

# News From The States

# EVENING WRAP

Thanks for being here and [supporting our work](#).



By [Kate Queram](#)

Child care is a crucial [economic driver](#). Last year alone, gaps in care disrupted work for nearly two-thirds of parents, costing an estimated [\\$122 billion](#) in lost wages, productivity and tax revenue.

But we don't treat it that way. Child care workers [make so little money](#) — around \$29,000 annually, on average — that [more than half](#) of them receive public benefits, compared to 21% of the general population. Lawmakers remedied this temporarily during the pandemic via federal relief funding, which boosted wages enough to stabilize the industry. But that money expired in September, leaving parents and providers speeding toward what experts have deemed the [“child care cliff.”](#) Absent state-level interventions, as many as 70,000 care programs could close, leaving up to 3.2 million children with nowhere to go.



## The Big Takeaway

**Child care centers felt the impacts of that loss immediately.** Providers at Lighthouse Academy in Alabama saw their pay drop back to pre-pandemic levels, leaving most with an hourly salary of less than [\\$11 per hour](#). One staffer had to triage her expenses, opting to pay rent instead of the gas bill. When she needs heat and hot water, she takes her 4-year-old daughter to a relative's house, [the Alabama Reflector reported](#).



*Tejuania Nelson-Gill, Director of Lighthouse Academy of Excellence & Achievement in Bay Minette, Ala.  
(Photo by Mike Kittrell for the Alabama Reflector)*

“Last year, everybody was okay. Everybody was able to buy their children different things for Christmas, but this year, we have to choose between our bills and getting our children something for Christmas,” she said. “And it’s hard.”

**The academy can’t do much to help.** Six staff members quit their jobs after the funding expired, forcing the center to close a third of its classrooms. Recruiting replacements is nearly impossible, said Tejuania Nelson-Gill, the facility’s director. The pay is so low — \$13 hourly for employees with state certification or associate degrees — that applicants can make more money doing almost anything else.

“I’ve lost a few teachers to fast food and Walmart,” she said. “So that’s the competition now.”

**The problems aren’t new.** The system has struggled with these same problems for years, Nelson-Gill said — they’re simply more visible in the wake of the pandemic, which laid bare the importance of child care but did nothing to bolster

it permanently. State lawmakers attempted to bridge that gap last year, offering two proposals that would have offered tax credits to companies that fund child care for employees. Neither advanced out of committee.



*Bugs.*

*(Photo by Rebecca Rivas/Missouri Independent)*

**Alone, subsidies aren't enough to fix the problem.** Officials in Oregon this month stopped accepting applications for child care benefits after lawmakers expanded eligibility but did not allocate enough funding to pay for it, leaving a [budget shortfall](#) that could top \$123 million. The pause came after a record number of families applied for benefits, forcing the state Department of Early Learning and Care to create a waitlist, [the Oregon Capital Chronicle reported](#).

The subsidies are allocated under the state's Employment-Related Day Care program, which pays for most child-care costs for families earning less than 200% of the [federal poverty level](#), or roughly \$5,000 for a family of four. Recipients are responsible only for a monthly copay, which averaged \$10 in August.

**The deficit should not have been surprising for lawmakers,** who [approved an operating budget](#) totaling \$113 million less than the department had requested.

