

# Marin Independent Journal

## Marin Voice: Support child care providers, ensure quality affordable services

By [AIDEEN GAIDMORE](#) |

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**If we've learned anything in the past two years, it's the critical importance of Marin's child care infrastructure — allowing our residents to work, our businesses to open and our county to operate.**

From the first day of the shelter-in-place order during the COVID-19 pandemic, our child care programs were asked to remain open to care for the children of essential workers — and they did, regardless of the risk to their own health and well-being.

Without child care, many of our health care professionals could not have cared for our family and friends who were ill with coronavirus. Without child care for our retail staff, stores could have not stayed open to allow us to buy food and basic supplies. Without child care, our community would not have functioned.

Reliable child care allows parents to go to work and stay at work as dependable employees. For many new mothers, it allows them to re-enter the workforce and provide for their families.

**Unfortunately, the cost of child care is prohibitive for many working parents, especially in Marin County, with the average cost of licensed infant care at \$2,200 per month— or \$26,400 per year. At those rates, many people literally cannot afford to go to work.**

In addition to price, the availability of high-quality child care is another serious issue.

Working parents need full-day, year-round, flexible child care options, and many need non-traditional hours. They want to use our current system with their own choice of private preschools, care by family members, friends or neighbors, care by family child care providers, state-funded support or the Head Start program.

**Overall, working families need an early care system based on parental choice and convenience.**

The availability of child care also depends on having a sufficient number of child care providers running successful businesses.

Our child care programs in Marin are approximately 90% private small businesses. Like all small businesses, they suffered immense financial hardship during the pandemic. They can no longer stay viable without investments from the state and from funders at the local level.

Without child care available for Marin residents, how are we going to rebuild our economy? **Without financial support for child care, parents are forced to either stay out of work and remain in poverty or leave their children in unsafe, inconsistent child care situations to keep their jobs.**

This missing element affects families financially but also impacts the early education of our children. **High-quality child care provides critical learning opportunities for young children while their brains are developing rapidly.** And studies show that children without quality child care are more likely to have problems throughout their educational career, which often means the cycle of poverty continues.

**The time is now to recognize the importance of our early childhood education field and to invest in child care providers, their programs and the families who need them.**

An analysis by President Joe Biden's Council of Economic Advisers describes the economic returns of investments in childhood development and early education. For every dollar spent, there are benefits to society of \$8.60 (about half of which comes from increased earnings for children when they grow up). That sounds like a smart deal to me.

To learn more, please join me at First 5 Marin's Policy Breakfast on May 6. The theme is "Child Care Keeps Marin Working." The keynote speaker is Sen. Mike McGuire. I will be joined on a panel discussion with Mike Blakeley from the Marin Economic Forum and by Joanne Webster from the San Rafael Chamber of Commerce.

To register for this free event, email [Michelle@First5Marin.org](mailto:Michelle@First5Marin.org).

*Aideen Gaidmore is the executive director of the Marin Child Care Council and member of First 5 Marin Children and Families Commission.*