

2017 NJ GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Where the Candidates Stand on Child Care

Question: Each year, New Jersey provides subsidies to help pay for child care for approximately 60,000 children from low-income families, enabling parents to participate in the workforce. For the ninth year in a row, funding for the state child care subsidy rate has remained flat, forcing child care programs to cover the cost of doing business in 2017 with the same rate they received in 2008. This harms both the quality of programs and access to care, especially for infants. At \$4.00/hour per infant, the rate has been so low, for so long, that fewer providers can afford to accept our youngest children.

If elected, what will be your short- and long-term plans for improving access to quality child care for low-income families in New Jersey?

Kim Guadagno, Republican Candidate

As a working mom who used flexible child care credits to help defer cost of child care, I know affordable and reliable child care is critical for all working families.

Too many families in New Jersey are struggling because of high taxes and a high cost of living, so my goal as governor will be to make New Jersey more affordable for everyday working people. While my opponent has promised to increase taxes if elected, I will lower property taxes during my first term or I won't run for a second. Additionally, I believe we need to pass child care and dependent tax credits to make high-quality child care more important.

Phil Murphy, Democratic Candidate

The budget is a statement of our priorities. For the last eight years, we have handed out billions of dollars in tax breaks to millionaires and large corporations while ignoring the needs of the most vulnerable in our society. I will look at all options to expand child care for low-income families, and I support the creation of a child and dependent care tax credit. Right now, the average New Jersey family with a preschooler and an infant pays \$21,000 in child care costs. That figure is simply unaffordable for most low-income families, and a child care tax credit can help alleviate these burdens and allow parents to work outside the home.

Seth Kaper-Dale, Green Party Candidate

The theme of my campaign is "the last are first." I do not believe a society can thrive unless it is prioritizing the needs of those who are most vulnerable. Children are the most vulnerable population, and they can't cast a vote. We must, as a society, cast votes with our eye toward which candidate will help our children thrive. The best kind of society is one where nobody is 'last' because we all have what we need.

We know that brain development in very young children is fostered by experiencing nurture and safety. In order for the mind and the body to grow to full potential, a child needs real protection and stimulation. For the sake of children, the state needs to find the money to dramatically increase the subsidy rate for child care for financially eligible families.

The rate of reimbursement needs to go up per child. We should be basing our reimbursement rate not on a slight increase from the \$4 rate, but rather by comparing our rate to other states that have not had a stagnated number for the past 9 years. I would propose an immediate 50% increase in the subsidy per infant—raising it to \$6/hour—while we consider going even higher if our research shows that we are still lagging. This rate, \$6/hour, should only be for those licensed child care centers and for registered family child care providers.

The benefit of excellent and plentiful child care in NJ is good for children during the hours they are in the program, but it is also good for the rest of the hours of their day. Children in subsidized child care are children whose parents are able to work and raise money to support the family's needs. A family with less economic stress is one where there is likely more stability—and stability is essential to a child's brain development and social development.

There should also be a concerted effort, with DCF and the Department of Labor, together, to encourage the creation of strategically located child care centers and identification of new registered care providers. I'm glad to see here the 'access' part of the question from ACNJ.

As I have toured some of our financially strapped regions of the state parents have told me, time and again, "the reason I can't get a job is that there is no child care near where I live. I have to pay for 2 buses just to get my kid to daycare."

Caring for children is a profession that should be encouraged as the state has a vested interest in seeing that children thrive.

It is also important that every town in New Jersey have at least some child care centers that accept a child on a subsidy if the child is from that town—even if the subsidized rate is below market rate. In the same way that some towns are too expensive to live in, some towns are too expensive to send your child to daycare.

This year I resettled 2 refugee families in a town in NJ and found that most of the child care centers in the town did not accept kids on state subsidies. Their rates far exceeded the subsidies. We need to find a way to more fairly compensate child care providers and we need to make sure that any family, regardless of family income, can be cared for in the town where he/she resides.