



OCTOBER 2023

# A FRAGILE ECOSYSTEM V

KENTUCKY VOTERS DEMAND ACTION  
ON THE CHILD CARE CRISIS



**The Prichard Committee**

Building a Groundswell for a Big Bold Future

Nearly four years into the *Fragile Ecosystem* survey series, Kentucky has made strides in strengthening access to quality child care access for working families. However, the sector remains on shaky ground, and in the 2024 state budget session, faces a final push in securing the financial stability needed to maintain gains made from 2020-2024.

In turn, the sector also requires substantial policy innovation to strengthen the business model for child care, allowing child care to thrive as small businesses. Public-private partnerships point the way toward greater financial stability for private child care and greater access to quality early education options aligned to the needs of parents in Kentucky's workforce.

This report, *A Fragile Ecosystem V: Kentucky Voters Demand Action on the Child Care Crisis*, demonstrates broad public consensus on the need for Kentucky's General Assembly to deliver key investment and policy changes required to sustain gains in access and quality and grow access to quality early education for more of Kentucky's 3 and 4-year old population. *A Fragile Ecosystem V* demonstrates the importance of child care, Kentucky's workforce behind the workforce, to developing an early childhood sector reflective of the need to keep parents in the workforce by providing children with the strong start required for success in school, career, and life.



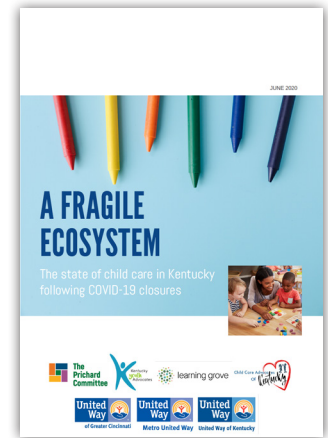
## A HISTORY OF THE FRAGILE ECOSYSTEM SERIES AND SURVEY FINDINGS

From 2020-2024, the Prichard Committee and a team of statewide partners released data capturing the status of Kentucky's child care sector in the survey series *A Fragile Ecosystem*. The series began as an outgrowth of the needs for the early childhood sector at the onset of the pandemic with *A Fragile Ecosystem: COVID-19's Impact on Kentucky's Child Care Sector*. The survey series is now releasing its fifth edition with this publication, *A Fragile Ecosystem V: Kentucky Voters Demand Action on the Child Care Crisis*.

Findings from *A Fragile Ecosystem I, II, and III* illuminated the dire financial circumstances facing private child care providers throughout the pandemic and beyond. Even before COVID-19, half of all Kentuckians lived in a child care desert— a testament to the decades-long struggle of providers to make ends meet. The pandemic made a bad situation critical for the child care sector.

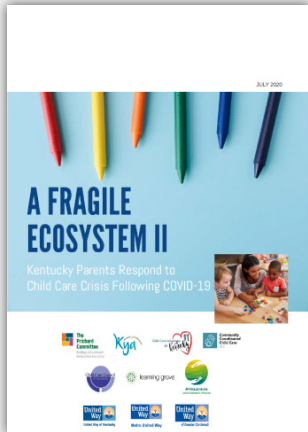
In June 2020, *A Fragile Ecosystem I* found that:

- During pandemic closures, 66% of providers laid off staff and 67% of child care workers were dependent upon unemployment insurance during lay-offs.
- More than 64% of providers communicated a need for grants for re-opening costs, more than 56% needed grants to pay for fixed costs, and more than 51% said they would require grants to pay for staff to re-open after mandated pandemic closures ended.



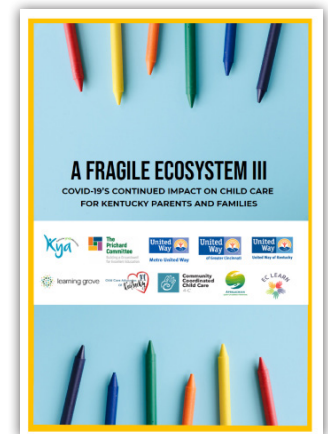
In July 2020, *A Fragile Ecosystem II* found that:

- Almost 30% of Kentucky parents shared that they were struggling to find child care, a barrier that kept many Kentucky parents out of the workforce as pandemic restrictions were lifted.
- More than 91% of Kentucky parents indicated their support for the state and federal government to invest in greater access to child care for working families.



