

Working to Improve Child Care in Arkansas (Angela Duran Commentary)

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The struggle for accessible, affordable, high-quality child care doesn't just leave scars on Arkansas families; it damages our workforce and the economy. From workforce participation to productivity, the ripples of the child care crisis touch every Arkansan, regardless of their parental status.

Recognizing the impact of the child care crisis on the Arkansas economy, Excel by Eight began mobilizing Arkansas businesses in 2020 to identify workable solutions that address

the three critical elements of the child care crisis — accessibility, affordability and quality. Our formalized E8 Business Coalition began meeting earlier this year and is charged with researching and recommending sustainable solutions to the challenge. This call for collaboration and investment deserves the support of every Arkansas business that is committed to a healthy, thriving future.

Beyond being a necessity for working families, reliable, affordable child care is an economic imperative. Without it, parents face agonizing choices: leave the workforce entirely or settle for subpar care. This translates to lost productivity, talent shortages and, ultimately, a less competitive Arkansas.

The data paint a stark picture: According to an analysis conducted by the [University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences](#), 85% of Arkansas parents cannot find high-quality care for their infants and toddlers. When they do find it, they often can't afford it. The median cost of infant care in Arkansas is about \$7,300 a year, with higher-quality care costing more than \$10,000 annually. Additionally, according to a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation report, the child care crisis costs Arkansas an estimated \$865 million annually in lost productivity and tax revenue.

By raising awareness of the crisis, identifying solutions and advocating for policy changes ahead of the 2025 general session, the E8 Business Coalition is paving the way for parents to build careers and contribute to a stronger economy. Businesses like Pilgrim's Pride in south Arkansas, St. Bernards Healthcare in northeast Arkansas, Big Oak Tree Media in northwest Arkansas and [Polk Stanley Wilcox Architects](#) in central Arkansas are leading the charge, demonstrating the power of collective action.



We invite you to join more than 30 businesses, nonprofits and chambers of commerce across the state in this work. Here's how you can make a difference:

Join the E8 Business Coalition: Lend your voice to this crucial movement by joining us, attending quarterly meetings and sharing your experiences.

Advocate for policy change: Speak to your legislators and support initiatives that improve affordability, accessibility and quality of child care.

Raise awareness: Talk to your peers, employees and community about the importance of early childhood education.

Invest in your employees: Consider offering flexible work arrangements or child care benefits to ease the burden of working parents.

By working together, we can ensure that every child in Arkansas has the opportunity to thrive and that our state can reach its full potential. We can build a future in which child care is no longer a barrier but a stepping stone to a brighter tomorrow.

To learn more about the E8 Business Coalition, visit excelby8.net/about-us/business-coalition.



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