

Most Illinoisans live in 'child care deserts,' report says ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

About 58 percent of Illinois residents live in a “child care desert” with few or no options for licensed daytime care for kids while parents work.

The Center for American Progress’ annual report listing every licensed daycare and home daycare in the nation shows there are very few places for a dual-income family to send their children when they’re at work.

Child care, the report said, has become a necessity for working parents.

“Two-thirds of U.S. children who have not started school have all parents in the workforce. At the same time, the cost of childcare is out of reach for the average family; in most areas of the country, it exceeds the costs of rent or in-state college tuition,” according to the report.

In Illinois, parents pay about \$13,000 a year per child for daycare on average, putting the state near the top in the nation in terms of average annual cost.

Rasheed Malik, who wrote the report, said two-thirds of rural U.S. Census tracts in Illinois have at least 50 kids living there with a demand of at least three kids per available daycare spot. That means two of the three children don’t have the option, even if their parents can afford it.

“About 70 percent of the rural population lives in a childcare desert,” he said.

A significant blind spot in the report data is child care provided by family, friends and neighbors. About one of every four kids younger than 6 is in that category.

“Family, friend and neighbor care will always be there to help people bridge those gaps and to help people patch things together and have flexibility,” Malik said. “It’s certainly very large, in part, because the licensed and regulated child care market is not where it needs to be.”

These relatives and family friends are not required to go through training, safety checks, and periodic licensing inspections for renewal, a significant cost of running a daycare.

“[Family, friend and neighbor] providers must be equipped with the supports necessary to ensure that the care they provide is safe and enriching,” the report said.

About 24 percent of children younger than 6 are in home-based childcare with a relative, according to an analysis by the National Women’s Law Center.

The report recommends more spending to make the schools more widely available. It lauded Connecticut’s plan to reimburse up to \$17,000 in childcare costs per year. The report didn’t offer specifics on how to do that while lowering the cost, whether it’s paid by parents or taxpayers. The Child Care Aware of America study estimated Connecticut’s child care costs at more than \$15,000 a year per child.

Related link: America’s child care deserts in 2018 ^[3]

Region: United States ^[4]

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