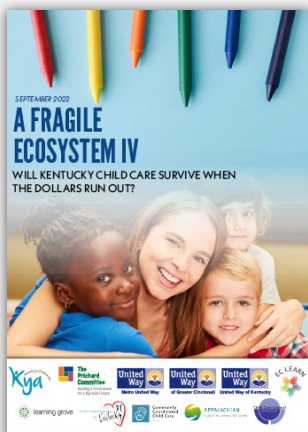
In December 2020, *A Fragile Ecosystem III* found that:

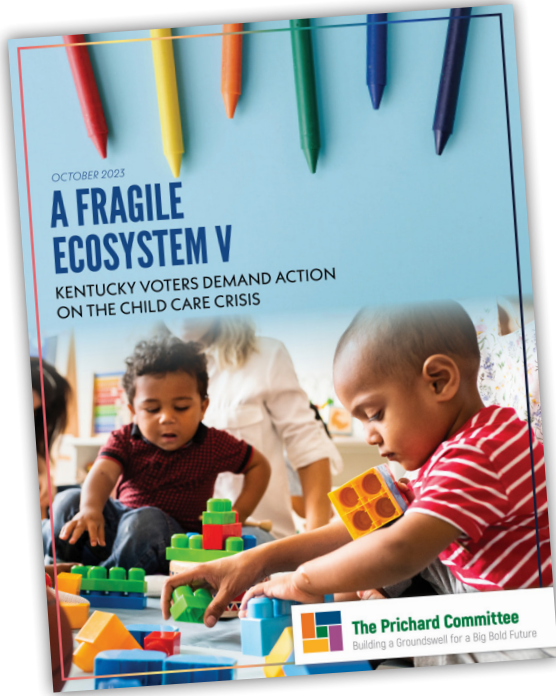
- 46% of Kentucky parents quit jobs, declined jobs, or greatly changed their jobs due to issues with child care since March 2020.
- Nearly all respondents supported additional public investment at the state and federal levels to support not only child care during the pandemic but to help working families afford access to high-quality care.



In September 2022, *A Fragile Ecosystem IV* found that:

- Once American Rescue Plan relief dollars ran out, more than 70% of providers said they would be forced to raise tuition for working parents
- Nearly 40% indicated they would cut staff wages
- Almost 30% of providers said they would lay off staff.
- More than 20% indicated they would permanently close their child care program.
- This critical work led to an investment of \$50 million to delay the September 2023 ARPA child care cliff, making it possible for long term stability and policy innovation in the 2024 state budget session.





## A Fragile Ecosystem V

In June 2023, this survey, *A Fragile Ecosystem V*, asked Kentucky voters and parents their perceptions of the child care crisis, the need for investment in child care, their early care and education preferences, and the dependence of parents on child care in contributing to Kentucky's workforce. More than 800 voters, with an oversample of 400 Kentucky parents, are represented in *A Fragile Ecosystem V's* findings.

- Their responses show early education as a broad, bi-partisan issue with support from rural and urban Kentuckians. Kentuckians not only support - Kentuckians expect - action on child care and early education in the 2024 state budget session.

## A CALL TO ACTION

We are calling for state leaders to - at last - secure the financial stability needed to maintain gains made from 2020-2024 in the 2024 state budget session and to provide policy reform to ensure that the business model for child care is strengthened, allowing child care to thrive as small businesses. Equally as important, state leaders must realize the value in public-private partnerships for early education options which point the way toward greater financial stability for private child care and greater access to quality early education options aligned to the needs of parents in Kentucky's workforce.

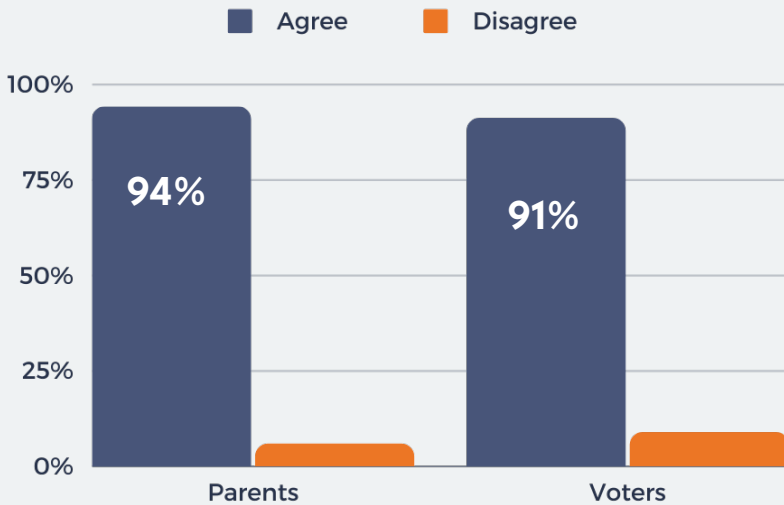
## SURVEY PARTNERS

*A Fragile Ecosystem V: Kentucky Voters Demand Action on the Child Care Crisis* was conducted in partnership with the following organizations: The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, Kentucky Youth Advocates, Metro United Way, United Way of Kentucky, United Way of Greater Cincinnati, Child Care Advocates of Kentucky, Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C), Appalachian Early Childhood Network, EC LEARN, and the Child Care Council of Kentucky. We would also like to thank the Kentucky Division of Child Care for partnering to distribute the survey to Kentucky child care providers.

# KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

A SURVEY OF 800 KENTUCKIANS, 400 PARENTS.

*Do you agree or disagree that access to high-quality child care is essential for parents to be able to work?*



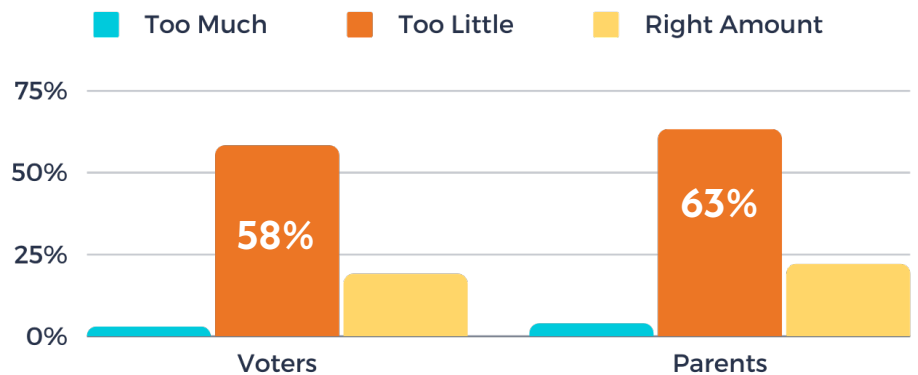
## VOTERS AND PARENTS STRONGLY AGREE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE IS ESSENTIAL FOR PARENTS TO BE ABLE TO WORK.

According to a survey of registered voters funded by the United Way of Greater Cincinnati and conducted by the Prichard Committee in June 2023, Kentuckians overwhelmingly agree that access to high-quality child care is essential for parents to be able to work.

## THERE'S A STRONG SENSE KENTUCKY ISN'T DOING ENOUGH TO ENSURE ALL PARENTS HAVE ACCESS TO A HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE PROGRAM THEY CAN AFFORD.

Child care can be an early learning opportunity for young children while their parents are at work.

*Do you believe that Kentucky is currently doing too much, too little, or about the right amount to help ensure all parents have access to a high-quality child care program that they can afford?*



# 72%

**Seventy-two percent** of voters say they support investing more taxpayer money to increase access to high-quality child care.

# 1/3

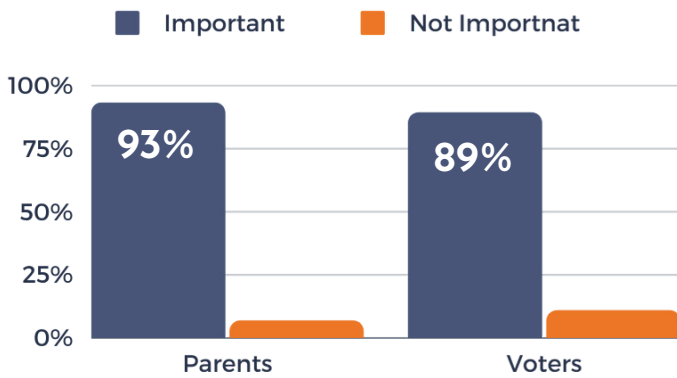
More than **one-third** of parents say their job status has changed due to child care issues.

# 54%

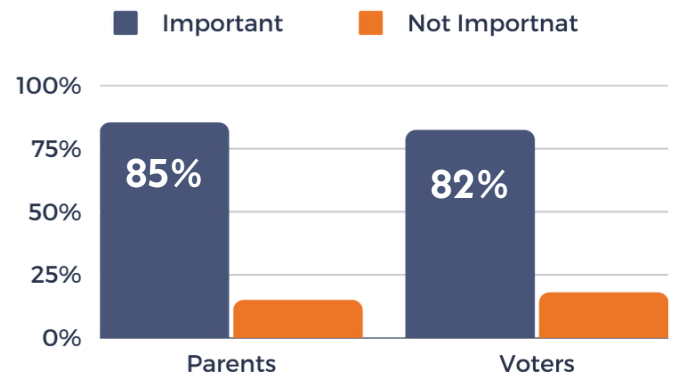
A **majority** of parents indicate they have struggled to find child care, especially parents of younger children.

## VOTERS AND PARENTS BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT TO INCREASE ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY PRE-K PROGRAMS AND PRIVATE CHILD CARE.

