



Lowering the Cost of
CHILDCARE

JOSH
FOR JERSEY
★ **GOVERNOR** ★

Josh's "Lower Costs Plan for Jersey"

I. LOWER THE COST OF CHILD CARE

OUR CHALLENGE

New Jersey is expensive for families. The total cost of housing, food, childcare, transportation, healthcare, taxes, and other necessities is nearly 30 percent higher in Jersey than the national average. According to a recent survey, nearly two-thirds of voters in our state feel their family's income is falling behind the cost of living, while another one-quarter say that their incomes are just keeping up. In short, more than 85 percent of New Jersey families say they can barely make ends meet.

Childcare costs, in particular, are through the roof in our state. Since 2019, the average cost of childcare is up 32 percent, making our state the second-most expensive in the country. On average, full-time daycare costs \$12,988 per year for an infant and \$10,855 per year for a four-year-old. That means the average Jersey family is paying more than 10 percent of their household income on childcare for one kid. For a minimum wage earner in New Jersey, childcare can cost more than fifty percent of their annual salary. Many are paying much more. In Bergen County, for instance, on average, childcare costs families more than \$17,460 a year — \$442 each week. For families with infants, the cost is even higher — as much as \$19,500 a year.

MY RECORD

I have been a champion for our children in Congress, and I will be as Governor, too.

I've pushed for a range of actions to bring down taxes and costs for families:

- Fighting to make life more affordable for families by blocking the Congestion Tax and restoring the State and Local Tax Deduction (SALT).
- Helped to negotiate and pass expansion of the Child Tax Credit.
- Introduced the *LITTLE Act*, which will more than double the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit and created a new tax credit for start-up childcare centers to ensure families have more access to more affordable childcare.
- Fighting the far-right and President Trump's budget, which will gut Medicaid, WIC, SNAP, and school meals, and his proposed shutdown of the Department of Education, which plays a critical role in early childhood development.
- Led the fight for the *Child Care Stabilization Act* to help childcare centers stay afloat during the pandemic and prevent the closure of 70,000 childcare businesses nationwide.
- Secured a \$2.7 billion increase in Head Start funding since taking office, benefitting low-income children.
- Cosponsored the *Apprentice-Related Child Care Act* to establish a childcare stipend pilot program for apprenticeship program participants.
- Introduced the bipartisan *Providing Child Care for Police Officers Act*, which provides grants to create childcare centers for public safety officers working non-traditional hours.
- Cosponsored the *Child Care Investment Act* to increase employer-provided childcare tax credits and boost pre-tax dependent care deductions.

- Cosponsored the *Child Care for Working Families Act* to increase the quality and supply of childcare and lower childcare costs for families.
- Cosponsored the *Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act* to strengthen the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

AS YOUR GOVERNOR

I will continue to fight for our children and families as Governor:

- **Cut Taxes for Families Caring for Children or Parents.**
I've already announced the new "Family Tax Credit" that I'll enact. This will reduce the bottom line on the income tax form for every Jersey family with dependents — children under 18 or senior parents they're supporting — to help ease the burden. That includes about a fifty percent income cut taxes for families in the lowest bracket. For those up to the median New Jersey income, we'll cut their income taxes by roughly one-quarter. Every New Jersey family with children or elders to support, regardless of income, will see their taxes go down.
- **Make Childcare More Affordable and Available For All.**
Families face a gauntlet of costs and difficulties in obtaining high-quality care for their kids while they work to support them. New Jersey lost over 250 childcare centers and providers during the pandemic from 2020 to 2021, only worsening the childcare shortage and increasing costs for families. In 2023, while 84 percent of young children in the state were estimated to have adequate access to childcare, nine zip code areas had extremely high children-to-slots ratios. That's just wrong and I will fix it through a range of initiatives:
 - **I'll provide tax breaks and other government assistance for employers** that provide childcare (particularly large companies providing on-site childcare), as seventeen other states already do.
 - **I will require that all public schools and municipal buildings be available for childcare** unless there is a clear reason not to, waive permit fees, and create a fast-track licensing process, to help open more childcare centers and lower cost.
 - **I will standardize zoning regulations** to ensure childcare centers and in-home providers automatically qualify as allowable uses in most residential, mixed-use, and commercial zones — eliminating lengthy zoning approvals. And, I'll remove parking mandates for childcare facilities in cities, like Oregon did.

