

*Testimony for Missouri House Committee Hearing*

*Date: 01/XX/2025*

*Committee:*

*Bill Number(s): HB 269*

*For Informational Purposes*

According to a 2023 investigation, nearly half of all children aged five and under live in a childcare desert in the state of Missouri (Bates & Bergin, 2023). A childcare desert refers to an area where the demand for childcare exceeds availability and is defined as a jurisdiction where there are more than three children ages five and under for every licensed childcare slot or there are no licensed slots at all.

According to Census data compiled by Jackson County Public Health, half of the population in eastern Jackson County lives in a childcare desert (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a). The city with the highest ratio of children ages five and under to childcare slots was Grandview, with a ratio of nine children to available slots. The cities of Blue Springs, Buckner, and Greenwood were also identified as childcare deserts. Meanwhile, Lone Jack, Sibley, Sugar Creek, and Lake Lotawana were identified as cities with no licensed slots at all. Finally, when looking at race and ethnicity data it is clear that childcare access disparities exist. Hispanic and Latino children had the highest probability of living in a childcare desert, with 81% of children under five living in childcare desert zip codes. Additionally, 80% of Black children reside in childcare desert zip codes compared to 62% of White children under the age of five.

Importantly, childcare challenges disproportionately affect the financial well-being of women, single parents, parents in poverty, and families of color more (Novoa, 2020). A 2021 report from the Missouri Chamber revealed that 61% of surveyed parents reported missing work due to childcare issues. Furthermore, 28% of respondents noted that someone in their household had either left a job or opted not to take one due to childcare-related challenges (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2021). One national analysis estimated that in 2022, women were five to eight times more likely to experience negative employment consequences related to childcare compared to men (Almeida & Salas-Betsch, 2023). In Eastern Jackson County specifically, there is a 7% decrease in maternal workforce participation in zip codes that are considered a childcare deserts compared to zip codes with sufficient childcare access. There is almost no difference in men's workforce participation across zip codes with regard to childcare desert scores (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022b).

In addition to workforce issues, women who cannot access childcare also report forgoing or missing important healthcare appointments and cancer screenings. A national survey of women found that 24% could not find time to go to the doctor, and 14% of women missed or delayed their own healthcare appointments because of lack of childcare. While women of all income levels were impacted, low-income women were more likely to experience both childcare problems and delayed healthcare (Alvarez et al., 2022).

Access to quality childcare benefits the health of the entire family, providing children with access to social and emotional development opportunities and early education, while providing parents the opportunity to enter the workforce and improve the financial health of their family. Addressing this complex issue requires a commitment to public investment in childcare infrastructure. By doing so, Missouri can help families secure access to high-quality childcare for their children, empowering parents to confidently participate in the workforce knowing that their child's health and well-being is a priority.

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