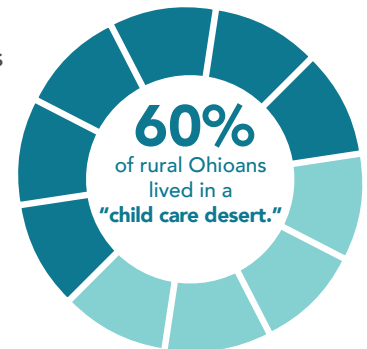


Expanding Child Care in Rural Ohio

Children with access to high-quality early learning experiences within their first five years of life are more likely to be kindergarten-ready, graduate from high school, and have higher earnings and better health later in life. Despite this understanding, most of Ohio's youngest rural children are not being served by early learning programs.

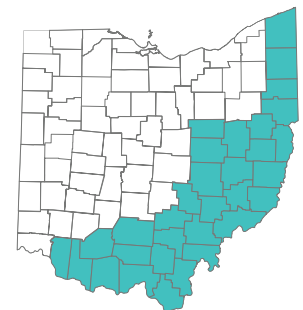
Even before COVID-19, **60% of rural Ohioans lived in a "child care desert,"**¹ an area with more than 50 children under five and no providers, or an area with three times as many children as licensed child care seats. Rural Ohioans are twice as likely to experience a child care desert compared to 30 percent² of all Ohioans.



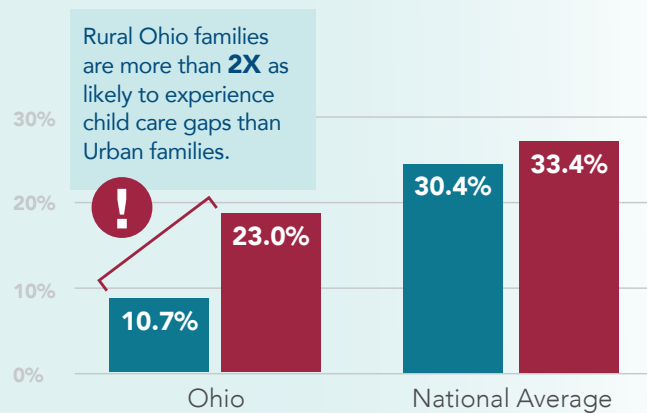
Child Care in Rural America

Barriers to overcoming the challenges in this region are unique compared to Ohio's metropolitan areas. Nearly **one in every three⁴ of Ohio's Appalachian children from birth to five experience poverty.** Many Ohio parents must choose between taking on full-time work or staying unemployed or underemployed because they cannot afford the high cost of child care, and care is often not even available where they live.

Rural families spend 12.2% of their income on child care.⁵ In addition to contributing to the economic instability of working families, children in poverty have disparate access to quality early learning experiences.



Urban vs. Rural Gap³ ● Urban ● Rural



Child Care in Ohio's Rural Appalachian Region

Ohio's Appalachian region is made up of 32 counties concentrated in the Southern and Eastern parts of the state.

Young Children...

There are 110,014 children, from birth to five, living in Ohio's Appalachian region.⁶

...Living in Poverty...

Nearly 1 in 3 (31,133 of these young children) are living in poverty (under 100% of the Federal Poverty Level).⁷

...With Limited Access to Quality Child Care...

Most of these young children living in poverty (75%) do not have access to quality, affordable child care even though their economic status makes them eligible for publicly funded child care.⁸

...Are Not Ready for Kindergarten.

As a result of the high concentration of poverty and limited supply of quality child care and early learning opportunities for low-income families in the region, **74% of low-income Appalachian children are not ready for kindergarten.**⁹

Recommendations for Action:

The 2023 [Farm Bill](#) is a critical piece of national legislation that primarily addresses agriculture and food policy, and also allocates resources for rural development initiatives. The enacted policy known as the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Act), was signed into law on December 20, 2018, and is effective until 2023. The upcoming bill would reauthorize this policy and, for the first time, direct rural development funds to improve access and quality of child care in the U.S., and specifically in Appalachian regions.

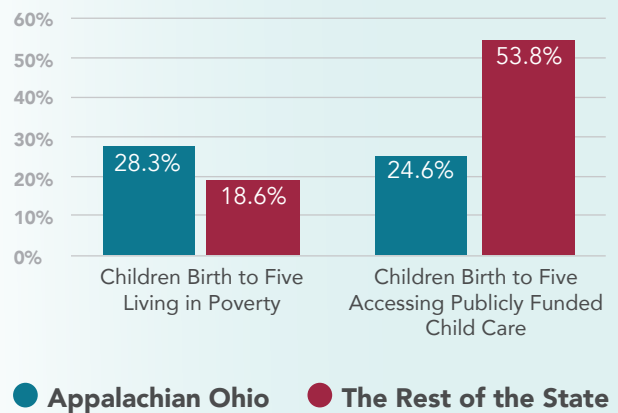
A bipartisan effort called the [Expanding Child Care in Rural America](#) (ECRA) Act of 2023 has been introduced as part of the Farm Bill by a group of U.S. Senators and Representatives, including Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown. The bill aims to address child care challenges in rural and agricultural communities. It directs the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide grants, loans, and technical assistance to improve child care facilities in rural areas. The ECRA Act is supported by many state and national organizations and seeks to enhance child care access for working families, making a positive impact on rural communities and the workforce.

We need policymakers to consider the following recommendations to support child care in rural and Appalachian areas of Ohio:

- **Increase Funding for Rural Child Care**
Advocate for the ECRA Act to be included within the 2023 Farm Bill to support rural child care programs.
- **Expand Access to Early Childhood Education**
Promote State and Federal policies that expand access to quality early experiences in center- and home-based programs.
- **Community Partnerships**
Encourage collaboration and innovative solutions in rural communities to increase investment in early childhood education within the communities.
- **State and Local Initiatives**
Complement the Farm Bill efforts with state and local policies tailored to the unique needs of Ohio's rural and Appalachian regions.

“Nationally, three-quarters (77%) of farm families with children under 18 report difficulties securing child care because of lack of affordability, availability, or quality. Almost half (48%) report that having access to affordable child care is important for maintaining and growing their farm business.”¹⁰

Appalachian Region Compared to the Rest of the State (Remaining 56 Counties)^{11,12}



By combining efforts at the federal, state, and local levels, it's possible to strengthen child care services in rural areas of Ohio, ultimately benefiting families, children, and the broader community.

1. Ohio Chamber of Commerce
2. Ohio Chamber of Commerce
3. [Bipartisan Policy Center 2019](#)
4. U.S. Census Bureau (2019)
5. [Center for American Progress](#)
6. U.S. Census Bureau (2019)
7. U.S. Census Bureau (2019)

8. Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Data Production, July 2022
9. Ohio Department of Education (2022)
10. The National Farm Families Child Care Survey (2023)

11. U.S. Census Bureau (2019)
12. Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Data Production, July 2022