

# Early Learning and Care Policy Platform DRAFT for Mono County

3.20.2024

---

## 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 kingpin 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 social 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.

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. Every county needs the 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 these Region 6 counties, we must first understand how much childcare is available. These numbers below are the most recent available certified census data for these three counties, and the average childcare costs have been extrapolated based on the [California Budget and Policy Center](#) data from 2017 and adjusted these data using the [Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator](#). These numbers highlight that there is insufficient licensed childcare available in all three counties.

County	Pop. <sup>1</sup>	Avg. Childcare Cost	# of Children under 5 (2023)	# of Child Care Slots (2023)
Mono County	13,247	\$1,116	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 in each of these counties 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.

Then, we took a look at the [California Budget and Policy Center](#) data from 2017 and adjusted these data using the [Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator](#). These extrapolated numbers are considered “survivable minimum” average cost of living for single adults, single parents, and two working parent households. 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census, 2021

<sup>2</sup> All dollar amounts noted in this table were adjusted for inflation using the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, found at [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm)

County	Consumer Price Index <sup>3</sup>	Single Adult	Single Parent <sup>4</sup>	Two Parents	Wage/Salary of childcare pros.
California	149.8	\$35,507 (\$18.12/hour)	\$78,415 (\$40.00/hour)	\$90,424 (\$46.13/hour)	\$ 35,390 (\$17.02/hour)
Mono County	131.0	\$29,577 (\$15.09/hour)	\$76,870 (\$39.22/hour)	\$88,848 (\$45.33/hour)	No Data Available

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:

---

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

<sup>4</sup> Kimberlin, Sara, and Amy Rose. “Making Ends Meet: How Much Does It Cost to Support a Family in California?” California Budget and Policy Center, 1 Dec. 2017, [calbudgetcenter.org/resources/making-ends-meet-much-cost-support-family-california](http://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/making-ends-meet-much-cost-support-family-california)

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.