

Poll shows bipartisan consensus on child care in Ohio as lawmakers consider funding changes

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COLUMBUS, Ohio - Ohio Republicans, Democrats and independent voters overwhelmingly believe the state should increase funding for child care for working parents, a new poll shows, potentially buoying the chances that daycare-related legislation passes in the General Assembly.

According to the December poll conducted by Alexandria, Virginia-based Public Opinion Strategies on behalf of Groundwork Ohio, which advocates for expanding child care access, 84% of voters want state funding for child care “to increase access, affordability and quality.”

Of the 800 Ohio voters surveyed, 77% of Republicans supported state funding; 92% of Democrats supported it and 84% of independents supported it. It comes as not only child advocates, but also business groups such as the [Ohio Chamber of Commerce](#), [are concerned](#) that the cost and availability of good programs is keeping many parents out of the workforce, which stalls the state’s economy.

The number of available workers and inflation’s costs for child care businesses have worsened child care availability since the COVID-19 pandemic.

In previous legislative sessions, state lawmakers introduced virtually no bills to address child care. But [the last two-year session, which ended in December, saw several](#), including offering refundable and non-refundable tax credits for families; a tax credit for employers who help pay their workers’ child care costs; more publicly funded child care; universal preschool and full-day kindergarten; and free child care benefits for child care workers. But none made it across the finish line.

Three bills have been introduced already to start the new session, signaling that lawmakers understand the issue is not going away.

Last year, [Gov. Mike DeWine increased](#) state vouchers for publicly funded daycare for about 8,000 more children. Yet, the new poll for Groundwork Ohio found that voters have an appetite for more programs – from tax credits to more subsidies.

Among the 800 voters who were surveyed, 484 had children aged five and younger. About a third of those respondents or their partners said they stayed at home with children. Some of them, however, wished to enter the workforce to provide money for their families, said Jarrett Lewis, a partner for the pollster, who explained the poll on a webinar Tuesday morning.

About six in 10 women who stayed at home part-time or full-time said they would return to the workforce if they had access to high-quality child care at a reasonable cost. And half of working parents said that they had to cut back in their working hours to care for their children in recent months, Lewis said.

“This has an undeniable impact on the state’s economy,” he said. “Ohio voters in this poll, you’ll see data that they agree that labor shortages in the state are in part due to a lack of access to high-quality child care. In light of this, Ohio voters very much, very strongly support increasing funding for child care in order to increase access, affordability and quality. That support, importantly, extends across party lines.”

Among the bills introduced thus far in the Ohio General Assembly are [House Bill 2](#) and [Senate Bill 32](#), similar though not identical bills that would create voluntary programs for employers to participate in, in which child care expenses would be covered in three equal parts by the state, the employer and the employee. The employer could choose to pay a portion or all of the worker’s share as well.

Both bills would send up to \$10 million to the Ohio Department of Children and Youth to cover the program and the state’s share. HB 2 and SB 32 are sponsored by Republicans. GOP-sponsored bills generally have a better chance of passing since both chambers of the legislature are controlled by Republicans.

The third bill, [House Bill 7](#), is also GOP-sponsored. It would allow foster families and kinship caregivers – family and extended family members who take children in if the parents are unable to care for them – eligible for publicly funded child care and preschool.

At the federal level, families can claim the [Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit](#) on their federal returns, which is \$600 per dependent child, said Brittany Boulton, Groundwork Ohio’s vice president.

“That \$600 per child is [currently up for debate](#) in Congress, so that’s a federal concern,” she said.