# Child Care Challenges

## Ulster County

January 2026

Child care is a critical support for families with young children, employers, and New York State's economy. The State made substantial investments in the child care system in the past few years, but this **progress is threatened by significant issues related to cost and capacity.** To address these challenges and ensure families have access to the care they need, **policymakers must make critical investments in the 26-27 NYS Budget** to bolster the child care workforce and stabilize the Child Care Assistance Program.

## ⚠ Challenge 1: High Costs for Families

**Parents can't afford to pay more for child care, but providers can't afford to charge less.** For families paying out-of-pocket for care, the statewide average annual cost for center-based **infant care ($14,388) is more than double the cost of SUNY college tuition ($7,070).**

### Median Annual Child Care Costs in Ulster County

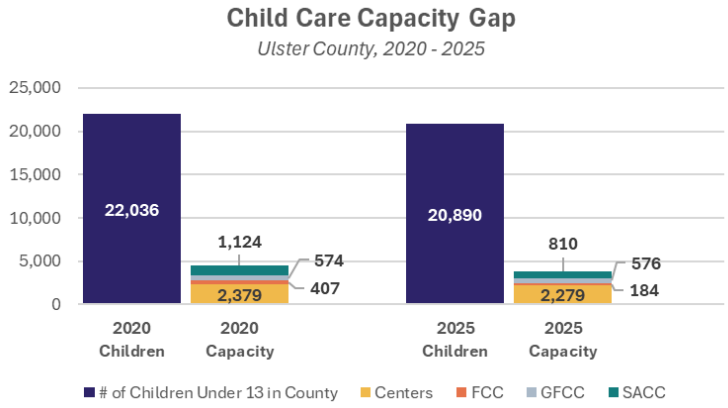
| | *Center-Based* | *Home-Based* |
|---|---|---|
| *Infant* | **$16,435** | **$13,264** |
| *Toddler* | **$15,859** | **$12,168** |
| *School Aged* | **$12,975** | **$11,534** |

## ⚠ Challenge 2: Child Care Capacity Gap

There is **not enough child care to meet New York families' needs.** Child care programs across the state are struggling with workforce shortages, **leading to decreased capacity and long waitlists for families**, which leads to parents missing out on valuable employment or educational opportunities.

### In Ulster County

| | |
|---|---|
| *Children under age 6* | **9,001** |
| *Children under age 13* | **20,890** |
| *Families with children under age 13 and all parents working* | **78%** |
| *Child care slots* | **3,849** |





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Learn more at thechildrensagenda.org

# Challenge 3: Child Care Workforce Shortage

**Low pay and limited benefits have forced many child care educators to leave the field in order to support their own families.** High turnover in the child care workforce increases the cost of care for providers and limits the quality of care for families.

### Average child care worker earnings in the Hudson Valley

**$19.17**
***hourly***

**$38,070**
***annually***

**95.7%**
**of jobs in this region pay more than median child care wages**

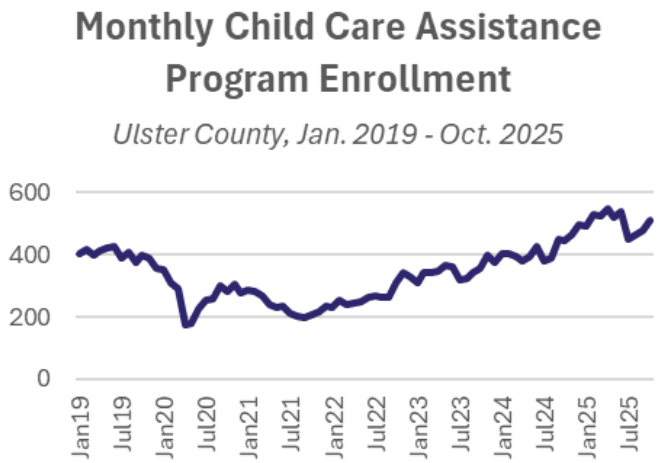
# Challenge 4: Insufficient Government Funding

Enrollment in the Child Care Assistance Program steadily declined in the 2010's and fell rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic. **New York has taken important steps to expand enrollment and eliminate barriers in response**, including increasing income eligibility to 85% of SMI (2023) and developing an online CCAP application (2024).

With these changes, counties saw significant increases in enrollment in 2025; **however, nearly half of counties were forced to close enrollment and/or establish waitlists** for eligible families between April and December 2025 due to insufficient funding. To ensure every New York family has access to the high-quality care they need to thrive, policymakers must make significant investments in the 26-27 NYS Budget to support the child care workforce and fully fund the Child Care Assistance Program.

### In Ulster County

| | |
|---|---|
| *Children eligible for CCAP* | **38%** |
| *Eligible children enrolled in CCAP* | **6%** |
| *Oct. 2025 CCAP enrollment* | **509** |
| *CCAP enrollment status as of Dec. 2025* | **Open** |
| *Children on CCAP waitlist* | **N/A** |




## What New York Voters Are Saying

A December 2025 statewide voter poll conducted on behalf of The Children's Agenda found that **three in five parents (61%) struggled with the cost** of child care, and **72% of voters believe New York should spend more** to make child care affordable.

For additional county fact sheets, please visit: thechildrensagenda.org/county-level-research/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