

Childcare as Infrastructure: State Policy Proposals

Washington frames childcare as a "service," but it's core economic infrastructure. Just as AI reshapes work, caregiving remains among the few occupations that will never be automated.

We've done this for elder care through WA Cares. Now we must apply the same reasoning to families with young children.



Economic Foundation

Families need childcare to work and contribute to the economy

Child Development

Children need safe, nurturing spaces to thrive and grow

Workforce Stability

Communities need workers who can show up, invest, and stay

Policy Gap #1: Age Group Definitions

- 1 — Infants (0-12 months)
Maintain protective ratios and smaller groups; emphasize continuity of care
- 2 — Younger Toddlers (13-24 months)
Slightly higher ratios than infants but developmentally conservative
- 3 — Older Toddlers (25-35 months)
Align to New Mexico's structure with modestly higher ratios
- 4 — Preschool (3-5 years)
Adjust toward national benchmarks allowing limited capacity increases

The Problem: Washington moves children to "toddler" classification at 12 months—exposing very young children to larger groups before they're developmentally ready.



Policy Gap #2: Sustainable Funding

The Problem

Childcare cannot be solved through discretionary budgeting. Programs expand in good years and collapse in bad ones.

That is not how infrastructure works.



Create Trust Fund

Convert philanthropy account into permanent Early Learning Trust



Identify Revenue Stream

Small, dedicated contributions modeled on WA Cares



Sustainable Growth

Funding grows with employment, benefits scale with need

Other Policy Gaps

1

Pay What Quality Costs

Codify Cost of Quality Care model into law. Base reimbursement on real operating expenses, not market prices. Move toward 85th percentile benchmark.

2

Build Physical Capacity

Expand Early Learning Facilities Fund. Reduce barriers for rural providers. Pair facilities funding with zoning reform. Infrastructure needs buildings with doors.

3

Centralize Licensing Excellence

Strengthen licensing through regional hubs and additional staff. Focus on Tier-1 safety rules. Create service-first model with navigators and coaches.

