

# STATUS OF CHILD CARE REPORT

A detailed look at child care  
in the state of Alabama



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## OUR MISSION

To make **quality care** and **education** of children **happen** by providing **information, education, and assistance** to **families, providers of child care, and the community.**

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# FOREWORD

"The true test of a **warrior** is how your 'stance' holds up after any 'circumstance'. Meaning, even after the **stormiest** weather, a true warrior will still reflect the **brilliant** rays of the magnificent sun through both his or her eyes. You may get hit by sudden lightning or take severe beatings from the cruel wind, but you will always **get back up** and stand **strong** on your feet again, soak in the sunlight, and be prepared to get hit by even the most merciless hail - **time and time again.**"

— **Suzy Kassem**, *Rise Up and Salute the Sun: The Writings of Suzy Kassem*



**JOAN WRIGHT**  
*Executive Director*  
*Childcare Resources*

Amid preparing this triennial report, wham! our circumstances, like yours, changed. One thing that did not change is the impact child care has on the economy. Whether that's a family's home economy where working parent(s) rely on child care that enables them to be employed to support their household, or the economy of a local business who relies on a steady workforce to impact their productivity, service, and bottom line, or the economy of our community. The novel coronavirus quickly elevated the impact of child care in all these areas and more.

Throughout this report, we highlight how child care, and the workforce it needs, supports, and prepares, is critical to us all. Whether you are new to utilization of child care, an employer who's workforce relies on stable, accessible child care, or a member of our vicinity who enjoys a thriving community in which to live, work, play, and worship, we believe the information contained herein will enlighten your awareness, and hopefully appreciation, for the value child care brings to the conversation.

Paramount to any structure is its foundation. Child care, a place for early childhood education, is the place where all future learning is built - learning that will support a young child to pursue their own potential, including one day entering the workforce. Parents, especially working parents, need assurance of the healthy development of this critical foundation.

Assurance that provides peace of mind that empowers them to work and provide for their family, modeling examples for their own children to pursue. This critical foundation is reliant on a stable, competent, early education workforce - one that is supported and fairly compensated with regard to similar jobs and expectations.

Childcare Resources remains committed to our role in training and supporting the child care workforce that serves as the backbone of our economies and families that utilize it. While you may not now be, or ever have been, a direct consumer of child care, if you are a consumer of any industry for a product or service, you are often affected indirectly by child care as that industry relies on child care for its workforce to provide you the product or service you desire. As such, we believe that a strong, competent child care workforce deserves no less than what we expect from other workers, regardless of industry: basic supports such as credentials, professional development, on-going support and technical assistance, business acumen, and professional advancement.

At Childcare Resources, we believe that **every child** deserves the best start in life. This report describes and offers insight into the current situation of child care in our central Alabama region with steps to consider making a positive impact on this edifying industry and the children and families it serves. It is our hope that you will engage in this conversation, act, and make a difference. We invite you to contact us on ways we can support your interests.



**JOAN WRIGHT**  
Executive Director



"And one has to understand that **braveness** is not the **absence** of fear but rather the strength to **keep** on going forward despite the **fear**."

— Paulo Coelho

# EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

## CHILD CARE SUPPORTS ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Child care facilitates economic growth by enabling increased participation of individuals in the labor force. The Committee for Economic Development released a report in January 2019 entitled *Child Care in State Economies: 2019 Update*. Their findings demonstrate a strong link between child care and economic growth and development. When child care is available, low-wage workers with young children are more likely to work or seek additional education.

