

NEW OHIO CHILD CARE POLL

Ohio Voters Agree: Child Care Is an Affordability Issue State Leaders Can Address

August 24, 2026



New statewide polling shows broad bipartisan agreement that child care is a serious challenge for working families and an issue Ohio's next governor and legislature have an opportunity to address.

Affordability is the defining concern for Ohio voters heading into the 2026 election. Nearly two-thirds, 64%, identify lowering the cost-of-living as one of the two most important issues facing their families.

Ohio's next governor and legislature cannot control every cost putting pressure on working families. Child care is different. State policy can make a difference in what families pay, whether they can find care, and whether parents can work.

New statewide polling conducted by UpONE Insights on behalf of Groundwork Ohio and First Five Years Fund shows significant agreement across party lines about the problem. Ohio voters see finding and affording child care as a serious challenge. They recognize its connection to the workforce and economy. They overwhelmingly believe families should be able to choose the child care that works best for them.

And regardless of which party wins the governor's race, voters expect the next governor to pay attention.

OHIOANS AGREE THERE IS A CHILD CARE PROBLEM

76% of Ohio voters say the ability to find and afford quality child care is a crisis or major problem: 62% of Republicans, 78% of independents, and 94% of Democrats.

Eight in 10 voters also say the cost of child care is part of the nation's broader affordability crisis.

For parents paying for child care, the impact is immediate. **Half say child care costs prevent them from saving money or getting ahead financially.** More than a third, 36%, are cutting back on other household essentials to afford care, and 33% say they are struggling to pay for it.

The cost is also affecting decisions about whether to have children. Nearly one in five Ohio voters, 19%, say they are putting off starting or expanding their family because of child care costs.

Nearly half of voters, 47%, are concerned that young families may leave Ohio or choose not to have children because they cannot find affordable child care.

Child care may not affect every household in the same way. But for the working families who need it, it can determine whether they can work, save, and get ahead.

CHILD CARE MATTERS TO OHIO'S WORKFORCE

74% of voters agree that increasing access to high-quality child care will strengthen Ohio's economy and workforce. Parents agree at 77%.

More than a third of Ohioans, 34%, say they or someone they know would consider entering the workforce if quality child care were available. Among parents, that rises to **53%**.

Ohio is working hard to attract employers, grow its economy, and fill available jobs. **Workers need somewhere safe and reliable for their children to go while they work. Child care has to be part of that economic strategy.**

FAMILIES WANT CHOICES

Few findings in the poll have more bipartisan agreement than this one.

86% of Ohio voters say it is important that families can choose the child care setting that works best for them.

That includes **85% of Republicans, 86% of independents, and 87% of Democrats.**

Those choices include child care centers, family child care homes, schools, relatives, and faith-based providers. Ohio families have different needs, work different hours, and live in very different communities. The goal should not be to prescribe one kind of care. It should be to make sure families have quality options they can afford and the ability to choose among them.

VOTERS SUPPORT HELPING WORKING FAMILIES AFFORD CARE

70% of voters support Ohio having a state- and federally funded program that helps eligible working families afford child care while parents work or attend school. In Ohio, that is the Publicly Funded Child Care program. That includes 51% of Republicans, 74% of independents, and 93% of Democrats.

And **60% oppose reducing the number of children served by Ohio's Publicly Funded Child Care program or allowing funding to lapse so fewer families can access it.**

The poll shows that voters see a problem, they support helping eligible working families afford care, and they do not want to see access eroded.

That gives Ohio leaders room to work.

THE NEXT GOVERNOR SHOULD PAY ATTENTION

72% of Ohio voters say a candidate's plans to support working families with young children will be important when deciding how to vote for governor.

That includes **63% of Republicans, 69% of independents, and 86% of Democrats.**

There is also political risk in allowing the problem to get worse. **45% of voters say they would be less likely to support a candidate for governor who failed to fill a funding gap that caused thousands of children to lose access to child care.** Among independents, that rises to 53%.

Whether Ohio's next governor is a Republican or a Democrat, the challenge will be the same. So will the opportunity.

Ohio can make it easier for parents to work, help employers find workers, and make the state a more affordable place to raise a family. Child care is one place state leaders can act.

OHIO VOTERS WANT WASHINGTON TO FIND COMMON GROUND

Ohio voters also continue to support a federal role in helping working families afford child care.

68% say federal funding for child care and early learning programs for low-income working families is a good investment of taxpayer dollars. And 59% support sending federal child care funding to states through a block grant so states can determine how best to increase access while preserving families' ability to choose the care that works for them.

Voters are less interested in which party gets credit than in seeing something get done. **47% say gridlock from both political parties is holding back progress on making child care more affordable.** By more than two to one, 47% to 19%, voters say members of Congress should do whatever it takes to pass child care legislation, even if that means compromising with the other party.

BOTTOM LINE

Ohioans agree that finding and affording child care is a serious problem. They understand that child care affects whether parents can work and whether employers can find workers. They overwhelmingly want families to have choices. And they want the next governor to have a plan for supporting working families with young children.

There are many affordability pressures that Ohio policymakers have limited ability to change. **Child care is one where decisions made by the governor, General Assembly, and Congress can make a difference.**

The question for Ohio's next leaders is what they choose to do with that opportunity.

About the Survey

The survey was conducted by UpONE Insights on behalf of Groundwork Ohio and First Five Years Fund from August 3-6, 2026, among 600 registered voters across Ohio. The survey has a margin of error of $\pm 4\%$.

About Groundwork Ohio

Groundwork Ohio is a statewide, nonpartisan nonprofit that champions young children from the prenatal period through age five. We turn research into action by advancing policies that improve early learning, maternal and child health, and family economic stability. We bring together families, community leaders, business leaders, and policymakers to build the public will and bipartisan support needed to make Ohio the best place in the nation to be a young child. Learn more at groundworkohio.org.

About First Five Years Fund

The first five years last forever. At First Five Years Fund, we work to protect, prioritize, and build bipartisan support for early learning and child care programs at the federal level. Reliable, affordable, and high-quality early learning and child care can be transformative, not only enhancing a child's prospects for a brighter future but also bolstering working parents and fostering economic stability nationwide. Learn more at www.ffyf.org.

About UpONE Insights

UpONE Insights is a leader in providing both quantitative and qualitative research to shape tomorrow's narratives through understanding data. Founded by Robert Blizzard, UpONE Insights is at the forefront of modern polling and research. Learn more at upONEinsights.com.