



# Elevating Early Childhood to Build a Stronger Montana

## 2025 POLICY AGENDA

Early childhood is a crucial time for laying the groundwork for a successful life. By ensuring children in rural, urban, and tribal communities across the state have access to safe and healthy early learning experiences and stable, nurturing environments, policymakers can help set the foundation for Montana's kids to succeed. Strong systems are the basis for long-term sustainable change – every child in Montana deserves the chance to flourish, but not all children have access to the same early childhood supports and opportunities.

### WHAT SHAPES OUR POLICY AGENDA

This agenda was developed as a collaborative effort with input from families, early childhood professionals, as well as community and state leaders, and serves as our policy advocacy guide for the 2025 Montana Legislative Session.

## 2025 LEGISLATIVE FOCUS

### Early Care & Education Trust Fund

Establish an early care and education trust to create an avenue for Montana to strengthen and invest in the state's early childhood infrastructure.

### Tax Credit Package

Enact a comprehensive tax credit package that includes a child tax credit for working families with young children, credits for child care workers and for employers offering child care benefits.

### Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship Income Threshold

Increase the income eligibility threshold to the maximum allowable level (or about 85% of the state median income) to ensure more working parents can afford and access child care services.

### Early Care & Education Workforce

Expand opportunities to recruit, retain, and support the early care and education workforce to ensure children have access to high-quality experiences (for example: apprenticeship programs, early childhood career and technical education, tuition assistance, or wage supplements).



## OTHER POLICIES WE SUPPORT INCLUDE:

- **Financing for Child Care Businesses**
  - Establish a financing program (including technical assistance) so child care entrepreneurs have access to funding for the establishment, expansion, or renovation of facility space.
- **Categorical Eligibility**
  - Allow child care and early intervention workers to be categorically eligible to receive the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship for their own children to recruit and retain critical workers.
- **Shared Services**
  - Enhance shared services programs for child care providers, including more affordable and accessible liability insurance and health insurance options.
- **Early Learning Opportunities**
  - Enhance current early learning opportunities to ensure more children have access to quality care and education across school districts and community-based organizations.
- **Child Support Enforcement**
  - Remove the child support enforcement requirement of the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship to eliminate unnecessary barriers for families to be able to access child care support.
- **Home Visiting**
  - Stabilize and expand home visiting programs in Montana so more families can access evidence-based support.
- **Paid Family and Medical Leave**
  - Enact a state paid family and medical leave program so working parents can provide critical care to their family without financial stress.
- **Medicaid Expansion**
  - Lift the 2025 sunset on Medicaid expansion to continue offering critical health care coverage to families in Montana.
- **Streamlined Application**
  - Pass an interim study bill to explore how state government can streamline public assistance applications to reduce administrative burden, reduce red tape for families, and save taxpayer dollars.



During the summer of 2024, Zero to Five Montana engaged with communities across the state to gather input on critical early childhood issues. Partners in nine communities, including Billings, Cut Bank, Great Falls, Helena, Livingston, Lodge Grass, Miles City, Polson, and Red Lodge, shared with us their experiences with Montana's early childhood system. [This on-the-ground input helped inform our policy agenda.](#)

Zero to Five Montana is a nonpartisan, statewide early childhood organization focused on serving all children in Montana, particularly those facing significant barriers to opportunity. By centering and amplifying the voices of those most impacted by policy decisions, we strive to cultivate a community-driven policy landscape that effectively supports families, small businesses, and communities. When we work together, we can positively impact the lives of Montana's youngest children and our future.

Our promise is to stabilize, innovate, and build the early childhood system in Montana so all families and communities can thrive. We are always open to collaboration and partnership -- please reach out!

