

## **Wisconsin's child care needs, challenges in the spotlight at Advocacy Day**

*More than 250 advocates meet with legislators to call for state budget support*

MADISON, Wis. – More than 250 advocates met with state legislators to call for state budget funding for child care at an April 5 Advocacy Day at the state Capitol.

The Raising Wisconsin-led event brought together child care and Head Start providers, parents, and business leaders to advocate for \$300 million to continue the Child Care Counts Program. Child Care Counts, a program that provides financial support to child care programs, is viewed by supporters as essential to prevent reduction of hours or closures when pandemic-relief funding ends in 2024.

“The level of commitment of the advocates at this event was outstanding. The passion and real-life stories they brought to the Capitol give me hope for the child care field,” said Ruth Schmidt, executive director of Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA), which leads Raising Wisconsin. “There are so many leaders stepping forward to support child care now, which will have lasting impacts for years to come.”

Child Care Advocacy Day, held in partnership with WECA and Wisconsin Head Start Association (WHSA), was held on the one-year anniversary of the launch of Raising Wisconsin, a statewide advocacy initiative supported by a broad multi-sector coalition of early childhood educators, organizations, families, and business leaders. The coalition has been expanding its reach while advocating for significant funding for Child Care Counts as part of its early care and education-focused state budget priorities.

“It is amazing to see such a large group of advocates come together to support child care,” said Jackie Anderson, Director of Raising Wisconsin. “It speaks to the power of a coalition working together with the same vision – the economic and social well-being of young children and families.”

Wisconsin legislators and policymakers have allocated more than \$700 million in federal pandemic relief funding for early care and education since the start of the COVID-19 public health emergency, but that funding is set to expire in January 2024. In Wisconsin, a majority of it has funded Child Care Counts. Without continued public funding, child care providers, families, businesses, and communities will suffer even more challenges.

“Child care needs money, and it needs the Child Care Counts to stabilize and be able to retain and also recruit the new teachers that we need to provide for our working parents and the workforce that our state of Wisconsin needs,” said attendee Payton Lehnerr of Greater Oshkosh Economic Development Corporation.

Advocacy Day attendees met with a majority of Wisconsin's state representatives and senators during afternoon legislative visits at the Capitol after a morning training and remarks at The Concourse. State Senator Jesse James (R-Altoona) and Rep. Patrick Snyder (R-Schofield) also spoke during the morning session to discuss the importance of child care.

Looking ahead, Raising Wisconsin encourages those in its networks to attend state Joint Committee on Finance public hearings to share the same message about the importance of continued funding for Child Care Counts. The first JFC hearing was held April 5 in Waukesha and will be followed by April 11 in Eau Claire, April 12 in Wisconsin Dells, and April 26 in Minocqua.

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