

## Arkansas Early Childhood System: Key Oversight Questions for Legislators

### The Bottom Line

Arkansas families face high costs, limited access, and long waitlists, while providers struggle to stay open and teachers leave for higher-paying jobs. Despite mixed funding and recent governance changes, the system remains undersupplied, underpaid, and fragmented.

#### 1. Access & Waitlists

How many eligible children are currently unserved (ABC, vouchers, infants/toddlers)?

What is the true unmet need, beyond formal waitlists?

How long are families waiting for assistance?

In how many counties are there no available slots, especially for infants?

Key Issue: Eligibility  $\neq$  Access

#### 2. Affordability & Funding Gap

What is the true cost of care vs. state reimbursement and parent payments?

What would it cost to cap family payments at 7% of income?

How many providers are operating at a loss or have closed recently?

Key Issue: Parents pay too much. Providers receive too little.

#### 3. Workforce Shortage

What are current wages vs. K–12 and retail jobs?

What is the annual turnover rate?

How many classrooms are closed due to staffing shortages?

What would a wage ladder or supplement program cost?

Key Issue: No workforce = no expansion

#### 4. Rural Access (Child Care Deserts)

Which counties lack sufficient providers or any infant care?

What is the plan to expand supply in rural areas?

What barriers prevent new providers from opening?

Key Issue: Entire regions have no options

## 5. Vouchers & Mixed Delivery

How many families with vouchers can actually find a provider?

What % of providers accept or limit vouchers?

Are reimbursement rates high enough to make vouchers usable?

Key Issue: Vouchers don't work without supply

## 6. Governance & Accountability

What metrics define success for the new system?

How often will the legislature receive data on:

Capacity

Waitlists

Workforce

Who is accountable if outcomes don't improve in 1–2 years?

Key Issue: Structure ≠ results

## 7. Economic Impact

How many parents are out of the workforce due to lack of care?

What is the estimated economic loss to Arkansas?

What is the ROI of expanding access (per Chamber/Women's Foundation data)?

Key Issue: Child care is workforce infrastructure

## 8. Funding Strategy

What level of funding is required to:

Eliminate waitlists

Stabilize providers

Address workforce shortages

If funding remains flat, who goes without care?

Key Issue: Flat funding guarantees continued shortages

## 9. Data & Transparency

Do we have real-time data on supply, demand, and workforce? (If not, why?)

Can we create a public dashboard by county?

What data gaps limit effective policymaking?

Key Issue: You can't fix what you can't measure

Closing Question

"If we invested \$30–50 million, exactly how would you deploy it to measurably improve access, affordability, and workforce stability within 2 years?"

Takeaway

Arkansas does not have a single problem—it has a system design problem:

Not enough slots

Not enough workers

Not enough funding aligned with real costs

We can't "wait and hope".

Without targeted investment and accountability, the system will continue to underserve families and constrain economic growth.