

What Happened with Child Care During the 2023 Legislative Session?

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Written by: Jenna Williams



Child care certainly received its fair share of discussion this legislative session, but did anything really happen? The short answer is *kinda*. Here's what happened.

Funding Requests

During the session, Voices for Utah Children teamed up with parents, child care professionals, and early childhood advocates to lobby the state legislature for more than \$260 million to stabilize Utah's child care system. This was, admittedly, a big ask. But the requests highlighted [the reality](#) of the child care sector's needs. Many of the state funding requests aimed to replace expiring federal pandemic money that has been propping up the sector. This emergency federal [funding](#) will begin to end in June 2023 and will fully expire by June 2024.

Child Care Stabilization Grants, Rep. Andrew Stoddard

Federal Child Care Stabilization Grants have been a lifeline for Utah's child care

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sector. Child care providers have indicated the lack of ongoing stabilization funding will result in one or more of the following three outcomes: child care programs will close, tuition will be raised for families, and/or employees will have lower wages. [This funding](#) would have allowed for a one-year extension of the stabilization grants currently received by hundreds of child care providers in Utah.

Requested: \$216 Million

Outcome: NOT FUNDED

Retention Incentives for Early Childhood Professionals, Sen. Luz Escamilla

In 2022, federal funding allowed Utah's Office of Child Care issued \$2,000 bonuses to eligible workers serving in child care positions to provide recognition for their critical work throughout the COVID pandemic and to improve retention within the field. 9,368 child care professionals received retention incentives through this program. [This funding request](#) would have continued this incentive program for an additional two years while structural reforms were pursued.

Requested: \$38 Million

Outcome: NOT FUNDED

Regional Child Care Development Grants, Rep. Ashlee Matthews

Through federal funding, Utah's six Regional Care about Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies supported new programs for rural outreach, small business training, start-up grants, and professional development. [This funding](#) would have continued these grants for another three years to continue programming that works to expand child care access and improve care in both rural and urban areas.

Requested: \$2.1 Million

Outcome: NOT FUNDED

Child Care Licensing-Related Fees, Rep. Ashlee Matthews

With COVID-relief funding, the Office of Child Care Licensing has waived the fees associated with licensing in order to lessen the barriers to expanding, maintaining, and opening new child care programs. [This funding](#) would have extended this fee coverage for another three years as the state tackles the child care crisis.

Requested: \$3 Million

Outcome: NOT FUNDED

Child Care Solutions and Workforce Productivity Plan, Sen. Luz Escamilla

A priority of the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity's Women in the

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Economy Subcommittee, [these funds](#) will support strategic planning for child care solutions.

Requested: \$250,000

Outcome: \$150,000

Legislation

HB 167: State Child Care, Rep. Ashlee Matthews & Sen. Luz Escamilla

[This bill](#) provides the framework for State agencies to convert empty state buildings to on-site child care. It will allow private providers to rent the space and operate from the facility, creating greater access to child care for employees and the greater community.

Outcome: PASSED

HB 170: Child Tax Credit Revisions, Rep. Susan Pulsipher & Sen. Daniel McCay

This bill provides a non-refundable yearly tax credit of \$1,000 per child between the ages of 1-3 for families making up to \$43,000 for single filers and \$54,000 for households filing married jointly. Because the bill's original intent was to help with the cost of child care, we'd like to see this expanded to help children ages 0-6, as it did in the original bill. [This legislation](#) makes Utah the 13th state with its very own state child tax credit.

Outcome: AMENDED VERSION PASSED

HB 282: Child Care Sales Tax Exemption, Rep. Christine Watkins

[This bill](#) would have allowed for a sales and use tax exemption for construction materials used to construct or expand a child care program.

Outcome: BILL NEVER HEARD IN COMMITTEE

Advocacy

While our policy wins feel small, it was a stellar year for child care advocacy. We hosted our first Child Care Advocacy Day, where we welcomed over 100 parents, kiddos, providers, and supporters of child care in Utah's Capitol Rotunda! The turnout far surpassed expectations and we hosted many new faces. We look forward to continuing to grow our network of child care advocates and working on solutions to child care during the interim.

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Child Care Advocacy

To learn more about child care advocacy in Utah, visit UtahCareforKids.org.