

ALERT TOP STORY

CHILD CARE

Tell lawmakers: Child care as critical as roads and bridges, Beaver Dam leaders say

Terri Pederson Mar 28, 2025 0



Wisconsin Early Childhood Association Executive Director Ruth Schmidt displays a map showing the loss of child care programs in Wisconsin during a discussion at Bayside Supper Club Wednesday on the need for more affordable child care options in the state.

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With child care costs becoming increasingly out of reach for working parents and the number of providers declining, a group of Beaver Dam leaders is calling for community members to press lawmakers for more state assistance.

The timing comes at a critical point for child care when prices could drastically change after facilities lose funds coming in from the Wisconsin Child Care Counts program. The program was initially funded by federal pandemic relief aid. It was supposed to end at the beginning of 2024, but state lawmakers and Gov. Tony Evers agreed to continue the program until this June with \$170 million in state funds.

Beaver Dam child care operators, county and city officials worried about rising child care costs met at Bayside Supper Club Wednesday to discuss putting pressure on state legislators to increase state support for the programs.

Mary Vogl-Rauscher helped organize the initiative, saying cost increases could affect not only families in Beaver Dam but businesses as well.

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“You are going to see child care costs go up a minimum of \$75 a week more than they are already paying,” Vogl-Rauscher, said.

“The primary reason that we need a healthy child care sector is because the core purpose of having child care is to make sure you can hire employees who have their needs met and get to work every day,” Wisconsin Early Childhood Association Executive Director Ruth Schmidt said. “It is as important as a bridge to get over a river or lake. It is as important as the roads people drive on, the plowing system that happens.”

Not only do child care problems cause significant strains for parents, but a lack of child care can prevent some parents from accepting a job, Schmidt said.

“One in three working parents would be able to increase their work hours if they had access to care,” Schmidt said. “Birthing and raising a child are often using up to 30% of a household income.”

There has been a dramatic decline in child care over the last 10 years, and every county in Wisconsin is affected by it, Schmidt said. Dodge County has lost 39% of its child care providers.

Working in child care has become less desirable due to low wages and lack of benefits, Schmidt said.

Although parents do have to have some responsibility for the cost for child care, the burden is too much for many poor families whose parents want to work, she said.

State and local taxes do go to support students when they attend school, Schmidt said. But there are relatively few state dollars that pay for the services students need before they reach school age.

If the Wisconsin Child Care Counts Program ends in July, child care facilities will have to raise their rates about 25% across the state, Schmidt said.

“We will see lots of programs closing and so many parents priced out of the ability to work that they will have to make different choices for their family,” Schmidt said.

Families put ‘in a horrific situation’

YMCA of Dodge County CEO Dirk Langfoss said lawmakers are not hearing enough from business owners and families about the needs for child care.

“The YMCA is the largest child care provider in Dodge County,” Langfoss said. “On a daily basis we serve 400 kids from birth to elementary school kids.”

Because of its size, the YMCA has been able to manage increased costs to the program over the years, but that time is coming to an end.

“Independent operators who operate child care centers, I don’t know who how they do it,” Langfoss said. “It is very difficult.”

The YMCA tries to be a firewall for inflation, he said, but rates are still going up. For example, Langford said, infant care had cost \$220 a week since 2017, but it went up to \$253 in January.

At \$253, you are looking at paying \$13,000 for that infant,” Langford said. “That is a lot of money for families.”

Currently the YMCA of Dodge County receives \$153,000 a year in state funds, Langford said. If that is taken away, the facility will have to raise the rates, he said.

“Those families will be put in a horrific situation, and we are trying our darndest to prevent that from happening,” Langford said.

Care essential to attracting residents

Beaver Dam Unified School District director of human resources Nicole White said the lack of child care in Dodge County is causing problems for families when they move to the area. The school district did a survey of staff a few years ago that showed about half the staff were concerned about finding affordable and quality day care.

The need for child care was one of reasons the Beaver Dam School Board decided to lease out Wilson Elementary School, which will be closing to grade school students at the end of the school year, to Community Care as a child care facility.

“We want to keep those quality people in our classrooms,” White said.

Mayor Bobbi Marck said the city started to be concerned about the lack of child care around four years ago. There have been efforts to increase child care in the city, she said, but there is still more work to be done with new employers coming to the area.

“For decades cities have understood that to retain established businesses and to draw in new businesses, we must promote economic development by investing in things employers need like water and sewer and streets,” Marck said. “We build business parks and financial districts. Cities are used to doing that, but now, as we move forward, cities are looking at child care as one of those things that employers need to be part of economic development in our community.”

City budgets are limited, Marck said, and that is why the state needs to help to find a long-term solution to the problem.

Vogl-Rauscher said the biggest need right now is for people to contact their Wisconsin representatives about the needs for child care. She said anyone looking for help doing that can contact her at mvogltrauscher@richardsbenefits.com.

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