

As a parent of two small children, childcare has been a large topic of conversation in our home since before our older daughter was born. Very soon after finding out we were expecting a baby, I remember being strongly encouraged to prioritize making phone calls and getting on childcare waitlists. As two working professionals who needed, and wanted, to return to full time work, it seemed essential to take care of this logistic immediately. I remember feeling a sense of urgency that I did not fully understand as well as a sense of loss in centering my focus on something other than the joy and anticipation of the baby.

As we started researching childcare options, making phone calls, and not hearing back, we quickly realized why we were so strongly encouraged to start early and were appreciative for the “insider info.” We were very clear about what kind of environment we wanted for the baby and had a sense of what we could afford. What we did not know was that every childcare option on our first list, about 15 locations, would either not return our calls or tell us they had no space for an infant and did not really use waitlists. We also learned that the cost of caring for an infant was more than we expected. Walking away from that first list and many hours dedicated to research and phone calls with no childcare in sight was quite disheartening.

Knowing we needed to secure childcare and our timeline was getting shorter, we expanded our search and turned to an option available to us through my place of work. Although it was not the childcare setting we desired we were grateful there was a viable option, including a much-appreciated benefit-based discount.

Thankfully, we were able to get on the waitlist and three months later we were offered a spot. We accepted it immediately knowing we had yet to hear back from anywhere else and, in that moment, we still did not have another option. While I know now that where we ended up could not have been better for us, the process getting there was incredibly stressful and worrisome. Similarly, I have nothing but incredible things to say about the community we became part of, and yet a piece that continued to feel heavy was writing the tuition check each month, even with a small benefits-based discount.

For four years we made it work and were incredibly grateful to the educators who cared for our daughter every day. We both were able to remain productive at work because of the care and expertise of a group of educators about whom I cannot say enough. Then, in 2019, we learned our younger daughter was going to join our family and were again filled with joy and anticipation. In full transparency, much of the anticipation this time was related to childcare cost. We were concerned about the cost of multiple children in childcare and having two children in daycare for more than one full year did not feel financially comfortable for us. As it worked out, our girls overlapped for 6 months.

We were incredible lucky to get a full time spot for our infant at the same location where our older daughter still was. The educators continued to be amazing, the community supportive, and our productivity at work great. And, yet, monthly tuition checks were the second largest monthly payment we made, even with my employee discount.

When COVID hit our communities, many things felt uncertain but we were moving day by day and making things work. However, two months into the statewide “stay homes stay safe” orders, I received an email that our childcare was closing, for good. That day shifted my sense of things from being okay to feeling as if things were falling apart. We were two full-time working parents, trying to work remotely now without childcare for a 5 year old and 8 month old for the foreseeable future. Through some really unfortunate and very challenging circumstances, we

were shuttled right back to where we started nearly 5 years earlier trying to find much needed childcare in a situation we couldn't fully grasp. As two educators who prefer to prioritize learning and development of our children, we instead felt unsure of what was the best fit for our family.

This time around, we were fortunate to have three options available to us each of which immediately offered waitlists and talked optimistically about anticipated openings. This time around, we also experienced options that presented significantly different costs leaving us with much to consider. This time around, we found ourselves comparing all kinds of details but ultimately centering our conversations not on which place had an opening or which setting we felt was best for the needs of our children; rather, this decision was driven by finances. We feel grateful to have care with a provider we trust and that our children have connected and adjusted very well to the unanticipated transition. And, it continues to weigh on me that we felt we needed to consider cost so heavily above other pieces of the childcare puzzle.

As I reflect on my story, it is not one I would change. However, it is one that has been challenging in ways that I do not believe it needed to be and in ways I hope it won't be for other families in the future. With that in mind, I sincerely ask that you please support the Governor's proposed investments in child care.

Thank you for your time, attention, and care.

Sincerely,

Lara