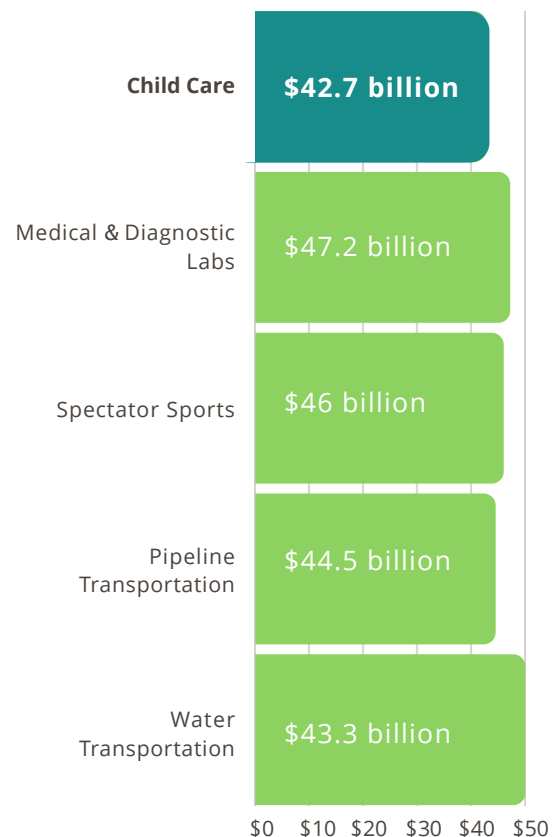
Affordable child care creates an opportunity for low-skilled workers to maintain employment and upgrade their skills through education, both of which contribute to long-term economic growth and productivity. Assisting families in paying for child care through child care subsidies further encourages greater labor force participation, which in turn increases overall economic output.

In Alabama, a total of \$11,191,093 was paid to child care providers on behalf of 34,958 children in March 2019 [1]. As an industry, child care generates revenue of \$42.7 billion which is comparable to other important service-providing industries (Fig.1). The child care industry's direct economic output produces "spillover" that essentially doubles the gross market-based economic activity related to the child care industry for a total economic impact of \$99.3 billion. Regional model-based estimates suggest approximately \$52.1 billion in additional "spillover" to other industries (Fig.2). Investments in early education will foster individual and family well-being and ensure communities are prepared for business growth.



**\$11,191,093**  
amount in child care subsidy  
paid in March of 2019

**FIG.1:**  
**INDUSTRY ANNUAL REVENUE**





# \$42.7 BILLION

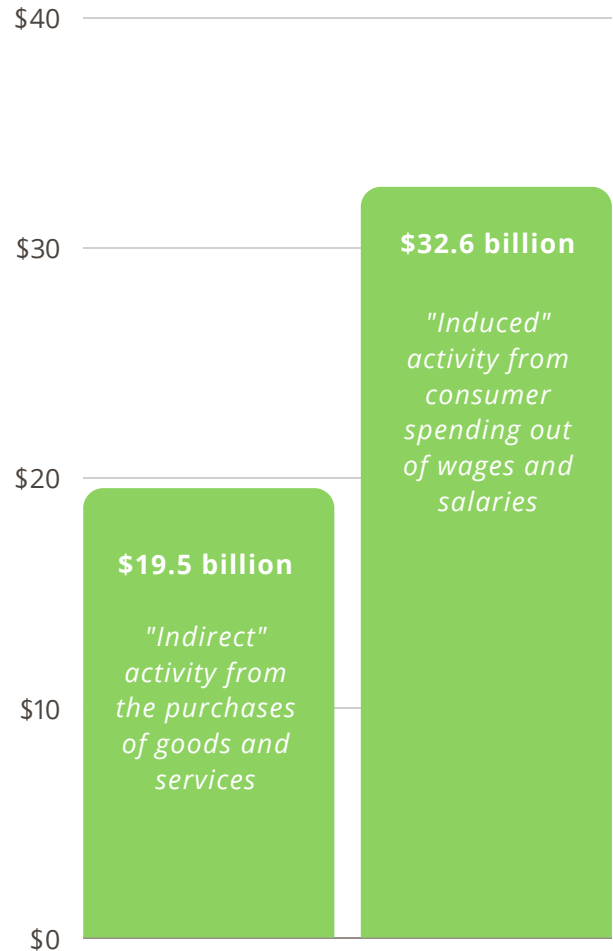
*amount of revenue generated annually by the child care industry*

## EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SUPPORTS WORKFORCE INFRASTRUCTURE

The child care industry impacts the local, state and national economy by providing support to working families as well as employing the early care and education workforce. Approximately 6,140 teachers are working in child care to educate Alabama's youngest children [2].