*Increasing access to high-quality public-school pre-K programs for children from age 3-5*

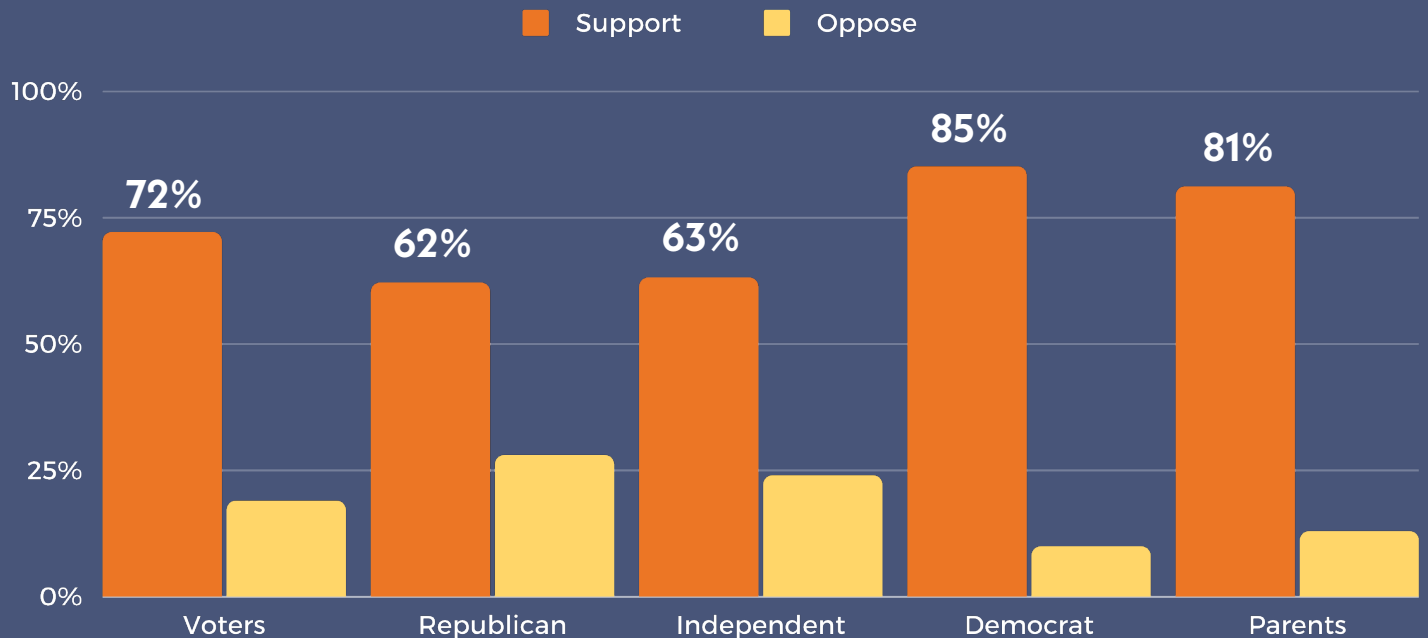


*Increasing access to high-quality private child care for children from birth to age 5*



## BY AN OVERWHELMING MARGIN, VOTERS AND PARENTS SUPPORT INVESTING MORE TAXPAYER MONEY TO INCREASE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE PROGRAMS.

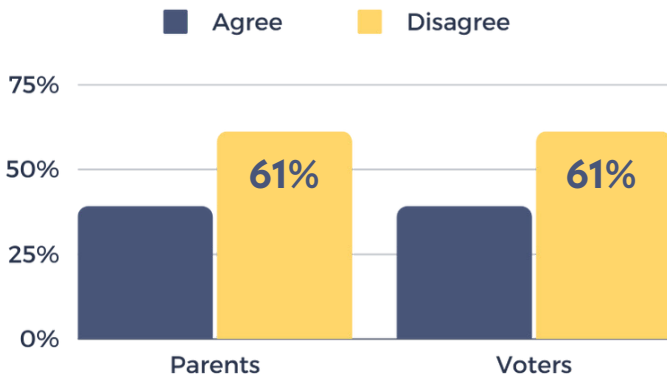
*Do you support or oppose Kentucky investing more taxpayer money to increase access to a high-quality child care program parents can afford?*



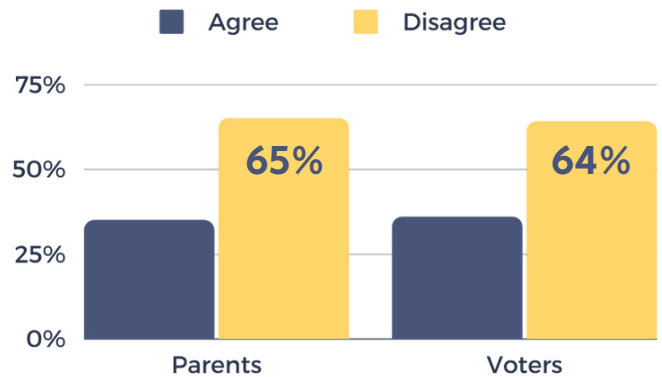
**METHODOLOGY:** Funded by the United Way of Greater Cincinnati and on behalf of the Prichard Committee, Public Opinion Strategies completed a survey of 800 registered voters in Kentucky with an oversample of 400 parents. The survey was conducted June 22-29, 2023 and has a margin of error of +3.95% for the registered voters and a margin of error of +5.59% for the oversample.

