



# News Release

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## **Closure of Care 4 Kids leaves 3,000 families without access to child care, number could rise to 5,000 this summer**

*Budget shortfall forces state to close enrollment, threatens providers*

NEW HAVEN – High-quality early care and education is a crucial part of any successful economic development plan. In Connecticut, the Care 4 Kids child care program has played a key role in providing quality child care to low-income working families in the state, enrolling an average of about 21,000 children per month in 2016. Care 4 Kids not only enables parents to work, but also lays the developmental foundation for the next generation of workers and leaders.

Last summer, however, increased program costs driven by federally mandated quality improvements resulted in a \$33 million budget shortfall for the program. To address that budget gap, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) closed enrollment, leading to a current waitlist of about 3,000 families. The waitlist is projected to increase to 5,000 families by July 2017. An additional 2,200 families will be without support for summer-only care, leading to a potential summer camp crisis.

A new report from Connecticut Voices for Children brings together data analysis, provider perspectives, parent stories, and policy solutions to assess the role that Care 4 Kids plays in supporting families across the state and the effect of these budget cuts on the tens of thousands of families it serves. Connecticut families already face some of the highest child care costs in the nation, with an average annual price tag of \$13,880 for infant child care. For the 30 percent of children under age five in the state living in low-income families (below 50 percent of state median income), high-quality child care is out of reach. Care 4 Kids plays a key role in allowing parents to access high-quality child care and enabling them to work. In 49 percent of Connecticut towns, Care 4 Kids is the only option for affordable, state-supported child care.

“Assuring access to high-quality child care is one of the smartest commitments a state can make, helping parents return to work and creating a sound foundation for children’s healthy development,” says Ellen Shemitz, Connecticut Voices for Children’s Executive Director. “Research shows that quality early childhood education programs can dramatically improve long-term educational outcomes. If we are serious about creating educational opportunity for all children, if we are serious about investing in workforce development, and if we are serious about supporting working parents and a more resilient and inclusive economy, then we cannot afford to shutter the doors of child care providers.”

Currently, Care 4 Kids is accepting applications only from families currently enrolled in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Other low-income families struggling with high child care costs are no longer eligible to enroll, generating a waiting list (3,000 children as of February 2017), and leaving parents on edge, without affordable child care and scrambling for solutions to be able to continue working.

“Care 4 Kids plays a critical role in Connecticut’s child care system. The combination of slowly reducing enrollment through attrition and closing the program to new families threatens the state early care and education system as a whole,” says Daniel Long, Research Director at Connecticut Voices for Children. “We expect the Care 4 Kids waiting list to climb to 5,000 this summer with continuing declines in enrollment.”

The brief calls upon lawmakers to fully fund Care 4 Kids, recommending passage of a sweetened beverages tax as part of a balanced approach to budget setting that does not rely on program cuts alone.

*About Connecticut Voices for Children:*

*Connecticut Voices for Children is a research-based policy think tank based in New Haven, Connecticut. Our mission is to promote the well-being of all of Connecticut's young people and their families by advocating for strategic public investments and wise public policies. To achieve these objectives, Connecticut Voices for Children produces high-quality research and analysis, promotes citizen education, advocates for policy change at the state and local level, and works to develop the next generation of leaders.*

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