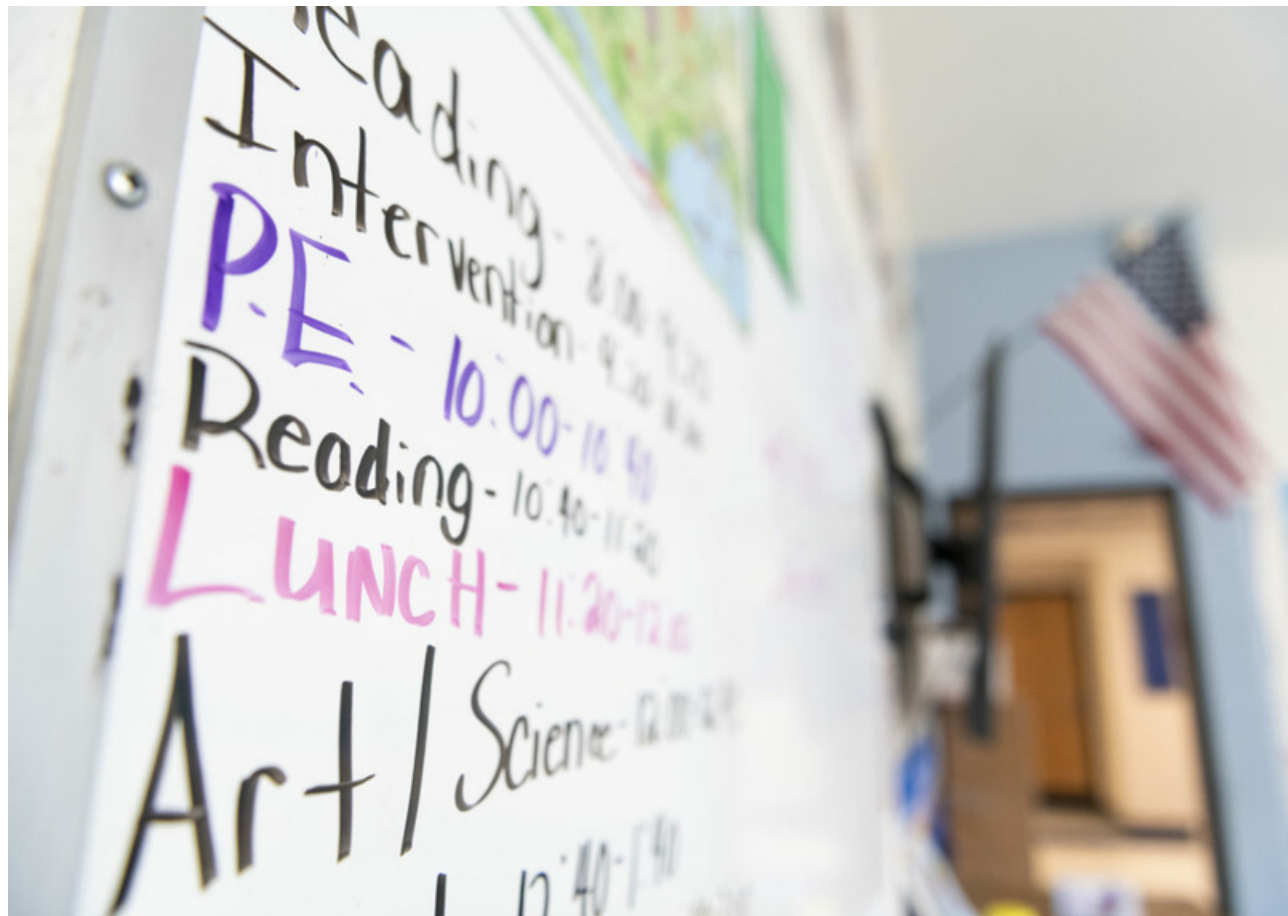


That funding isn't even enough to cover the program's current caseload, officials said. At those levels, the deficit totals \$38 million, which could balloon to \$123 million if caseloads grow by 2% per month, according to Alyssa Chatterjee, the state's early learning director. Absent additional funding, the waitlist will likely become permanent, she added.

The agency has yet to finalize its budget request for the upcoming legislative session, in part because officials could not estimate enrollment numbers under the new eligibility criteria. The current demand would have been covered under the department's original request, advocates said.

"They might have gotten it kind of right back then," said Dana Hepper, director of policy and advocacy at Children's Institute.

**Affordable child care is enough of a draw** that companies in South Carolina are beginning to offer on-site benefits to lure employees, according to [the Daily Gazette](#), our newest newsroom that launched today. The average cost of full-time care in the state ranges from \$9,000 for an infant to \$8,400 for a 4-year-old, according to data.



*Nary a purchasing lesson in sight.  
(Photo by Lexi Browning/West Virginia Watch)*

**Funding problems are rampant in West Virginia**, where a [state audit](#) determined that 37 school districts misappropriated millions of federal pandemic relief funds due to slipshod oversight by the Department of Education. Auditors said the agency “lacks adequate capacity or structure” to monitor district-level expenditures, leaving the state at risk of “fraud, waste and abuse,” [West Virginia Watch reported](#).

The report reviewed a sample of purchases made by 54 school districts since 2020, when the department began distributing nearly \$1.2 billion from the federal [Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief](#) funds. Thirty-seven of those districts spent that money on “noncompliant” purchases, including pool passes, food and an out-of-state field trip, auditors found. Spending plans for each of those districts had been approved by state and federal monitors, but the Department of Education did not have a fiscal monitoring plan in place to detect violations, according to Brandon Burton, research manager for Performance Evaluation Research Division, who presented the audit to lawmakers last week.

The state has until next September to spend \$400 million in leftover federal funds. Auditors recommended that the department hire additional staff to increase oversight of that process, but officials rejected that idea given the tight timeframe. Most of the improper spending stemmed from sloppy procurement procedures during the height of the pandemic, when supplies like hand sanitizer and masks were difficult to find, said Melanie Purkey, the department’s senior officer for federal programs. The department is updating its policies to prevent similar problems, she added.

“I think school systems were in a panic, and thought, ‘We found a vendor who’s going to provide this, so we’re going to buy it,’” she said.