## MOST KENTUCKIANS DISAGREE THERE ARE A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF CHILD CARE PROGRAMS IN KENTUCKY AND THAT THEY ARE AFFORDABLE.

*There are a sufficient number of high-quality child care programs to serve the children of Kentucky.*

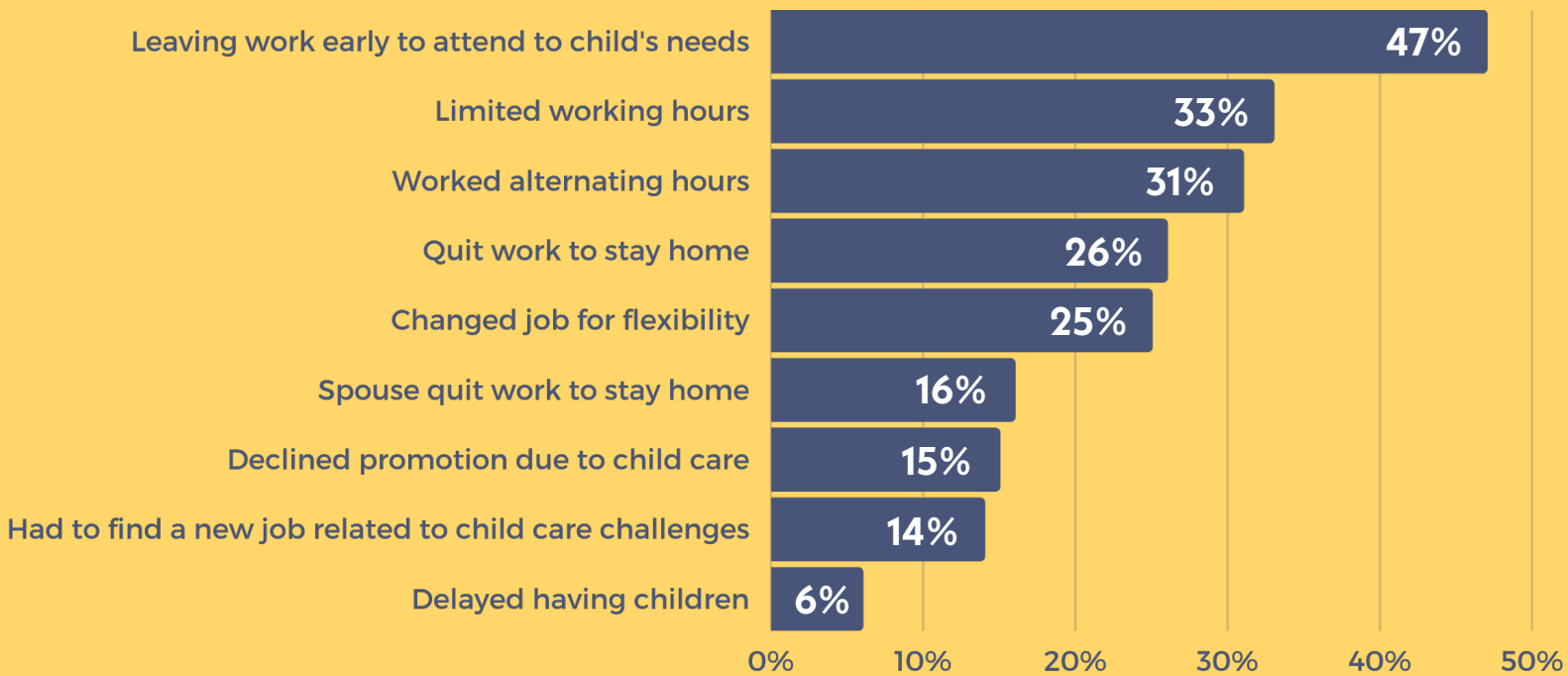


*Child care programs in Kentucky are affordable.*



### PARENTS REPORT THE FOLLOWING LIFESTYLE CHANGES IN ORDER TO PROVIDE CHILD CARE:

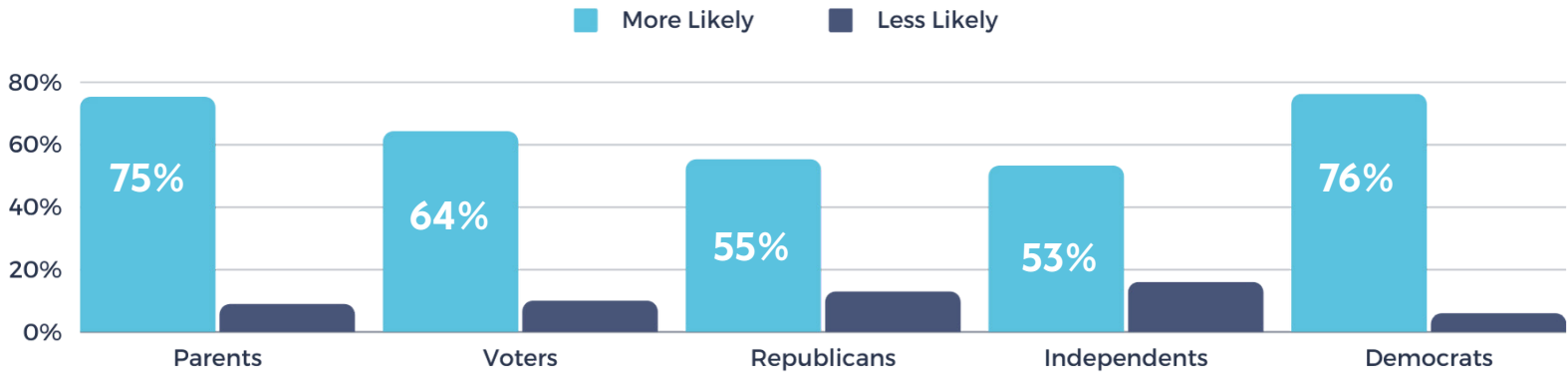
*Have you ever had to make any of the following lifestyle changes in order to provide child care?*



