

These cities raised taxes – for child care. Parents say the free day care ‘changed my life’ ^[1]

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Source: CityNews

Format: Article

Publication Date: 30 Apr 2024

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

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Last year, New Orleans added more than 1,000 child care seats for low-income families after voters approved a historic property tax increase in 2022. The referendum raised the budget of the program seven-fold – from \$3 million to \$21 million a year for 20 years. Because Louisiana’s early childhood fund matches money raised locally for child care, the city gets an additional \$21 million to help families find care.

New Orleans is part of a growing trend of communities passing ballot measures to expand access to child care.

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The recent local initiatives are focused on younger children – infants and toddlers – more than ever before, said Diane Girouard, a senior state policy analyst with Child Care Aware, a nonprofit research and advocacy group.

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For some Americans, the child care crisis has continued, keeping them from being able to hold down jobs and advance in their careers. The number of parents who reported missing work because of child care surged in 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak; it has yet to recede to pre-pandemic levels.

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About 70% of the City Seats budget pays for children to attend centers ranked as high quality on the state’s rating system. The rest of the budget goes to improving quality: Child care providers have access to a team that includes a speech pathologist, a pediatrician and social workers.

Participating providers are required to pay their staff at least \$15 an hour – on average, Louisiana child care workers made \$9.77 an hour in 2020 – and abide by strict teacher-to-child ratios and class sizes. They also receive professional development from early learning experts.

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