

# Workers will seek more child care money for tots [AU]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

About 40 Durham County child care workers will travel to Raleigh today to ask lawmakers for more money for Smart Start, the state program that helps prepare children for school.

The county is one of four sending representatives as part of "Tuesdays for Tots," an ongoing lobbying effort to get the state to fully fund early childhood education needs.

Tight budgets have cut Smart Start funding by about \$40 million in recent years. The program also has had to compete for dollars with Gov. Mike Easley's More at Four initiative, a prekindergarten program that some say has received money that otherwise would have gone to Smart Start.

Durham County, which received \$10.4 million in Smart Start money in 1999, received \$7.5 million this year, said Marsha Basloe, the executive director of Durham's Partnership for Children, which administers the county's Smart Start money.

Both Easley's and the state House's proposed budgets maintain Smart Start at its current funding level. But advocates say the program needs \$17.5 million more just to help counties meet 52 percent of their estimated need. In Durham County, for example, Basloe said 1,500 children are on the waiting list for subsidized care.

Today's lobbying effort comes a day before the scheduled release of a statewide report that is expected to tout the impact of child care on the state and local economies.

That report emphasizes that North Carolina's nearly 8,500 child care homes and centers are small businesses that collect more than \$1.5 billion in gross receipts every year. In addition, quality child care reduces employee absences and turnover, the report says.

More and more, industry is looking at child care availability when deciding whether to move or expand in an area, said Tom White, the executive director of the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce.

While it may not rank as high on employers' lists as, say, community college work force training, child care is the kind of quality of life issue to which industry is giving more attention.

"I think Smart Start will prove to be -- it is in my estimation -- one of the most important public policy initiatives from an economic development perspective," White said.

- reprinted from The Herald-Sun

**Tags:** [funding](#)<sup>[2]</sup>

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