

GEORGIA'S YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES NEED US NOW.



It's estimated that **20,000 additional babies** will be born in Georgia each year¹ given recent changes in state and federal law - making the need for Georgia to support its young children and families even more urgent.

Georgia's families with young children have long been struggling.



22% of children under 5 live in poverty²



1 in 10 babies are born with low birth weight³



The maternal mortality rate in Georgia is *more than twice* the national rate⁴



Fewer than 15% of income-eligible Georgia children are estimated to receive state child care subsidy⁵



Six things Georgia policymakers can do right now to support babies and those who care for them:

- 1 Improve access to quality child care
- 2 Strengthen Georgia's Pre-K
- 3 Ensure stable health coverage for children
- 4 Invest in maternal and child health
- 5 Support the financial well-being of families
- 6 Improve access to paid leave

Improve access to quality child care

Increase state funding for Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program by \$20,000,000 to help maintain increased enrollment

Federal pandemic relief funding of more than \$2 billion, which has been a historic and critical lifeline for Georgia child care providers, will end by 2024. This federal relief funding made several improvements to CAPS possible, including increasing enrollment by 10,000 children and covering the cost to families with children receiving a scholarship.

By increasing state investment in CAPS, Georgia would go a long way in addressing the affordability and availability of high-quality child care for low-income families, thereby strengthening the state's economy by allowing parents to participate in the workforce and setting children up for success.

Support the child care workforce, such as by adding early childhood educators as a priority group for CAPS

Early educators are engaged in incredibly difficult and complex work that has been recognized as essential to children's learning and development, supportive for families, and foundational to the economy.

There has long been a struggle to recruit and retain early childhood educators, but it has reached a **crisis level**. Nationally, data from the U.S. Department of Labor show that the child care workforce is still **down 8.2%** from pre-pandemic totals⁵, despite other sectors' recovery.

While comprehensive and sustained investment in early educator compensation is needed to support this critical workforce, the state can utilize existing mechanisms to bolster educators' economic security, such as by **prioritizing children of income-eligible early educators for CAPS Scholarships**. Quite simply, professionals who work hard to provide quality care for others' children should not have to worry about accessing quality care for their own children.



Strengthen Georgia's Pre-K

Use available Lottery dollars to Increase Pre-K assistant teacher pay to \$22,800, a 25% increase from their current base salary of \$18,190

The quality of instruction in early childhood classrooms depends on committed, well-prepared teachers. In order to ensure the health and well-being of Georgia's children, early childhood educators, including Pre-K assistant teachers, are required to obtain education/credentials that higher-paying jobs often do not require.

Only 63% of Pre-K assistant teachers were retained in 2022,⁷ a sharp decrease from previous years. Many programs have had to delay openings because of problems recruiting and retaining staff.

Increase operational funds for Georgia's Pre-K classrooms by 10% to mitigate the effects of inflation and support quality



Ensure stable health coverage for young children and parents

Enact multi-year continuous Medicaid eligibility for children from birth to their third birthday

The first three years of life represent a period of rapid growth. Early identification of developmental delays during this period is critical for remediating potential concerns, and regular visits to the pediatrician support children's lifelong health.

To support the continuity of preventive care (e.g., well-child visits, immunizations, disability screenings) and sick care in the critical early years, while also decreasing the administrative burden for the state, policymakers should consider eliminating Medicaid renewals for children from birth to age three.

This will improve the quality of care for the nearly 50% of Georgia's children whose births are covered by Medicaid.⁸

Invest in maternal and child health

Support early childhood mental health services by:

- ensuring young children and their families are appropriately included in mental health legislation
- supporting the **Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission's 2022 recommendations**⁹
- supporting efforts to build the early childhood mental health workforce and increase access to developmentally appropriate mental health services

Healthy social-emotional growth in infants and toddlers provides an essential foundation for early learning, school readiness, and long-term success.

Support the Georgia Department of Public Health's Georgia Home Visiting Program by:

- investing state funds in a pilot program in rural counties that assists home visitors in bringing maternal and child health care directly to homes
- allowing Medicaid reimbursement for evidence-based home visiting

Home visiting programs connect caregivers with a trained professional who supports them during the early stages of raising a family. **Extra support during the first years of a child's life plays a key role in ensuring that children experience the types of positive relationships that ultimately create strong neural pathways and shape future learning.**



More than 70% of Georgia voters support using a portion of the state's budget surplus for early childhood education and health programs.¹⁰

Support the financial well-being of families

Eliminate the state sales tax on diapers, helping families with young children afford this basic necessity that keeps babies clean and healthy

Invest in income supports for families in need, such as through improved TANF and kinship care benefits

Financial supports for families, such as TANF and kinship care benefits, ease financial stress and help **lift children out of poverty by helping families afford basic necessities.**

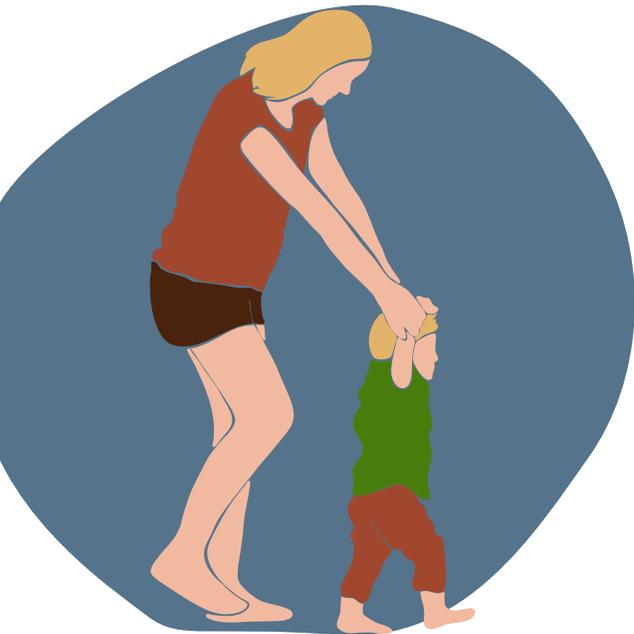


Improve access to paid family leave

Support paid leave and other family-friendly policies, such as the extension of the Family Care Act

The Family Care Act requires businesses that have 25 or more employees and offer sick leave to allow employees to use five days of earned sick leave for the care of immediate family members. **Without action this legislative session, the Family Care Act will sunset on July 1st, 2023.**

Georgians shouldn't have to choose between their family's health and well-being and their financial stability. **More than 4 in 5 Georgia voters support paid sick or family medical leave.**



Families are the building blocks of society and as parents we need more help and assistance in the early years to care for children who are our future.

- Dacula Mother

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