A thriving community depends on the accessibility and affordability of quality child care. The backbone of quality child care is a stable, qualified and compensated early childhood workforce. Investments in early education will foster individual and family well-being and ensure communities are prepared for business growth.

**FIG.2:**  
**CHILD CARE SPILLOVER REVENUE**



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# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DEPENDS ON QUALITY CHILD CARE

"Child care is unique among early childhood programs because, if done right, it can serve two critical purposes simultaneously: ensuring the healthy development of young children while enabling parents to contribute as productive members of the workforce [3]."

Alabama leads the nation in providing the highest quality early learning experiences for four-year old children through the Alabama First Class Pre-K program.

Beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, voluntary pre-kindergarten will provide high quality education to 22,500 children across the state. Despite the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the 2020 Alabama Legislature resolutely approved a \$6 million increase for the Alabama Department for Early Childhood Education – First Class Pre-K program.

At the time of approval, then Secretary of the Department for Early Childhood Education, Jeana Ross, thanked Alabama state leaders "for ensuring that even more children and their families are provided the high-quality early learning experiences that will positively impact their educational attainment and future success."

"This important support for Pre-K will keep many of our youngest learners from starting school already a year behind and keep education inequities and achievement gap from compounding in K-12 [4]."

"By laying the critical groundwork for tomorrow's workforce and promoting a strong workforce today, high-quality childcare provides a **powerful two-generation approach** to building human capital that a prosperous and sustainable America requires.

**It supports parents:** increasing completion of postsecondary education, raising labor force participation, increasing workforce productivity, and helping business attract and retain talent.

It ensures that **children have the chance to develop well** and begin kindergarten ready to thrive in school, work, and life."

— **U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation,**  
*Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Childcare*

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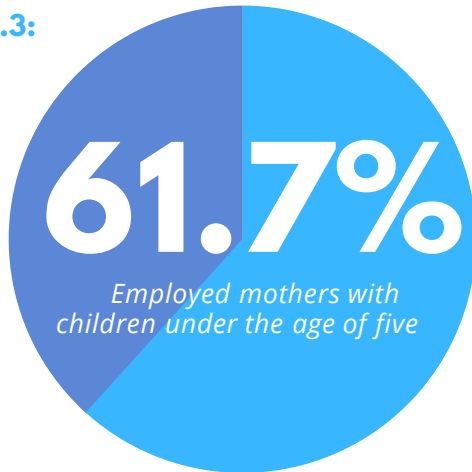
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# WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

FIG.3:



*Clearing the Path*, a 2017 report released by The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham, indicates that working mothers felt frustrated and limited by the lack of affordable, quality child care and struggled constantly to find dependable child care [5].

**Across the state of Alabama, 61.7 percent of employed mothers have young children under the age of five** [6] (Fig.3).

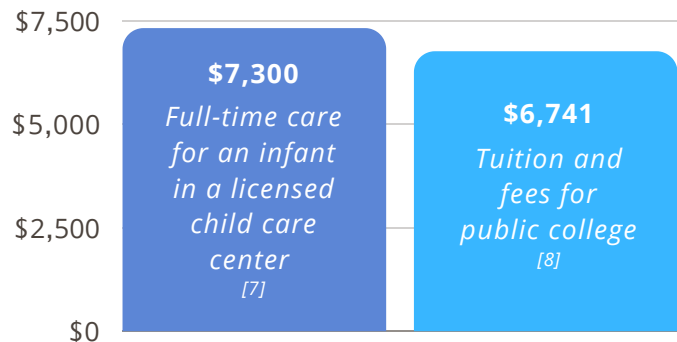
Families searching for child care face several challenges: lengthy waiting lists, difficulty paying the high cost for care, locating care for non-traditional work hours, and care for a child with special needs.

Parents can be on a waiting list for several months to more than a year. The average full-time cost for an infant in a licensed center in central Alabama is \$7,300 annually, with the majority of child care programs operating during traditional work hours, 6:00 am to 6:00 pm [7] (Fig.4).

A parent working a night shift, weekends, or a rotating work schedule may have difficulty locating formal child care.

