

How the Kentucky Model Would Help Utah's Child Care Providers Help More

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Written by: Jenna Williams



This year, the Utah State Legislature passed [House Bill 461](#) with overwhelming support. Sponsored by Rep. Ashlee Matthews and Sen. Luz Escamilla, HB 461 aims to recruit and retain more child care professionals using the “[Kentucky Model](#).” This model allows child care workers to access child care assistance even if their income exceeds typical financial eligibility limits. As of October 2024, the Utah Office of Child Care announced that the law will not be implemented due to a lack of funding ([more info here](#)).

Investing in child care professionals is investing in children's futures. The most [critical factor](#) in quality child care is the relationship between children and caregivers. Yet in Utah, child care workers earn less than [dog walkers](#) and are [four times](#) more likely to live in poverty than K-8 teachers, leading to high turnover rates that disrupt children's sense of security. HB 461 can help improve retention so providers build strong relationships that support children's growth. A skilled, respected, and well-compensated workforce is essential for children's success.



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Child Care Benefits for Staff

Nearly all providers surveyed employed parents of children under five. This is common as many child care workers enter the field because they have young children themselves. Additionally, child care providers tend to be younger.

Most surveyed owners provided staff with discounts of 10% to 100% for their children's tuition, seeing significant benefits as a result—though often at a financial cost to their program.

"We have retained 100% of our staff that are receiving free childcare since we implemented the free childcare benefit."

- **Center-Based Provider, Salt Lake City**

"I am losing over \$10,000 dollars a month of staff childcare. Getting paid for those students would be amazing and allow me to either offer benefits or higher pay."

- **Center-Based Provider, Cottonwood Heights**

"When we are able to offer childcare for free or at a reduced rate, we are able to attract talent that is excited to work with us and willing to stay for longer."

- **Center-Based Provider, Murray**

Impact on Home-Based Programs

For home-based programs, offering discounted childcare is especially challenging due to fewer available slots. Providing free or reduced-cost care to employees often results in significant financial losses.

Home-based providers reported less use of state child care subsidies by their employees. This is largely due to state regulations preventing providers from receiving subsidies for children in the same classroom, which forces employees to send their children to other programs to qualify.

"The employees' children take up spots, so we either have to pay the employee

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less or charge them for the spot. Either way they barely make enough money to make it worth their while, making it hard for us to find employees willing to work for almost nothing. So we either reduce our enrollment so we don't need any employees or we have very high turnover."

- Home-Based Provider, Lehi

"Giving up two spots means I am missing out on around \$1,400 a month. The extra income would be pivotal in helping me upgrade my home daycare."

- Home-Based Provider, Manti

Implementing HB 461 could alleviate financial pressures on child care programs by compensating for the costs of staff childcare benefits. The most common benefits providers noted of the Kentucky Model:

- Ability to pay higher wages and offer employee benefits
- Ability to recoup costs of discounted care, especially for younger children
- Potential to increase employee retention and reduce employee turnover
- Attract and retain higher-quality staff
- Offset the effects of the ending stabilization grants
- Reduce stress for owners and employees

"I am expecting my first child early next year and have to contemplate whether I take my entire income to pay for infant child care or quit to stay home. Qualifying for a subsidy would greatly help make the decision for me of not leaving a job that I love."

- Center-Based Provider, Murray

"It would support a stable workforce, and stabilize the center with a small financial bump, which is needed as the stabilization grant was used to offer staff health care benefits and increases in hourly wages."

- Center-Based Provider, Park City

"With the Stabilization Grant funding ending, it is now quite a burden on our budget to continue offering free child care to our employees. We have committed to it this year, but we are having to use savings to make ends meet. Next year, we won't be able to offer this benefit. It is very difficult to recruit high-quality child care workers, and I worry that taking away this benefit will make hiring even more difficult. Our full-time tuition is about 50% of our child care worker's monthly salary. If the Department

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of Workforce Services would provide tuition assistance to child care workers, it would make all the difference both for our center and the employees. It will enable dedicated employees to continue to work in this field that they are passionate about and will allow our center some budget relief.”

- Center-Based Provider, Murray

“If HB461 was implemented, we would first retain the great staff that we have (most leave once they have a second child but some leave when they have their first because infants are so expensive and it more than one of their paychecks). And second, we would be able to attract high-quality staff, potentially with experience and degrees if they didn't have to pay tuition for their children.”

- Center-Based Provider, Clearfield

“Our current staff and future staff would greatly benefit from subsidies, since all of us make just enough to cover bills and rent. In the past we have lost staff due to their inability to afford childcare outside of our program (especially for infants and toddlers). Having child care subsidies for educators and early childhood staff would be beneficial in easing the financial strain of the cost of care, as well as the stress of finding quality care programs. Please make this a priority of the educators who work in early childhood education, for their children and the greater Utah community”

- Center-Based Provider, Murray

Why Implement HB 461?

The child care sector cannot thrive without a stable workforce. Every child care professional able to work due to this policy could make four to eight additional child care spots available to Utah families.

HB 461 was one of the most promising child care bills passed in 2024. It offers a significant return on investment for Utah's child care system. With the end of COVID-era funding and no new state or federal money available, HB 461 is a crucial step toward sustaining the child care system.

Other Resources

[Fox13 News Coverage](#)

[KUTV News Coverage](#)

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For more detailed information on HB 461, [see our recent blog](#).