PRESS RELEASE

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WIN Act would expand access to childcare

Providers can't recruit enough workers; thousands operate at less than full capacity

Many Ohio childcare providers already have room for more children but lack the staff to serve them. Ohio's General Assembly is considering a bill that would open more seats in childcare centers, a critical step in addressing the state's childcare crisis.

Policy Matters Ohio's new brief finds that three-quarters of Ohio's 4,257 childcare centers are operating below full capacity, representing 124,876 potential childcare slots and between 8,920 and 17,839 potential jobs. Lawmakers can help address the shortage by passing the Workforce Investment Now (WIN) Act, legislation that would pilot a program to provide publicly funded childcare to childcare workers at no cost.

"Ohio families need more childcare, but providers cannot expand when they don't have enough educators in the classroom," said Heather Smith, researcher at Policy Matters Ohio and author of the brief. "Childcare workers perform essential work, yet the typical childcare worker in Ohio earns just $14.27 per hour. Legislators have repeatedly failed to invest enough in the sector, leaving providers with budgets that are too tight to offer competitive wages and benefits." Ohio's childcare workforce has shrunk by nearly 40% since 2019.

"The WIN Act would help providers recruit and retain workers by making childcare more affordable for early childhood educators themselves," Smith said. "Providing free childcare to childcare workers is a practical way to strengthen the workforce behind the workforce. More staff means more open classrooms, more available seats, and more options for Ohio families."

Alongside the statewide brief, Policy Matters released factsheets showing the share of childcare centers operating below full capacity in every Ohio House and Senate district. The fact sheets allow policymakers, reporters, and advocates to see how workforce shortages are affecting childcare availability in their own communities.

"As shown in our recent State of Working Ohio report, Ohio's childcare crisis is the result of policy choices; with the WIN pilot, legislators have the power to make different choices that support providers, workers, and families."

Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.