FIG.4:

## AVERAGE ANNUAL EXPENSE IN ALABAMA



More and more families are searching for care for a child with special needs. Special needs can range from developmental delays, medical needs (feeding tube or oxygen) to a child on the Autism Spectrum.

Unfortunately, there are situations for which a family cannot find care to meet their needs. This has a direct impact on the parent seeking or maintaining employment and thus contributing to the success of their family and community.

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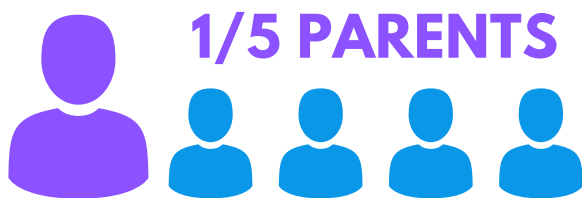
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# ECONOMIC IMPACT

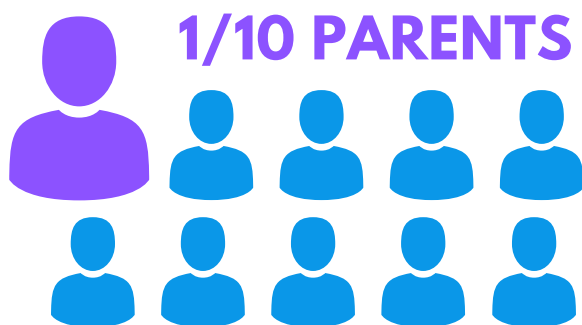
## ECONOMY AFFECTED BY CHILD CARE CHALLENGES

When working families cannot locate or maintain child care, not only does the family budget suffer, so does the economy. In central Alabama, there are over 62,000 children under the age of five. A total of 60 percent of mothers with young children are employed and will depend on child care or a caregiver to maintain employment [9].

ReadyNation completed a study to examine the economic impacts of the nation's child care crisis on infants and toddlers, working parents, employers, and taxpayers. The study describes an annual cost of \$57 billion lost in earnings, productivity, and revenue [10].



*reprimanded at work due to child care struggles*



*demoted, transferred, or fired  
due to challenges with child care*

"Productivity challenges affect both employer and employees. Almost two-thirds of parents facing child care struggles report leaving work early, and more than half report being distracted at or missing days of work. An overwhelming 86 percent of primary caregivers said problems with child care hurt their efforts or time commitment at work.

"The predictable impact: one-in-five say they've been reprimanded, 80 percent have been fired, and just over one-in-ten have been demoted, transferred or fired. Meanwhile, productivity problems cause employers to lose \$12.7 billion annually due to child care challenges faced by the workforce.

"The stakes are enormously high for the vast majority of families, who depend on parents' employment, as well as for children who depend on nurturing, stimulating environments for healthy brain development during the first three years of life. Action and innovation now will improve life outcomes for millions of children today and strengthen the workplace and economy both now and in the years to come [10]."

**PRODUCTIVITY  
CHALLENGES AFFECT  
BOTH EMPLOYERS  
AND EMPLOYEES**

## FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES CAN HELP

In 2019, The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham published *Clearing the Path: Next Steps, Creating Birmingham's Family-Friendly Workplaces* as a follow-up to their previously released *Clearing the Path* report. *Clearing the Path: Next Steps* is a call to action for companies to establish policies that are beneficial to parents and more likely to attract and retain valuable workers.

