THE STATE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

JUST FACTS

CONNECTICUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN

A System in Transition

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Connecticut Voices for Children believes in a Connecticut where all children can thrive. One of the most effective and evidence-based ways to support children's long-term success is through high-quality early care and education (ECE). Investing in children during their most formative years yields lasting benefits for children, families, communities, and Connecticut's economy.[1]

Statewide ECE Trends, 2014–2024

To understand how Connecticut's ECE system is functioning, CT Voices analyzed key indicators from 2014 to 2024. Our findings show a decade marked by instability, uneven progress, and widening gaps between need and capacity:

- **From 2014 to 2024, enrollment in publicly funded ECE showed little net growth overall** despite year-to-year fluctuation. Over the decade, infant and toddler enrollment increased 34%, while preschool enrollment declined nearly 9%, resulting in minimal net gain across all age groups.
- **Care 4 Kids enrollment rose 15%** over the decade but remained highly volatile. Despite this modest increase, by late 2024 into 2025 the program had a waitlist of more than 3,000 children, signaling demand far beyond currently available support.
- **ECE slot availability hit a decade low in 2024,** falling to 59,790 slots statewide. Infant/toddler slots increased by 2,228 slots (13%) between 2023 and 2024, but preschool slots dropped to 39,943—a 20% year-over-year decrease, representing nearly 10,000 lost preschool slots in a single year. Compared to 2020, infant/toddler slots remain up <2%, while preschool slots are down ~30%.
- **Demand continues to far outpace supply.** A persistent gap remains between the number of children likely in need of care and the number of available ECE slots.
- **ECE providers have declined sharply,** dropping from 4,527 in 2014 to 3,861 in 2024—a net loss of 666 providers (15%). The small gain of just 14 providers from 2023 to 2024 does not meaningfully reverse the long-term downward trend.
- **Provider closures continue at concerning rates,** driven in large part by low wages and financial strain. In 2024 alone, 210 family child care (FCC) homes and 60 child care centers (CCCs) closed statewide.

1 Davis Schoch, A., Simons Gerson, C., Halle, T., & Bredeson, M. (2023). *Children's learning and development benefits from high-quality early care and education: A summary of the evidence.* OPRE Report #2023-226. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/childrens-learning-and-development-benefits-high-quality-early-care-and-education

2025 Legislative Session: A Pivotal Turning Point

The 2025 session marked a major shift in the state's approach to ECE, with new investments and system-level reforms designed to expand access, improve compensation, and reduce administrative barriers.

Key legislation includes:

- **Public Act 25-168** – Establishes the Early Childhood Education Endowment, funded with future budget surpluses beginning in 2026. The endowment is designed to expand programs, raise wages, and improve affordability over time.
- **Public Act 25-93** – Increases OEC and ECE appropriations in FY26 and FY27 and introduces a $500 income tax credit for FCC owners.
- **Public Act 25-82** – Addresses system barriers by creating a centralized access portal, authorizing prospective Care 4 Kids payments, establishing an ECE fiscal map, and directing OEC studies on background-check delays and liability insurance costs.
- **Public Act 25-174** – Authorizes $80 million in bonding (2026–2031) for the construction and renovation of child care facilities.

Policy Recommendations

Connecticut's ECE system is entering a period of transition. As new programs roll out, Connecticut must pair ECE investments with broader policies that support economic stability for families and providers. CT Voices recommends:

1. **Sustain and grow the Early Childhood Education Endowment,** using new progressive revenue if needed, to ensure long-term expansion and avoid backsliding during fiscal downturns.
2. **Index the Connecticut Personal Income Tax to inflation** to prevent child care workers and low-income families from experiencing automatic tax increases driven by cost-of-living wage adjustments.
3. **Hire additional auditors at the Department of Revenue Services** to reduce the state's $3.7 billion tax gap—a step that could more than offset the estimated $60.7 million annual cost of PIT inflation indexing and strengthen the state's revenue base.
4. **Expand predictive scheduling protections** to help parents secure stable child care and support labor force participation, while also improving schedule stability for the ECE workforce itself.