

Salt Lake County's Child Care Closures: Parents Seek Solutions

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Written by: Jennifer Stout



In late October 2025, the [Salt Lake County Council](#) voted to begin closing [four county-run child-care centers](#): in Kearns, Magna, Millcreek, and the Fair Park neighborhood of Salt Lake City.

These centers have served hundreds of local families for decades, offering preschool, after-school care, and summer programs for children ages two through twelve. After hearing of the ruling, parents stepped in and opposed. The Council then agreed to extend operations through May 2026, while leaving parents to find alternative solutions after that date.

As the budget process continues, parents, educators, and local leaders are asking: Why dismantle one of the few affordable, stable child-care systems left in the valley? The decision to shut down the centers will not be finalized until the final Council Meeting on December 9, 2025.

Who These Centers Serve

According to [county data](#), the four centers collectively serve around 270 families during the school year and nearly 300 children in summer. For families with toddlers,

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the monthly cost is roughly \$460, while school-age care costs about \$290; rates that are half the local private-market average.

Beyond affordability, these programs fill a gap that few private centers do: they provide transportation to and from local schools, nutritious meals, and flexible schedules that align with parents' work hours.

We don't have anywhere else that's affordable, reliable, and safe. If this closes, I don't know how we'll keep working," a mother told The Salt Lake Tribune.

Several council members argued that child care "isn't a core government service" and suggested that private or nonprofit providers could fill the gap. To offset costs, a proposal to raise tuition by 20% per year for five years was also floated, effectively doubling or tripling rates by 2030. After hearing about the decision, Senator Luz Escamilla emphasized the human cost:

"You cannot solve a budget problem by cutting the very programs that help working parents stay in the workforce."

The Real-World Impact on Families

Families in the county's west-side and working-class neighborhoods will be hit hardest. Many are single-parent households or dual-income families who rely on consistent care to keep their jobs. Private centers nearby already have months-long waitlists and charge \$900–\$1,200 per month for comparable full-day care. According to [Mapping Child Care](#), only 36% of child care needs were met in the state of Utah in 2023.

Mckenzie Miller, a father of two daughters who attend the Magna recreation center, stated,

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“The kids are very enriched at the Magna Center, they have lots of activities, including field trips, that make it feel like they are getting more out of it than just a daycare for the day.” Miller goes on to say, “The hard part about the decision was that it was very abrupt and they didn’t really consult anyone about making the centers more sustainable to continue serving the communities.”

When reliable programs disappear, kids lose stable learning environments that build school readiness and social-emotional skills, key predictors of long-term success. Salt Lake County already faces what the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services classifies as a [“child-care desert,”](#) where licensed slots are available for fewer than one-third of children under age five. Publicly supported programs, such as the county’s centers, are rare anchors in this desert, and once they’re gone, they’re difficult to replace. Private providers operate on razor-thin margins and struggle to pay competitive wages. The closure of public programs removes not just capacity, but quality standards and professional staffing that help stabilize the broader system.

Economic Impact of Child Care

This isn’t just a family issue; it’s an economic one. When parents lose access to child care, workforce participation drops, particularly among mothers. [A 2024 report from Utah’s Office of Child Care](#) estimated that **Utah families lose over \$1 billion annually** in wages and productivity due to inadequate child-care access. The question is not whether the centers cost money; they do, but whether the cost of losing them will be greater.

[Economists consistently find](#) that every dollar invested in early care and education yields between \$4 and \$9 in long-term returns, through higher earnings, better school outcomes, and reduced social costs. Salt Lake County’s programs can be compared to infrastructure; they are essential, much like roads and transit systems, as they enable the economy to function by allowing parents to work, businesses to retain staff, and children to thrive in safe environments.

Other counties have taken creative routes instead of closures: partnering with

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YMCAs, Head Start grantees, or school districts to share costs and preserve public access. The Council could explore similar models while the budget is still under review.

Every parent knows that when you take something from a child, you must replace it with something, or that child will have a full-on meltdown. In the same way, the city council should not remove these centers without presenting a concrete, accessible replacement.

What's Next & What Can Be Done?

The Council's 2026 budget vote will determine the final fate of these centers. Until then, families can continue to advocate at public hearings, submit comments, and meet with council members. The temporary extension to May 2026 offers time, but only if it's used to find real solutions rather than delay the inevitable.

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- If you are not affected by these closures, you can still [email/call your representatives](#) to voice concern about child care in your districts, so that you have more options and affordability for your kids.

Here are a few ways you can join others in strengthening early learning and child care advocacy in our community:

- Consider participating in advocacy work, such as attending events. A rally will take place [on November 19th](#) at the Capitol to voice concerns about "family-friendly" policies, hosted by [The Policy Project](#). Show up in your green attire.
- You can also join the [Care for Kids Network](#) to continue the child advocacy

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work in Utah.

- Follow [@utahworksforfamilies](#), [@utahchildren](#) and [@utahcareforkids](#) on Instagram for updates.

The Future of Child Care in Salt Lake County

When Salt Lake County closes its doors on affordable child care, it sends a message that working families must shoulder the costs of an economy that depends on them. The Council still has the opportunity to reconsider, not just for the sake of parents scrambling to find care, but also for the long-term stability of Utah's workforce and future generations.

The coming months will test whether the community, local government, and private sector can collaborate to keep affordable child-care options alive in Salt Lake County. If they fail, the consequences may ripple far beyond the four centers under threat.

This is not just a Salt Lake County issue, but a state issue. As the legislative session approaches, now is the time to [contact your representatives](#) and tell them how much the burden of child care is affecting your family. If we truly believe that investing in child care is investing in our workforce, then the math is simple: keeping these centers open is not charity, it's strategy.