

## Opinion

# Nonprofit daycare builds housing for teachers in New Haven to fight high housing costs

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By Allyx Schiavone

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## Opinion: Universal pre-k only solves half a problem in CT



Early child care illustration  
Tribune

Gov. Ned Lamont announced on Wednesday plans to provide universal pre-kindergarten to Connecticut families. This plan would cap family fees at 7% of household income and pay early care and education providers more to provide subsidized preschool slots serving 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds.

I am glad that the governor is taking action to subsidize early care and education. As a lifelong educator and the executive director of a New Haven early care and education provider for infants, toddlers and preschoolers, I can tell you firsthand that the childcare system isn't working for those who need it. There aren't enough spots, and tuition is too expensive for parents. And teachers earn far too little to survive — but that's a whole other issue.

Unfortunately, the governor's plan only addresses half of the problem. Investing in pre-kindergarten without an equal investment in ages 0-3 years will further destabilize early care and education, making it even more difficult for parents with young children to find the high-quality, dependable, safe child care they need. Families are already struggling: [Childcare costs consume more than a quarter of U.S. household incomes. In Connecticut, childcare costs often outpace housing costs.](#) The impacts for families priced out of child care are often severe: [39% of parents who've quit their job or shifted to part-time work cite lack of available or affordable child care as a factor in their decision.](#)

Child care is essential, and early education opportunities set up Connecticut families for long-term success. This critical work, which powers our economy now and in the future, is subsidized by exceedingly low wages paid to early educators. In Connecticut, the [hourly median wage earned by a childcare worker is \\$16.51, just under \\$35,000 per year.](#) According to the [Connecticut United Ways' ALICE Report](#), \$108,324 is the minimum annual income needed for a family of four with an infant and a preschooler to survive in our state.

Governor Lamont is correct — our state faces a severe child care crisis, which ultimately boils down to a teacher staffing crisis and a statewide labor shortage. A 2023 survey found that one in seven early educator positions across our state remains unfilled, which leaves parents without child care, costing [our state about \\$1.5B every year.](#) If we lift wages for preschool teachers, but fail to lift wages for educators working with younger children, we will be broadening a gap that's already detrimental to the teachers I work with, as the [median wage for early care and education falls below 97% of all other jobs.](#)

We only have to look to our neighbors in New York to illustrate the potential fallout of separately funding preschool and care for ages 0- to 3 years old. Funding early care and education for children 0- to 3 years old separately from children 3- to 5 years old fractured New York City's early care and education continuum, with damaging effects for New York City's children, families and economy. Educators serving children 0- to 3 years old are now further away from a liveable wage; those who are qualified to teach older children have no incentive to stay, further depleting an already scarce workforce. As early educators leave the field, child care supply drops for those parents depending on affordable, high-quality care and education when their children are young, at the moment when parents' earning potential is at its lowest.

Lack of affordable, accessible care for ages 0- to 3 years old is especially detrimental for mothers. For women who leave the workforce, the nexus point is the birth of their child. For too many women, the lack of reliable, affordable infant care is what pushes them out of the workforce, further exacerbating [Connecticut's 73,000 worker labor shortage.](#)

As we work to fix our broken system, we must be aware of — and avoid — unintended negative consequences. Connecticut already faces a dramatic shortage of high-quality early care and education programs, and the deficiency is even more pronounced for children under age 3. Investing solely in universal Pre-K bifurcates an already unstable sector. As our state makes decisions to increase investment in the childcare sector, let's ensure we don't forget the impact of investing in our youngest children, our families, our economy and our state.

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