**METHODOLOGY:** Funded by the United Way of Greater Cincinnati and on behalf of the Prichard Committee, Public Opinion Strategies completed a survey of 800 registered voters in Kentucky with an oversample of 400 parents. The survey was conducted June 22-29, 2023 and has a margin of error of +3.95% for the registered voters and a margin of error of +5.59% for the oversample.

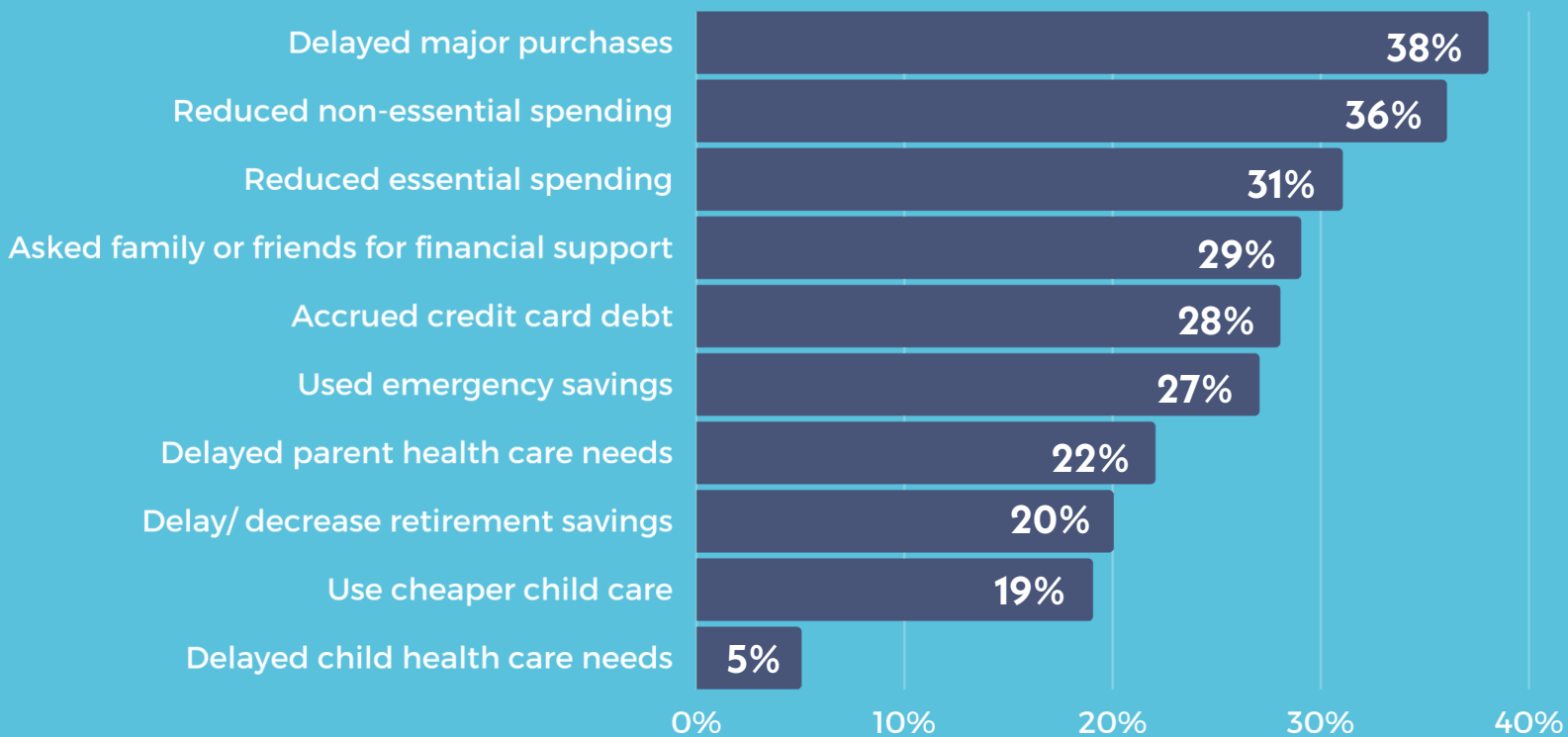
## SUPPORTING INCREASED ACCESS CAN BE A VOTE WINNER IN THE UPCOMING RACE FOR GOVERNOR.

