



thread

connecting
early care & education
to alaska

WHY CHILD CARE MATTERS THIS ELECTION

Candidate education briefing | Alaska 2026

A practical guide to child care as workforce,
affordability, family choice, and economic infrastructure.

What candidates need to know

This presentation is designed to help candidates understand the child care system, the pressure families and child care programs are facing, and the choices state leaders will be asked to make.

- Who **thread** is and what we do statewide
- **thread's** reach: families, educators, programs, communities, and advocates
- Why child care is a major election issue
- Recent policy wins, investments, and vetoes
- Practical questions candidates should be ready to answer
- Where to find additional resources and data
- Questions and discussion





About thread

thread is Alaska's Child Care Resource & Referral organization, serving families, early childhood programs & educators, and communities statewide for more than 40 years.

VISION

All early care & learning is accessible, affordable, high-quality to support positive outcomes for children & families.

MISSION

Advance the quality of early education and child development by empowering parents, educating child care professionals, and collaborating with our communities.

CORE VALUES

Empowerment

Access

Children's Rights

Child Care Professionalism

Innovation

thread Services



FAMILIES

- Referrals
- Tools & resources
- Child Care Assistance in Northern & Southeast regions



EARLY EDUCATORS & PROGRAMS

- Training
- Technical assistance
- Financial support



COMMUNITIES

- Workplace presentations & consultation
- Research & data
- Advocacy

thread by the numbers



thread's work reaches families, early educators, child care businesses, employers, and advocates across Alaska.

10,000+

child care referrals
each year

400+

early educators trained
in FY25

\$4.3M+

invested in child care
programs in FY25

68

Alaska communities
reached

1,770 early educators received a 2025 ROOTS Award. 140+ programs participated in Learn & Grow. More than 300 families in Northern and Southeast Alaska received help applying for Child Care Assistance.



thread is also a policy and civic resource



thread educates advocates and candidates in a strictly nonpartisan way, and serves as a resource for testimony, data, implementation feedback, and community perspective.

6,000+

families, educators, and advocates on **thread's** email list

1,438,

advocates took action this year

4,500+

emails, calls, petitions, and event actions



Candidates will hear from parents, early childhood educators, businesses, and community members who are looking for action and leadership on child care.

Why child care is a major election issue

Child care touches the issues candidates already talk about: jobs, cost of living, economic development, military readiness, family choice, education, and whether young families can stay in Alaska.

- Parents cannot work if they cannot find care.
- Employers cannot grow if workers cannot show up.
- Major projects need support infrastructure, including child care.
- Military families need reliable care to fully serve in Alaska.
- Families need real choices, not choices forced by a shortage.



The gap in availability is already shaping Alaska's workforce

19,500+

Alaska children need child care so parents can work

61%

of Alaskans live in communities considered child care deserts

\$344M

lost each year from child care problems in Alaska

The shortage is not just a family inconvenience. It is a workforce constraint that limits economic activity and community growth.



Child care is one of the biggest costs for families



\$12,107

average annual cost of
center-based infant care in
Alaska

\$1,009

average monthly cost
for center-based infant
care

For many young families, child care competes with rent or mortgage, groceries, utilities, transportation, and health care. It is one reason families reconsider whether they can stay in Alaska.

Only about 13% of eligible Alaska children age five and younger receive CCDBG child care assistance.

“I don’t have kids. Why should I care?”

Because every community depends on people who do.

nurses

teachers

public safety

construction crews

small business
owners

military spouses

retail and service workers

When workers miss shifts, reduce hours, turn down promotions, or leave jobs because care falls through, everyone feels it. There are shorter work hours, delayed projects, tighter hiring, fewer services, and a smaller workforce.

80%

of rural nonparents say finding and affording
quality child care is a crisis or major problem.

Child care is also a parental choice issue

Shouldn't parents be able to choose to stay home?

Yes. Families should have that choice. Supporting stay-at-home parents and making child care available to working parents do not have to be competing goals.

Today, 60% of Alaska children have all available parents in the workforce. Real parental choice means families have viable options: a parent can stay home if that is best for their family, and a parent who needs or wants to work is not forced out because care is unavailable.



Supporting child care does not mean one government model

Alaska already has a mixed system. Strong policy should expand choices and strengthen the child care programs that families already use.

