

# POLICY SOLUTIONS

## *to Increase Access to Affordable Childcare*

October 2022

The Mississippi Early Learning Alliance (MELA), the University of Mississippi's Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning and other early care and education professionals across the state have been working together to gather data and community input on policies that would immediately help to meet the childcare needs of working parents and caregivers. These partners have identified two foundational strategies:

1. Increase the supply of qualified early educators in childcare setting by increasing teacher pay.
2. Reduce childcare costs for working parents and families.

### **We Can Recruit and Retain Qualified Teachers in Childcare Settings.**

**We need Mississippi to invest funds in strategies & programs that make entering and staying in the childcare industry a competitive choice for qualified Mississippi workers.** This means paying childcare teachers a wage closer to that of other early educators, such as teachers in school-based prekindergarten classrooms.

However, we know that raising tuition rates is not a solution that will work for Mississippi families, as childcare is already not affordable for many families making the median income in our state. **Other states have successfully encouraged teacher retention by offering a wage supplement for childcare workers that gets pay closer to the starting school-based prekindergarten salary.**

### **We Can Reduce Childcare Costs for Working Parents and Families.**

We know that childcare programs are already operating on thin margins, and reducing tuition rates for families would threaten many childcare centers' ability to remain open. Reducing rates is not a viable option for these small businesses. However, there are other ways to reduce costs for families.

1. The Child Care Payment Program (funded through the federal Child Care Development Fund) exists to help make childcare more affordable for parents with the fewest resources. We need to ensure that our working parents with the greatest need face as few barriers as possible to accessing this program. **One barrier that could be immediately removed by the Governor is the requirement that single mothers cooperate with child support enforcement to participate in this program.**
2. Many Mississippi residents do not qualify for CCPP assistance, but are still paying more than 7% of their income on childcare. These families also need help reducing childcare costs. **Mississippi can bolster the economic stability of working families by creating a refundable Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.** These types of credits exist in 15 states, including Louisiana and Arkansas. With these credits, families receive up to 50% of what they spend for childcare back as a tax credit, which encourages parents to remain in the workforce.



*This brief was prepared by the Mississippi Early Learning Alliance in preparation for hearings held by the Mississippi Senate Study Group on Women, Children and Families. **Learn more about these policy recommendations on [MSEarlyLearning.org](https://MSEarlyLearning.org).***