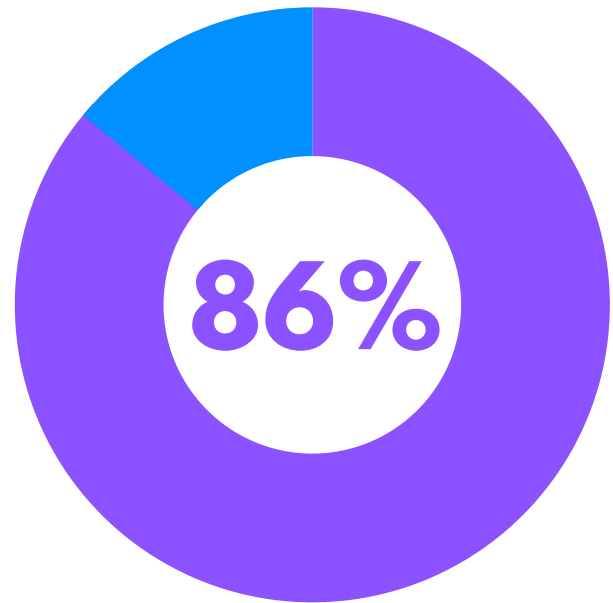
The report highlights employers in Birmingham that are implementing family-friendly policies that benefit both the working family and the employer as well. Key findings identified the following as family-friendly policies which provide significant, positive impact on employees:

Starting wages increased above minimum wage

Corporate support for quality child care

Extended paid parental leave

**Child care supports the current workforce while building the foundation necessary for our future workforce. The early years are important in the life of a young child as this is the time the foundation is built on which all future learning occurs [11].**



*Percentage of primary caregivers who experience problems with child care which hurt their efforts or time commitment at work*

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# LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

## THE EARLY YEARS BUILD THE FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE LEARNING

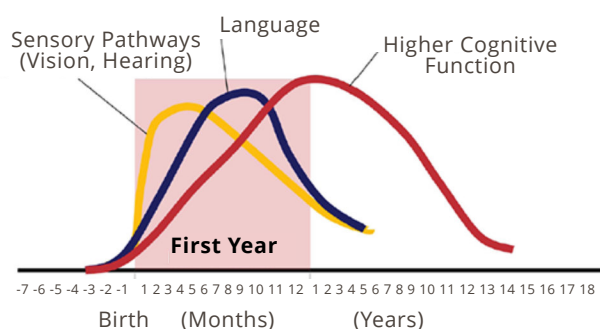
The most critical time of development in a child's life is the first few years. According to *The Science of Early Childhood Development* from The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, "Healthy development in the early years provides the building blocks for educational achievement, economic productivity, responsible citizenship, life-long health, strong communities, and successful parenting of the next generation."

"The science of brain development can inform investments in early childhood. The basic concepts established over decades of neuroscience and behavioral research, help illustrate why child development, particularly from birth to five years, is a foundation for a prosperous and sustainable society."

### The brain is built over time, from the bottom up.

"The basic architecture of the brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Early experiences affect the quality of that architecture by establishing either a sturdy or fragile foundation for all of learning, health and behavior that follow. In the first few years of life, more than 1 million new neural connections are formed every second. After this period of rapid proliferation, connections are reduced through pruning, so that the brain circuits become more efficient."

### HUMAN BRAIN DEVELOPMENT: NEURAL CONNECTIONS FOR DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS DEVELOP SEQUENTIALLY [12]



"The interactive influence of genes and experiences shape the developing brain. A major ingredient in this developmental process is the "serve and return" relationship between the child and their parents and other caregivers."

"Young children naturally reach out to interaction through babbling, facial expressions, and gestures, and adults respond with the same kind of vocalizing and gesturing back at them. In the absence of such responses, or if the response is unreliable or inappropriate, the brain architecture does not form as expected, which can lead to disparities in learning and behavior."

"Cognitive, emotional, and social capacities are inextricably intertwined throughout the course of life. The emotional and physical health, social skills, and cognitive-linguistic capacities that emerge in the early years are all important pre-requisites for success in school and later in the workplace [12]."





# 1 MILLION

number of new neural connections  
formed every second during the  
first few years of a child's life.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The basic principles of neuroscience indicate that early preventive intervention will be more efficient and produce more favorable outcomes than remediation later in life.
- A balanced approach to emotional, social, cognitive, and language development will best prepare all children for success in school and later in the workplace and community.
- Supportive relationships and positive learning experiences begin at home, but can also be provided through a range of services with proven effectiveness factors. Babies' brains require stable, caring, interactive relationships with adults; any way or place they can be provided will benefit healthy brain development.
- Science clearly demonstrates that, in situations where toxic stress is likely, intervening as early as possible is critical to achieving the best outcomes. For children experiencing toxic stress, specialized early interventions are needed to target the cause of the stress and protect the child from its consequences [12].