- **I'll increase qualified childcare staff.** A major barrier to childcare access is the inability of centers to afford and find sufficient staff, with 40 percent of center providers saying they had difficulty affording or hiring staff. We need to:
 - Expand the current New Jersey Early Childhood Apprenticeship Pilot Program to accept on-the-job training as an alternative to formal education (along with strict background checks, as required under New Jersey law);
 - Follow Iowa's model to allow assistant teachers in New Jersey to begin working under supervision while earning their credentials;
 - Provide subsidized childcare to all childcare workers, themselves; and
 - Create a childcare stipend pilot program for apprenticeship program participants.
 - All of this will expand the childcare workforce, increasing availability and lowering cost.

- **Double the Child Tax Credit.**

The Child Tax Credit currently provides \$500 per child up to age six. I will expand the credit to \$1,000 per child and expand the age eligibility to eleven-years-old. The expansion of this program will reach an additional 441,000 families and 713,000 more children.

- **Deliver Universal Pre-K and All-Day Kindergarten.**

Currently, 293 school districts — approximately half of the state's districts — offer free, full-day preschool programs, a 350 percent increase under Governor Murphy. All-day kindergarten is available in almost all districts, but some offer only half-day programs or require parents to pay if they want access to full-day pre-K. While most of the state's 608 public and charter schools offer free all-day kindergarten, eleven districts either do not provide full-day kindergarten or charge tuition for it.

Free, Universal Pre-K and full-day kindergarten give parents the peace of mind they need knowing that their kids are in a safe, healthy, high-quality learning environment. It also will save every family money and help those who want to go to work outside the home, afford to, and boost our economy in the long run.

- **I will complete the expansion of these vital programs to every school and every child in New Jersey.** I will make sure that every Jersey family is able to obtain high-quality early childhood care and education.
- **We also need to create more public-private partnerships between districts and providers in their area.** In the early learning context, public-private partnerships are particularly important because there are already many childcare providers that could allow us to quickly and easily expand access. But, the state's provision of free care that goes largely to in-school centers is driving many of these conscientious private childcare centers out of business. This is counter-productive for our children and families, and bad for small businesses in our state.

There's an easy fix:

- I will require all districts to adopt “mixed-delivery” programs, including both school- and private-based care.
 - I will mandate that the state’s Department of Education align its classroom space requirement for preschools with the Department of Children and Families’ requirement for licensed childcare centers. DCF requires providers to have at least 35 square feet of usable activity floor space for each child, while DOE requires at 750 square feet of usable space per classroom, which precludes many perfectly acceptable private centers unless they invest in costly modifications.
 - Taken together, these changes will allow more districts to enter into long-term contracts with private childcare centers, providing certainty and stability, and encouraging investment, in the childcare market.
- **I will make sure that every Jersey family has access to free, full-day kindergarten, regardless of where they live.**
- **Make School Breakfast and School Lunch Universal.**
Free school lunch and breakfast are currently available to students whose families have an annual household income of up to 224 percent of the federal poverty level. I will make sure that every Jersey child obtains adequate nutrition by making this program universal. This policy change will benefit not only every child in New Jersey, but also every parent.
 - **Provide More Family Time for Jersey Families.**
What’s the one thing working families don’t have enough of? Well, besides money, it’s time. In fact, having more time when they need it to care for and support children and aging parents would both improve life generally and also lower caregiving costs. We need to do both for our families. New Jersey parents are expected to lose more than \$378 million dollars in expected earnings as they are forced to cut work hours or leave the workforce altogether to care for their children. As Governor, I’ll:
 - **Enhance the Family and Medical Leave Act**, with time to care for an elder family member, participate in children’s academic activities, address domestic violence, and attend prenatal medical appointments.
 - **Promote livable communities** with jogging and bike paths, vibrant public libraries and traffic patterns that reduce congestion and commute times – all so that families can spend more high-quality time together.