



Child Care

Establish a statewide paid family leave program to support early parent-child bonding, reduce financial hardship for working families, and ease pressure on Tennessee's limited infant care system.

WHY

Infant care presents one of the greatest challenges within Tennessee's child care system. Providers face high operating costs, strict staff-to-child ratios, and ongoing workforce shortages that make it difficult to offer enough infant slots to meet demand. At the same time, families often struggle to find affordable and reliable care for their youngest children. A statewide paid family leave policy would help address both of these challenges by allowing parents to care for their infants at home during the earliest and most developmentally important months.

Reducing the immediate demand for infant care would give providers the space to stabilize their operations. This could lead to lower staff turnover, improved retention, and more focused efforts to expand care for older children where the need is also significant. Over time, this approach would help build a stronger and more sustainable child care system that better serves both families and providers.

While paid family leave is a benefit for working parents, it is also a strategic investment in the long-term health of Tennessee's child care infrastructure. By easing pressure on providers and giving families more flexibility, the state can create a more resilient and responsive system that supports early development and strengthens the workforce.

According to DHS licensure rules for child care agencies, enrollment of children under six weeks is prohibited. ¹

In August 2025, 41 percent of DHS licensed child care providers accepted 6 week old babies. ²

In August 2025, 8 counties in Tennessee did not have a DHS licensed child care providers who accepted 6 week old babies. ²

"Our study finds that, with controls for demographic and job-related characteristics, as well as for pre-birth levels of public assistance receipt, women who take paid leave are 39% less likely than those who take no leave to report public assistance receipt in the year following the child's birth. Moreover, women who take paid leave report \$413 less in public assistance on average in the year following the child's birth, than women who take no leave." -

Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family leave for Families, Businesses and the Public ³