"Experiences in the earliest years of life **form the foundation** of brain architecture, for better or for worse.

**Learning, behavior, and health across the lifespan** are all built on that foundation.

We know today's best programs and practices can help support child development, but **too many children are left behind.**

**Dramatic improvements** for all children are not only achievable but also necessary for a **thriving and sustainable** society."

— **Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University,**  
*From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families*  
[12b]

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# EARLY CARE WORKFORCE

## STRUGGLING TO EARN A LIVING WAGE

Research continues to support the impact early learning has on providing the foundation on which all future learning is built; however, the early care and education workforce still struggles to earn a livable wage. The annual salary for a child care teacher is \$21,142 compared to \$46,668 for a kindergarten teacher [13]. The United States federal poverty line for a family of two is \$17,240 and a family of four \$26,200 [14]. For the approximately 6,140 teachers working in child care, this is a problem.

"Many child care center teachers are themselves eligible for a subsidy for their own children. A key to quality improvement lies in the education and training for child care teachers, and Alabama has committed considerable resources to training and education subsidies up to the bachelor's level. But low wages in traditional child care drive many of the best and trained teachers to apply for jobs in K-12 schools, where wages are much higher, and benefits, including health insurance and retirement, are much better. Salaries and benefits for child care employees need to reflect those of early childhood teachers in public schools, both for equity and retention of newly trained workers [15]."

As expectations continue to be raised for teachers providing the early interactions that are nurturing and supporting early brain development to our future workforce, their salary needs to reflect the significance of this critical and important work.

ANNUAL MEAN WAGE FOR PROFESSIONS IN ALABAMA [13]



**The current early care and education workforce is tasked with the important responsibility of providing the foundation for a child's life-long learning; yet compensation is not equal to a livable wage.**

"Salaries and benefits for child care employees need to reflect those of early childhood teachers in public schools, both for equity and retention of newly trained workers."

— Carol Gundlach,  
Alabama Arise

# FUTURE WORKFORCE

## EDUCATION IS AN IMPORTANT INDICATOR FOR SUCCESS

**"Your child is born ready to learn, and you are born ready to teach,"** Alabama Governor Kay Ivey stated in December 2019 when she announced the *Born Ready* statewide movement [16].

"The *Born Ready* movement will inspire parents to use everyday events as teaching moments. Every Alabama child - no matter their geographic location or socioeconomic status - will benefit from the movement, starting in the home and extending to all early childhood settings."

The movement is focused on raising awareness among parents on the importance of early brain development and quality early childhood learning experiences. The *Born Ready* movement is based on the research that indicates more than 95 percent of a child's brain develops in the first five years of life - highlighting the importance of helping children develop during the critical years before kindergarten. **Children who attend a quality pre-k program are more likely to be proficient in reading by third grade, graduate from high school and attend college, and have success in the workplace.**

**bornReady**

For more information on the Born Ready statewide movement, visit <https://bornready.org>



"Education is one of the most important factors in determining a child's future success. From ensuring readiness to the job market, to preparing them to excel in college, primary and secondary education work together to play significant roles in the outcomes of our children. **It is vitally important that our children have a high-quality and successful start to their journey through our education system.** Education is perhaps the most important indicator for future success and is often the single greatest factor to escape the lasting effects of generational poverty."

— **VOICES for Alabama's Children,**  
*2019 Kids Count Data Book*

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# TAKE ACTION

## TAKE ACTION FOR ALABAMA'S WORKFORCE

Be an advocate for Alabama and help your community thrive by supporting the current and future workforce. Individuals, business leaders and the early care and education community need to join together and make a commitment to take action, gain knowledge and get involved. Many of the resources listed below provide the opportunity to register and sign-up for action alerts.



