without any new people joining, there is not enough childcare. Childcare shortages force parents out of the workforce and result in economic losses.
- Childcare providers need equitable pay. The entire economy will benefit, childcare shortages will be alleviated, and children will thrive.

## Introduction

Early care and education (ECE) is an imperative factor in children's overall healthy growth and development. It strengthens families, supports working families, and is a lynchpin of any thriving economy. Childcare providers build critical social and emotional skills and foundational education with children. Children's brains develop connections faster in the first five years than at any other time in their lives. Childcare providers are the ones with the experience and expertise to foster the next generation of children. Their work is important for economic growth and family stability.

In Mono County, childcare shortages are creating societal and economic burdens. Parents are struggling to secure accessible, high-quality early care and education for their children under 4 years of age.

## The Problem

- **There is not enough childcare available.**
- **Individuals qualified to teach young children choose other professions due in part to the low wages in the early learning field.**

The County is rural and tourism is one of the primary economic drivers along with agriculture. Additionally, second homes and vacation homes have driven up property values and have disproportionately inflated the costs of rents, consumer goods, and services. Childcare is unaffordable *and* being a childcare provider is unaffordable. Childcare providers need an equitable wage to have any possibility of thriving. While there are issues around the cost of care for families and availability of slots, there are existing programs supporting family costs (Alternative Payment Program through MCOE and for Bridgeport Tribal Members, through the Inter-Tribal Council of California) and the lack of availability is related to low provider pay, thus this platform chooses to focus on the primary need in the field, a livable wage for providers.

Ultimately, the shortage of childcare is due to a lack of an equitable wage for childcare providers. These professionals are systemically underpaid and under-resourced. High quality childcare is dependent on the providers having high quality lives, including equitable wages, financial security, and work-life balance. When our providers are taken care of they can provide better and safer care for our children.

The failure to support childcare providers and families is a failure of elected leadership to invest in communities and economies. Mono County needs public resources to create a community where families can thrive, work, contribute to the local economy, and envision a bright future.

Right now, high-quality, reliable, affordable childcare is the missing link.

Reliable, high quality affordable childcare is an economic driver and necessary infrastructure; we need our leaders to support investment in a strong, sustainable system that supports families and providers. For families to have strong childcare options, childcare needs to be a more attractive career. Childcare professionals need sufficient incomes to support themselves and their families in the long term. With a reliable childcare system in place, providers will be able to stay in the field, parents will be able to participate in the workforce, and children will thrive.

## Research Overview

To understand the childcare shortage in Mono County, we must first understand how much childcare is available. The numbers below are the most recent available certified census data, and the average cost of child care was pulled from the 2022 [California Cost of Care Study](#). These numbers highlight that there is insufficient licensed childcare available in the county. Additionally, these cost of care numbers underscore how much of a family’s annual income is needed to pay for one child to attend childcare for one year. A household in Mono earning the median income for the county would pay over 35% of that income toward child care, for just one child.<sup>1</sup> A single parent earning the statewide minimum wage for an annual salary of \$33,280 would have to use nearly all of their annual income to afford childcare. The state does offer a subsidy program to support families in covering the cost of childcare; the average annual amount of this subsidy is around \$18,000, still leaving a significant burden for the family to cover to afford child care.<sup>2</sup>

County	Population <sup>3</sup>	Average <sup>4</sup> Childcare Cost Per Child (Annual)	# of Children under 5 (2023)	# of Child Care Slots (2023)
Mono	13,247	Center: \$26,218 Family Child Care: \$30,3850	842	177

In addition to that childcare costs are prohibitive to actual childcare providers themselves. To understand why there is a childcare shortage in Mono County, we looked into the financial reality of childcare professionals. We compared the average costs of living with the aggregated data for the state of California. Here, we used the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as a proxy measurement for cost of living. The CPI is a measurement of the costs of a standardized basket of consumable goods and services compared to the national average, and across the state and Mono County, it is significantly higher than 100.

