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Texas Legislators Introduce Bill to Expand Workforce Accessibility to Reliable, High-Quality Child Care

Child Care Associates leads efforts through Tarrant County Pilot Program

(**FORT WORTH, TX**) – Child Care Associates (CCA) proudly announces the [Child Care Innovation Pilot](#) (CCIP) program, a key workforce initiative introduced during the 89th Texas Legislature by State Representative Ben Bumgarner (R-Denton County) and State Senator Kelly Hancock (R-Tarrant County). The Child Care Innovation Pilot program is designed to expand access to affordable child care and support the workforce, this program builds on the success of Tarrant County's [Prime Early Learning Pilot](#).

[House Bill 5529](#) and [Senate Bill 2979](#) establish the Child Care Innovation Pilot program, enabling Local Workforce Development Boards in Tarrant County and North Central Texas to partner with employers to address critical child care needs impacting the workforce. In collaboration with the community, the boards will have the opportunity to competitively allocate base-grant funding to child care programs who agree to provide the needed services. The program builds on the success of a local Tarrant County pilot, which demonstrated that tying base-grant funding for child care programs to community goals can lead to significant gains in child care enrollment, early educator retention, and lower tuition costs for families.

Since 2022, Child Care Associates, in partnership with Rice University's Texas Policy Lab, has operated the [Tarrant County Prime Early Learning Pilot](#), an initiative aimed at increasing the availability of high-quality child care in underserved areas. The program was funded by one-time Tarrant County American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) resources, awarding competitive grants to 19 child care programs, including 11 centers and 8 home-based providers, all serving low-income families.

"We spent considerable time consulting with researchers, economists, and child care operators to find the best way to align services with the needs of working parents," said Kara Waddell, President and CEO of Child Care Associates. "Through this process, we discovered that supporting the entire child care ecosystem—not just individual seats—was key to scaling child care supply. That's why we created a grant model that directs funding to where programs need it most: offsetting fixed operational costs, supporting staff wages, and providing incentives for key services and high enrollment."

The Tarrant County pilot has already produced remarkable results:

- **14% increase** in overall program enrollment, with a 100% median increase in infant enrollment.
- **33% reduction** in tuition costs for private-pay families.
- **17% improvement** in child care teacher retention rates.

Army veteran Felicia Davis, owner of Ready Set Jump Learning Center, used the Prime Grant to expand infant care. She was also able to raise staff wages without raising costs for families. "The grant helped me retain quality teachers by offering competitive wages, so they can support their families while doing the work they love," said Davis. "Before Prime, I was losing staff to higher-paying jobs. Now, I have stability for my team—and for the children in our care—and am able to staff more classrooms."

The initial Tarrant County investment was guided by the county's [Blue Ribbon Action Committee on Child Care](#). "When the Blue Ribbon Action Committee on Child Care was tasked with guiding the local ARPA investments into the child care sector, we knew we needed to identify innovative solutions that could spur systemic change beyond this one-time investment. The Prime Early Learning Pilot was really intended to demonstrate a new model for leveraging public and private investments in order to increase access to the child care families lacked in our community," said Rose Bradshaw, Co-Chair of the Blue Ribbon Action Committee and President-CEO of the North Texas Community Foundation.

The CCIP will build on the success of the Prime Pilot by expanding the pilot into additional North Texas counties, with the potential to become a model for the state. The Texas Workforce Commission will oversee the program which will be operated in the Tarrant County and North Central Texas Workforce Board areas. The boards will provide competitive grants to existing, high-quality child care providers to scale their services and meet the region's identified needs.

The Child Care Innovation Pilot program will focus on:

- Expanding the availability of high-demand seats (e.g., infant/toddler care, non-traditional hour care for shift workers, care for children with special needs, and care in high-need geographic areas)
- Improving teacher retention through increased early educator compensation
- Stabilizing tuition costs for families
- Supporting program quality and child outcomes

Approximately 52 child care programs are expected to benefit from the first cycle of the pilot, potentially impacting 2,200 children per year.

"Today, Texas has only 80 available workers for every 100 open jobs. Meanwhile, 60% of non-working parents nationally report that child care is a top reason they do not participate in the

workforce,” said Alfreda Norman, Co-Chair of the Blue Ribbon Action Committee and former Vice-President at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. “Ensuring that the child care options needed most by working families exist in every community across Texas is critical to our state’s long-term economic success.”

“Inadequate child care costs Texans an estimated \$11.4 billion a year in lost productivity and opportunity,” Emily Williams Knight ED.d, president and CEO of the Texas Restaurant Association, said. “Addressing this challenge isn’t just about supporting families—it’s about strengthening our workforce and ensuring businesses have the talent they need to thrive. By investing in innovative solutions, we can create sustainable childcare options that empower working parents, drive economic growth and secure a more prosperous future for Texas.”

The Child Care Innovation Pilot program has also been filed as part of a broader statewide initiative under [House Bill 5086](#) (Ordaz) and [Senate Bill 3007](#) (Blanco). This version will allow the Texas Workforce Commission to select up to six Local Workforce Development Board regions to operate local pilots over a four year period.

As the Texas Legislature continues to convene for its 89th session, the Child Care Innovation Pilot program now depends on the support of policymakers, advocates, and business leaders as a practical solution for sustaining the state’s workforce and addressing child care deserts. With the potential to stabilize child care markets and create long-term economic growth, this program is poised to transform the state’s child care landscape and ensure a brighter future for children and working families.

For more information about the Child Care Innovation Pilot program, please contact:

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About Child Care Associates

Child Care Associates (CCA) is one of the largest child development nonprofits in North Texas and has served more than half a million young children over the past 57 years. Through Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, PreK and Child Care Management Scholarships, CCA delivers quality early education programs to children and families of disadvantaged means, offsets the high cost of child care for lower income working families, and increases the quality of child care delivered across Tarrant County and North Texas.

Visit <http://childcareassociates.org/head-start-early-head-start> for eligibility and enrollment information. For more information, visit childcareassociates.org.

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