**Impulse buys:** [Every member of Congress was asked about child care policy. Only 5 Republicans responded. ... State: Seven Alabama teacher prep programs improve literacy instruction curriculum ... Republicans unveil proposal to address Arizona teacher shortage with \\$4,000 raises ... Georgia schools superintendent eyes revamped funding approach in 2024 Legislature ... Missouri participation rate in benefits program WIC was among lowest nationally in 2021 ... Nevada charter schools are higher rated than district schools, but... ... Proposed charter schools hope to add educational options in historically Black Oklahoma City community ... Proposed child labor enhancement bill would put Pennsylvania’s](#)

[migrant workers at risk, experts say ... Staffing and funding problems leave South Dakota tribal child welfare offices scrambling ... In rural West Virginia, families fight to avoid losing beloved schools ... Milwaukee County stops taking fathers to court to pay back Medicaid for childbirth costs](#)



## State of Our Democracy

Donald Trump's [role in the Jan. 6 insurrection](#) may have disqualified him from seeking office under the U.S. Constitution. But he probably won't be barred from the ballot because of it, [experts told Stateline](#).



*Yes, let's definitely re-elect this.*  
(Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

“What we’re talking about here is telling people that you can’t vote for the candidate of your choice,” said Josh Blackman, a professor at South Texas College of Law Houston. “This would be the single biggest disenfranchisement in modern history.”

**Watchdog groups and voters have filed lawsuits in a number of states**

seeking to bar Trump from the ballot under [Section 3 of the 14th Amendment](#), which bans from office anyone who has taken an oath to support the Constitution and then “engaged in insurrection or rebellion.” Most of those challenges are still pending, though at least three — filed in [Florida](#), [Minnesota](#) and [New Hampshire](#) — have been dismissed on procedural grounds. In each of those cases, the court took pains to avoid the constitutional question, suggesting a general reluctance to interfere with the electoral process, according to David Becker, founder and executive director of the nonpartisan Center for Election Innovation & Research.

“There’s also a very understandable reluctance of courts to put themselves between the voters and their choices,” he said. “And there’s going to be a very, very high bar that needs to be met for a court to say we’re going to take this choice out of the hands of voters.”

It’s anyone’s guess what will happen with the remaining lawsuits, though it’s probably worth noting that legal scholars remain divided on the issue. What I can tell you is that Trump will almost certainly appeal any case that succeeds in removing him from the ballot, all but guaranteeing that the final decision rests with the conservative-majority U.S. Supreme Court. Either way, things need to shake out quickly — ideally within two months, before GOP voters begin caucusing in Iowa.

**Tick tock:** [Idaho Senate president pro tem reprimands senators over editorials criticizing other senators ...](#) [Kentucky AG-elect Coleman plans to target public corruption, drugs, violent crime, child exploitation ...](#) [Dismal early voting turnout in Louisiana suggests big win for Republicans, pollster says ...](#) [Louisiana AG candidate Liz Murrill boasts close working relationship with governor-elect ...](#) [Michigan lawmakers close out year with election reforms like 16 and 17 year old voting pre-registration ...](#) [Mississippi Democratic Party asks judge to dismiss ousted leader’s lawsuit ...](#) [Ohio Republican leaders discussing marijuana policy privately, Democrats warn against sneakiness ...](#) [‘Nationwide gun emergency’ discussed by U.S. House Democrats at roundtable meeting ...](#) [U.S. Supreme Court unveils new ethics code, but critics say it doesn’t go far enough](#)



**From The Newsrooms**

- [Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen orders end to remote work, directs state workers back to offices](#)
- [\(Wisconsin\) New SEC rule aims to put a leash on predatory investors](#)
- [AG Moody seeks oral arguments in Florida Supreme Court test of abortion-rights initiative](#)
- [Book deals, real estate, stocks: South Carolina's members of Congress report their finances](#)
- [A year after devastating winter storm, power plant problems 'still likely' in extreme weather](#)



## One Last Thing

Bipartisanship is alive in Wisconsin, as long as the subject is boozy drinks — specifically, the brandy old-fashioned, which is now the official state cocktail under a resolution [approved last week](#).

# News From The States

A PROJECT OF STATES NEWSROOM

Did someone forward you this newsletter?

[SUBSCRIBE](#) | [LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR NEWSROOMS](#) | [FOLLOW](#)



---

©News From The States, all rights reserved.

[www.newsfromthestates.com](http://www.newsfromthestates.com) | [info@newsfromthestates.com](mailto:info@newsfromthestates.com)

Manage your donation and subscription preferences [here](#).

Add [info@newsfromthestates.com](mailto:info@newsfromthestates.com) to your [address book](#) to ensure delivery.

Did someone forward you this newsletter? [Click here](#) to get it delivered to your inbox.

States Newsroom – News From The States

1414 Raleigh Rd #127

Chapel Hill, NC 27517



## United States

You are receiving this email because you opted in via our website or States Newsroom. If you believe you received this message in error or wish to change your subscription, please (Unsubscribing is not supported in previews).