### **Alabama Department of Human Resources, Child Care Services Division (DHR)**

[www.dhr.alabama.gov](http://www.dhr.alabama.gov)

Alabama DHR is Alabama's Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) administrator, responsible for the child care subsidy program and quality initiatives (professional development). DHR contracts with government and non-profit agencies to provide regional and statewide initiatives designed to enhance the quality of child care and positively impact the early learning experiences of young children. Childcare Resources encourages the early care and education workforce to make professional development a priority as well as encourages directors to fully participate in the Market Rate Survey conducted by DHR. The Market Rate Survey is used to determine the cost of child care across the state and has impact on CCDF subsidy reimbursement rates.





**Alabama School Readiness Alliance (ASRA)**  
[www.alabamaschoolreadinessalliance.org](http://www.alabamaschoolreadinessalliance.org)

ASRA is a statewide, nonprofit coalition advocating for the expansion of high-quality, voluntary pre-k. ASRA was formed in 2006 as a joint campaign of A+ Education Partnership, Alabama Giving, Alabama Partnership for Children, and VOICES for Alabama's Children. ASRA's mission is to close student achievement gaps by ensuring that all children enter school ready to learn.



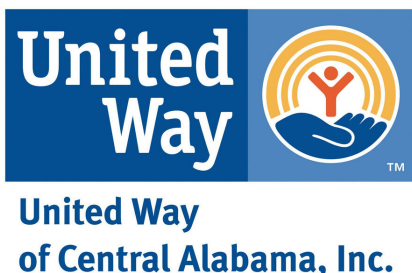
**Child Care Aware of America**  
[www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org)

The vision of Child Care Aware of America is that every family in the United States has access to a high-quality, affordable child care system. The child care system supports children's growth, development, and educational advancement and creates a positive economic impact for families and communities.



**ReadyNation, Council for a Strong America**  
[www.strongnation.org](http://www.strongnation.org)

ReadyNation represents business executives interested in building a skilled workforce by promoting solutions that prepare children to succeed in education, work, and life.



**United Way of Central Alabama, Inc.**  
[www.uwca.org](http://www.uwca.org)

UWCA financially supports over 80 agencies, including Childcare Resources, and initiatives that work in communities to positively improve the lives of others through quality education, financial stability, better health, and access to services.



### **VOICES for Alabama's Children**

[www.alavoices.org](http://www.alavoices.org)

The vision of VOICES for Alabama's Children is to ensure the well-being of Alabama's children through research, public awareness, and advocacy. VOICES works to ensure that all of Alabama's children are safe, healthy, educated, and economically secure in order to reach their fullest potential.

The 2020 Agenda for VOICES for Alabama's Children focuses on:

- Child Care Affordability
- Healthy Food Financing
- First Class Pre-K Funding Increase
- Home Visiting Funding Increase
- Quality Mental Health Access in Schools
- Quality Healthcare for Children and Families



**THE WOMEN'S FUND**  
*of* GREATER BIRMINGHAM

### **The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham**

[www.womensfundbirmingham.org](http://www.womensfundbirmingham.org)

The mission of The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham is to accelerate economic opportunity for women and their families through philanthropy, research, and advocacy.

The 2020 Agenda for Women includes:

- Build A Gender Inclusive Workforce and Economy
- Invest in Maternal Health, Expand Affordable Health Care



For more advocacy resources, visit [www.ccr-bhm.org/advocacy](http://www.ccr-bhm.org/advocacy)

# ABOUT CHILDCARE RESOURCES

Childcare Resources is a Birmingham-based non-profit organization whose mission is to make quality care and education of children happen by providing information, education, and assistance to families, providers of child care, and the community. Central Alabama's only child care resource and referral agency, Childcare Resources was created as the outgrowth of a child care task force convened by United Way of Central Alabama in 1984 to address critical child care needs identified in Jefferson, Shelby and Walker Counties, with Blount County added to the service area in 1988. The agency remains a proud United Way of Central Alabama partner agency today.

Services provided by Childcare Resources include:

- Financial assistance for low-to-moderate income working families
- Quality training and technical assistance for child care providers, including a free Early Learning Resource Library and mobile Resource Library Van
- Customized searches for families seeking child care options
- Educational resources for parents and caregivers

## CONTACT US

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## LET'S CONNECT



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