

House Health & Social Services Committee Members,

My name is Charles Westmoreland, and I am a researcher working for Juneau-based Rain Coast Data. For several months I have been tracking and compiling data regarding Alaska's childcare sector. The data trends are alarming and provide numerous justifications for taking immediate legislative action to help address this crisis.

From 2018-2020, Alaska lost 20% of its childcare providers, leaving the state with childcare slots for only 29% of all youth ages 4 and younger. A percentage this low classifies as a "Childcare Desert." Anecdotal evidence from dozens of childcare providers I've spoken with supports another alarming set of statistics: young families are leaving Alaska, and the lack of available childcare is partly to blame. According to US Census Data and State of Alaska population estimates, the population decline of 0-4 and 20-29 year olds is getting worse.

Age	Pop. 2010	Pop. 2020	Pop. 2022	% Difference (2010-2020)	% Difference (2020-2022)
0-4	53,996	48,972	45,403	-9%	-7%
20-29	109,838	100,190	94,524	-9%	-6%

Childcare providers are unable to hire and retain staff at current wages (\$14-\$15 hourly), which is impacting availability and forcing many to close permanently. This lack of childcare availability has resulted in Alaskans leaving this workforce and is contributing to negative economic consequences statewide. The service sector is perhaps the most hard-hit by the lack of available workers, but every industry and sector has felt similar impacts. About 7% of working parents have left jobs because they couldn't find childcare, and 77% of all working parents have missed time at their jobs for the same reason. The statewide economic loss is \$165 million annually. Nearly 10% of that figure is lost sales taxes (Source: US Chamber of Commerce Foundation). I have included charts and data points in a separate attachment related to this timely and critical issue.

Legislation supporting the childcare sector, paired with additional funding to improve wages, must be viewed as an investment in the economy that will produce greater returns in the future by creating a stable environment for young families and providing incentive for Alaskans to return to the workplace.

Very Respectfully,

Charles L. Westmoreland

Researcher, Rain Coast Data