*If you knew a candidate for Governor supported increasing access to an affordable, high-quality child care program, would you be more likely or less likely to vote for that candidate, or would it make no difference in your vote?*



## PARENTS REPORT THE FOLLOWING LIFESTYLE CHANGES IN ORDER TO PROVIDE CHILD CARE:

*Have you ever had to make any of the following lifestyle changes in order to provide child care?*

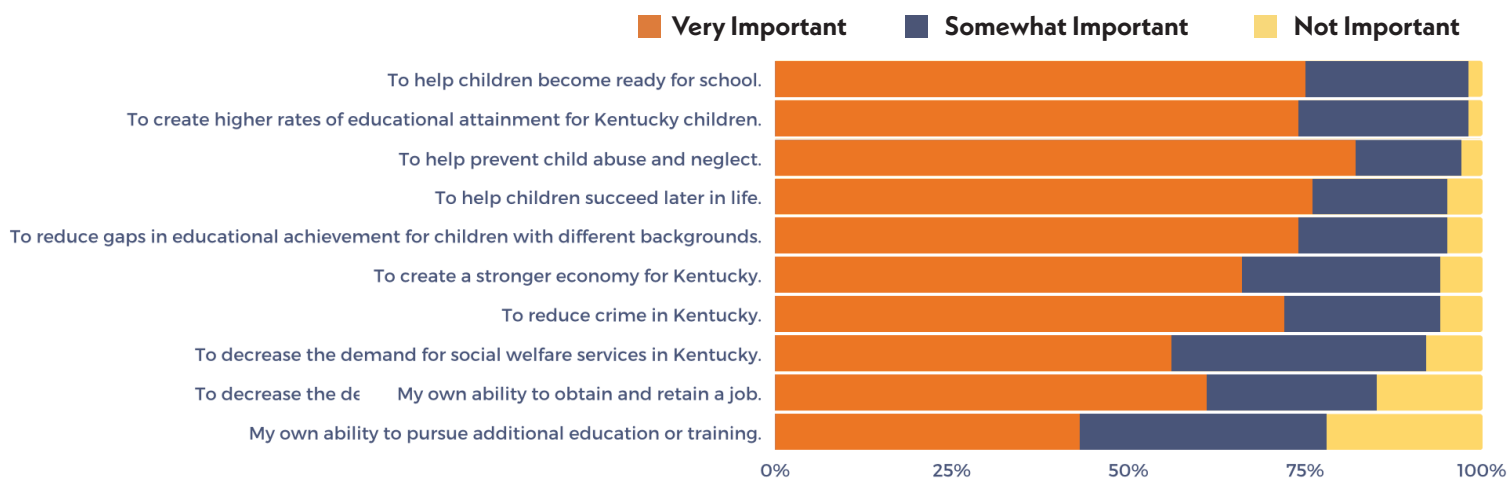


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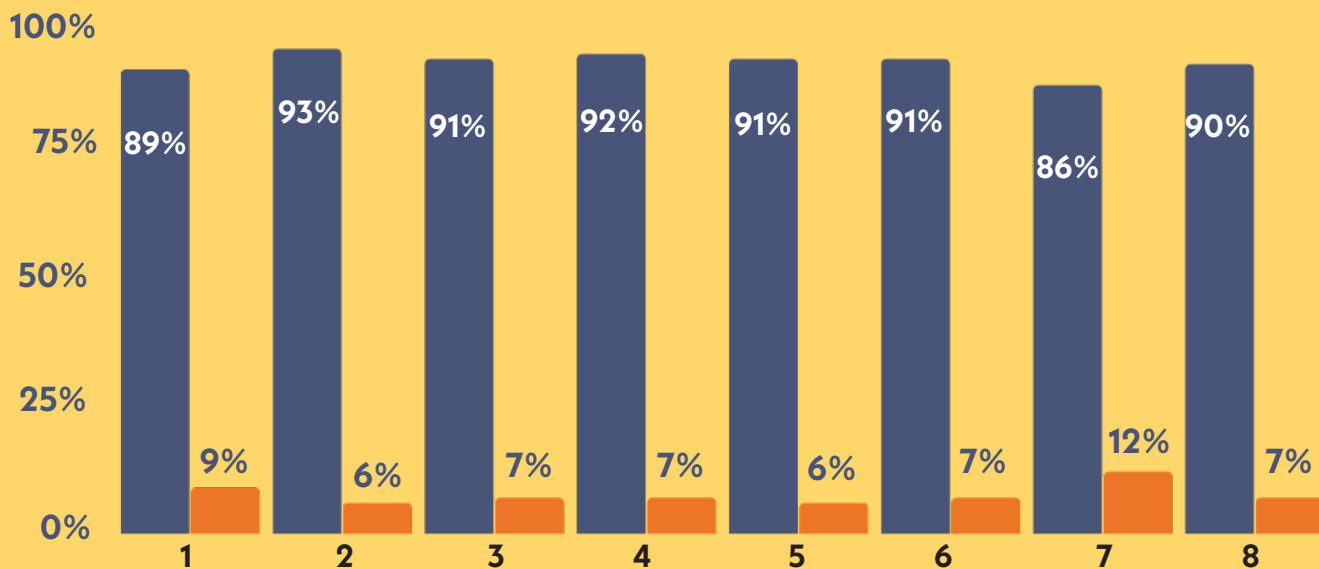
## VOTERS AND PARENTS POINT TO THE FOLLOWING AS MOST IMPORTANT FOR REASONS WHY KENTUCKY SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO A HIGH-QUALITY CHILDCARE PROGRAM THEY CAN AFFORD:

Thinking some more about this topic, how important are each of the following as reasons why Kentucky children should have access to a high-quality childcare program that they can afford...



## VOTERS AND PARENTS STRONGLY SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING INITIATIVES TO HELP IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CHILDCARE PROGRAMS

Next, please indicate whether you would strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the following initiatives to help improve access to a high-quality childcare program that Kentuckians can afford...



1.) Increasing wages and benefits to attract and retain the best childcare educators.

2.) Encouraging employers to provide childcare benefits to employees much like employers currently provide healthcare and dental benefits.

3.) Providing scholarships for early childhood teachers to learn how to better care for and educate young children.

4.) Improving the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) - which helps working and degree-seeking families afford the costs of childcare - so that more Kentucky families are eligible to participate.

5.) Offering full-day, quality public preschool curriculum and services in your local childcare center year-round.

6.) Ensuring that private childcare providers who participate in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) are provided additional funding so that centers remain open and can assist parents unable to afford childcare on their own.

7.) Creating new programs that use state funding to improve childcare access and affordability.

8.) Creating new programs to help more Family Child Care Homes open in Kentucky to serve more children in quality in-home settings.

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# PARENT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