To understand the financial reality of childcare worker wages, we compared living wage information to current wage data on childcare workers. The [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#) was used to understand the cost of living for Mono County. This Calculator supports understanding what an individual must earn to support themselves, living in a given county or state. The Living Wage Calculator can be used to understand the differences in earnings needed based on

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/monocountycalifornia,US/PST045221>

<sup>2</sup> <https://rcsc.adm.dss.ca.gov/index.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census, 2021

<sup>4</sup> Using cost of care data from the 2022 Cost of Care Study, an average cost for center based care, across the birth to five age period served with full day, full year care, was created. For family child care, using the cost of care data, an average across small and large home settings was created.

whether there are children in the home and one or two adult salaries. Living Wage information for the state of California is also included as a point of comparison to the Mono County data, from this resource. These salary values are for one person, therefore in the case of the Two Adults, Two Dependents, both of the adults would need to make that salary amount. Based on these data, the average hourly wage in California for a childcare worker would be insufficient to support any parents in Mono County, and would barely cover the costs for a single adult.

<b>County</b>	<b>Consumer Price Index<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Single Adult, no dependents <i>Living Wage</i><sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Single Parent, two dependents <i>Living Wage</i></b>	<b>Two Parents (both working) two dependents <i>Living Wage</i></b>	<b>Actual Annual Salary/Hourly Wage of childcare worker position<sup>7</sup></b>
California	149.8	\$44,179 (\$21.24/hour)	\$117,478 (\$56.58/hour)	\$62,525 (\$30.06/hour)	\$40,060 (\$19.26/hour)
Mono County	131.0	\$49,254 (\$23.68/hour)	\$116,667 (\$56.09/hour)	\$64,168 (\$30.85/hour)	\$37,340 (\$17.95/hour)

<sup>5</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index <https://www.bls.gov/cpi/>

<sup>6</sup> California and Mono County 2024 Living Wage values retrieved from <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/06>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_0600006.htm](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_0600006.htm)

Local leaders have recognized that the issue of stagnant opportunities for young children is urgent to ensure the wellbeing of families and the sustainability of communities. Mono County will need support from government offices at every level.

### **Where to Start**

Creating solutions in Mono County is going to require collaboration. For Mono County to get the childcare capacity and staff retention communities need to support working parents and early childhood development, major public investment from local, state, and federal governments informed by the local First 5s, County Offices of Education, local government agencies, and advocacy groups is needed.

According to the Brookings Institute, the following three conditions are necessary to create transformative change to the early child care field through local governments and community leadership:

1. **Willingness & ability to devote more local, state & federal funding to child and youth services.**

The foundational, game-changing component of any effort to create better outcomes for the next generation is more local funding for child and youth services. The vast majority of communities simply don't provide enough public resources to fund programs for youth at a scale that meets demand. Whether funding is increased through attracting greater contributions from the private or civic sector, through reallocating existing resources in a designated yearly set-aside, or through leading a political effort to generate new public resources, achieving better results for children is extremely difficult without more money being devoted to the cause. Successfully procuring greater public funding for youth is a significant political challenge, but unless this battle is fought and won, local efforts will have an impact only at the margins.

2. **Commitment to cross-sector collaboration in developing a strong early childhood services network.**

Too often, governments, schools, service providers, local colleges, employers, and others operate in silos, seldom communicating about the challenges they face in creating better outcomes in their community. A cradle-to-career approach demands that the full spectrum of actors work together closely; all of these sectors must include early childcare professionals in their important conversations. Communities that approach their problems together—leveraging the knowledge, capacities, and resources of all sectors in collaboration—will see better results. Many places have found it useful to create new intermediary groups (or reform existing ones) to ensure that this increased level of collaboration takes place.

3. **Attention to governance, and specifically to accountability, transparency, and evaluations.**

To guarantee the effectiveness and sustainability of new investments in early childhood, communities need to pay attention to governance. As local leaders attempt to expand services for youth, they need to earn and keep the trust of their communities. The funding landscape of early childhood services is often fragmented and opaque. Many communities have found it beneficial to develop a sense of all the funding opportunities in play before making any push for greater funding.

## **Next Steps**

Mono County needs reliable childcare, and it is imperative that we create policies that support the professionalism and longevity of these careers. High quality childcare lays the foundations for strong performance in school, healthy long-term social, emotional, and cognitive development, and economic benefits to the entire community.

Our local, state, and federal representatives must advocate for additional funding to support local families. Current levels of funding do not allow quality childcare in these communities to thrive. For families to thrive, the support of elected officials is vital.

Prioritizing childcare is an important part of fostering well-being and longevity in our community. As we look to the future, we must invest in our future as well. The youngest residents of Mono County deserve high quality childcare, and they will only be able to get that if we support the experts who can provide it.