Private
businesses

Home-based
programs

Nonprofits

Tribal programs

Employer-
supported care

Head Start

Faith-based
programs

96%

of Alaskan children live in communities
considered a child care desert

The goal is more options for parents and a child care market that can serve rural, urban, military, tribal, faith-based, home-based, nonprofit, and private child care programs.

Alaska needs the workforce to build



Whether the opportunity is AKLNG, mining, roads, housing, fisheries, health care, tourism, construction, or small business growth, every major project eventually runs into the same question: Where will the workers come from?

Child care is part of the support infrastructure that allows workers to accept jobs, complete training, stay employed, raise families, and remain in Alaska.

A strong child care system is not separate from Alaska's next era of development. It is one of the pieces that makes development possible.

Child care action has broad support



74%

of rural voters want additional action to help working families find and afford child care

90%

of likely Republican primary voters said child care is essential for working families and a strong economy

\$66M

child care package signed in North Dakota to address workforce shortages

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce supported federal child care modernization because it would help families manage costs, expand parental choice, support early childhood educators, and invest in workforce development.

States like Tennessee and North Dakota show that child care can be framed as family support, workforce policy, child care capacity, employer participation, and regulatory reform.

Child care is part of military readiness



Alaska plays an outsized role in America's Arctic defense. Military members stationed here need reliable care so they can fully serve their tour of duty, and spouses need support to work, train, or manage family life.

The Department of Defense considers child care essential to mission readiness, efficiency, and retention. GAO reports continue to identify waitlists, staffing shortages, and reliance on community-based programs when on-base care is unavailable.

That makes Alaska's civilian child care supply part of the support network for service members and their families.

Recent policy wins and current status

Alaska has made real progress, but implementation and funding decisions in 2026–2027 will determine whether families and early childhood educators feel those wins.

2025 wins

SB 95 expanded Child Care Assistance and grants. SB 96 created child care-related business tax credits. State child care investment in the Child Care Benefits line item has more than doubled since FY2023.

2026 vetoes

HB 133 prompt payment parity and \$6.4M in annual Early Educator Recruitment and Retention funding were vetoed. Early educator retention remains a major missing piece for stabilizing supply.

What to watch next

Regulations, implementation of 2025 laws, use of state and federal dollars, support for rural/community capacity, employer participation, and whether the state acts on early educator recruitment and retention.

Questions candidates should be ready to answer



- 1 How would you keep existing child care programs open and help new ones start?
- 2 How would you help families afford care without reducing parental choice?
- 3 How would you address early educator recruitment, retention, and wages?
- 4 How would you involve employers, local governments, tribes, nonprofits, and faith-based programs?
- 5 How would child care fit into your workforce and economic development strategy?
- 6 How would you use data, public reporting, and accountability to measure results?

The goal is to show voters that child care is part of a serious plan for families, workers, employers, and Alaska's future.

Resources for further learning

Candidate and staff resources

- **thread** Action Center and advocacy resources
- Alaska Early Care and Learning Data Dashboard
- Economic Impact of Early Care & Education in Alaska
- Alaska True Cost of Child Care Study
- Governor's Task Force on Child Care reports
- First Five Years Fund Alaska state fact sheet

thread can provide data, testimony, policy context, implementation feedback, and introductions to families, early educators, and child care programs across Alaska.



SOURCES

Key data sources used in this deck



[First Five Years Fund, Child Care and Early Learning in Alaska](#)

[Alaska Beacon, Alaska providers say childcare gap is growing](#)

[Governor's Task Force on Child Care, 2024 Report](#)

[Alaska Legislature, Senate Finance Committee testimony, 2/27/25](#)

[Bipartisan Policy Center, The Child Care Gap That Affordability Alone Cannot Close](#)

[Bipartisan Policy Center/Cygnal polling of likely Republican primary voters](#)

[First Five Years Fund/UpONE Insights, Rural Voters on Child Care and Head Start](#)

[U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Child Care Modernization Act support letter](#)

[North Dakota Governor's Office, \\$66M child care package](#)

[Tennessee Governor's Office, FY2025-26 child care and workforce investments](#)

[U.S. Government Accountability Office, Military Child Care](#)

Internal data sources: **thread** service counts, advocacy metrics, child care program records, and legislative tracking reflected in the attached Candidate Education PPT.



Questions and discussion

Stephanie Berglund
thread CEO
SBerglund@threadalaska.org
Direct 907.265.3122

111 W. 16th Avenue, Suite 205
Anchorage, AK 99501
www.threadalaska.org

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