Parents who are struggling with finding childcare point out the many childcare centers have hours that are not compatible with their work schedules. Parents claim there is lack of “flexibility” when it comes to childcare centers and their hours. One father from Simpson County admits he “had to change careers to align with childcare hours.” Additionally, one mother from Warren County explains she “had to quit [her job] and stay home because there isn’t anyone to handle” her child during the day.

Even parents who do not struggle with finding childcare share the same sentiments with other parents such as affordability. They believe the high prices “can be a burden” for some families. One father from Franklin County mentions the cost of childcare is “more expensive” than what he earns in a week. Another father admits paying for childcare “impacted [his] finances.” Also, a mother from Barren County believes her family’s finances “definitely decreased” when their child was in daycare.

Kentucky parents who do not struggle with finding childcare also discuss childcare centers’ flexibility with their work schedules. One father from Kenton County talks about the decision for his wife to “quit working” in order to take care of their child during the day. Additionally, a mother from Jessamine County explains she “had to miss work” when a “sitter was unavailable.”

## WHAT PARENTS SAID

*“When having a child, my husband and I decided that I would stay at home to raise her for precisely the reason above, childcare was super expensive and even with a master’s, my salary would have barely covered the price. It was challenging and upsetting.”*

*“I was not able to afford a childcare program, so I had to find private childcare. If the sitter was unavailable, I had to miss work, which meant missing out on money. That made it even harder to afford childcare.”*

*“There are several childcare places near me, but the challenging aspect was finding a good facility that was affordable. Our finances definitely decreased when we had our youngest in daycare. It was so expensive and we got no financial help.”*

*“The most challenging thing was finding childcare that operated during the hours we worked and stayed open long enough to drop off and pick up our child. It was more expensive than we anticipated, but our jobs pay enough to cover the cost.”*



**The Prichard Committee**  
Building a Groundswell  
for a Big Bold Future



**Community Coordinated Child Care**  
4-C



**APPALACHIAN**  
EARLY CHILDHOOD NETWORK

