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# Trump's Attack on Child Care Funding Undermines Early Educators, Shortchanges Children, and Increases Costs for Families

The Trump administration leveraged allegations of fraud in Minnesota in an attempt to freeze essential child care funding, a move that reflects a dangerous, broader posture toward the early childhood community that threatens educators, parents, and children.

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Children attending Sunshine Christian Academy go for a walk in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, on September 11, 2024. (Getty/Ryan Collerd)

The Trump administration has relentlessly undercut the stability of the early care and education system—terrorizing immigrants who are essential to the national child care infrastructure and a crucial part of communities across the country; putting basic needs further out of reach for families, particularly those with low incomes; and undermining the needs of children. Federal actions such as freezing resources, imposing new administrative rules on Head Start and state agencies, and mass federal layoffs have further destabilized the already underfunded child care system for families and providers nationwide.

As the second year of President Donald Trump's second administration approaches, the administration is increasingly taking actions that undermine the child care system and terrorize its already vulnerable workforce. At the end of December, a YouTube video posted by a right-wing influencer depicted his attempts to gain unauthorized access to a number of Minnesota child care centers in an effort to prove allegations of fraud. On the basis of this video, and

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strain on state budgets that many states are preemptively restricting access to child care assistance due to limited funding.

Less than a day after the five affected states filed a lawsuit to prevent the funding freeze from going into effect, a judge granted a temporary stay, directing the administration to release the funding it would have blocked for the next two weeks while the suit is pending. But the administration's attempt to leverage access to funding for crucial social and early learning services is in keeping with its broader posture toward families and the early childhood community, which still faces uncertainty ahead. The new funding restrictions would have affected an estimated 339,000 children across the five states—including 176,000 children under the age of 5—and an estimated 96,000 total child care providers.<sup>\*</sup> As many as 23,000 children in Minnesota alone faced a potential loss of services, including those from families who do not receive subsidies but nevertheless depend on programs likely facing cuts.<sup>\*\*</sup> These actions reflect a broader pattern of politicization by the administration that serves to strip children and families of their child care options, endanger educators, and further destabilize the early education system.

## **Online vigilantism fosters fear—not accountability—for early educators and endangers children**

It is crucial to hold those who commit fraud accountable, but the Trump administration's recent allegations were used to justify freezing the funds of states that opposed the president's policies and the continued vilification of immigrants across the country while doing nothing to ensure program integrity. These actions are part of the administration's playbook: terrorizing vulnerable families while dismantling existing accountability measures that have broad-reaching consequences—in this case, for the early educator community and children's safety.

In Chicago last November, for instance, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents detained an infant classroom teacher, following her into the building while parents were attempting to drop their children off for care. Not only was the incident an example of needless aggression, but it was done in the presence of terrified children.

The informal deputizing of everyday individuals—including encouraging "citizen journalists" to attempt unauthorized entry to private child care programs in order to pursue fraud allegations—to do the work of legitimate law enforcement or government agency investigators has also resulted in widespread harassment of providers.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Washington State Attorney General Nick Brown stated that his office had received several reports of Somali child care providers in the state being harassed and accused of fraud without evidence. Providers also reported online actors videotaping their program facilities, receiving threats of violence, and experiencing instances of vandalism. According to NBC News, "many of the people making the videos are affiliated

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## Existing antifraud mechanisms cannot be upheld when funding is suspended

There are numerous existing safeguards to prevent, detect, and mitigate fraud across all federal social support programs. But the administration has laid off half the staff of the Office of Child Care—along with inspectors general across 18 federal agencies—who were responsible for conducting program audits and ensuring compliance, paradoxically undermining alleged concerns about fraud in the child care system. Widespread cuts to funding not only threaten child care access for thousands of children nationwide, but it also undermines states' ability to exercise those existing antifraud mechanisms. States are already required to provide the federal Office of Child Care with information related to program integrity activities as well as corrective actions aimed at addressing instances of improper payments—including accidental payments to families who may no longer qualify for assistance.

The Trump administration has established a hotline page for reporting suspected fraud on the Administration for Children and Families' website, but steps such as these encourage vigilantism and fail to address real concerns. Individuals who take it upon themselves to police private child care programs in an extralegal attempt to uncover fraud not only undermine legitimate efforts by officials to ensure program integrity, but disrupt child care services, threaten early educators, and terrorize children. And the administration's broad-brush approach to restricting funds weakens an already tenuous child care sector, penalizing children and undermining their access to crucial early education services.

## The Trump administration seeks to further weaken the federal child care program, undermining providers and families

The administration is also attempting to tie the recent allegations of widespread fraud to provisions in a new regulatory change to the federal child care assistance program—the Child Care and Development Block Grant. The regulatory change was initially announced by the administration in 2025 before any such allegations gained public attention. The notice aims to rescind a 2024 rule, as part of a broader effort to undo Biden-era initiatives, that stabilized payment structures to pay providers more fairly and lowered costs for families. Rescinding the rule would further weaken an already fragile and underfunded system upon which an estimated 215,000 providers and 870,000 families depend.



TABLE 1

## Millions of children across the

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State	CCDBG allocation (FY 2024 allocation)	Est. number of participating programs and providers	
Alabama	\$157,154,309	1,845	
Alaska	\$14,613,261	Unknown	Ur
Arizona	\$203,974,811	2,234	
Arkansas	\$109,800,334	857	
California*	\$830,350,951	51,271	1
Colorado*	\$92,922,992	1,914	
Connecticut	\$60,084,078	5,199	
Delaware	\$21,924,421	745	
Florida	\$486,103,362	6,848	
Georgia	\$350,236,098	3,055	
Hawaii	\$29,640,655	1,675	
Idaho	\$49,279,330	879	
Illinois*	\$257,544,289	22,877	
Indiana	\$188,955,934	3,160	
Iowa	\$80,400,984	2,640	
Kansas	\$74,092,935	2,305	
Kentucky	\$154,375,396	1,502	
Louisiana	\$155,936,508	1,081	
Maine	\$23,603,110	1,071	
Maryland	\$108,104,340	3,108	

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Montana	\$22,020,110	860	
Nebraska	\$48,228,776	1,533	
Nevada	\$72,173,200	1,316	
New Hampshire	\$17,923,565	491	
New Jersey	\$162,961,106	4,406	
New Mexico	\$73,319,431	1,291	
New York*	\$393,423,957	17,277	
North Carolina	\$259,832,934	5,505	
North Dakota	\$15,733,672	942	
Ohio	\$300,547,919	5,126	
Oklahoma	\$133,351,884	3,291	
Oregon	\$79,771,410	3,728	
Pennsylvania	\$268,051,293	8,791	
Rhode Island	\$19,524,705	643	
South Carolina	\$155,017,244	1,231	
South Dakota	\$23,878,595	701	
Tennessee	\$233,332,395	1,764	
Texas	\$947,309,191	7,757	1
Utah	\$105,695,652	1,508	
Vermont	\$9,903,082	917	

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Wyoming	\$9,834,870	460
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**\* Highlighted states represent the five which received notice from the Department of Health and Human Services that they faced a suspension in federal child care assistance funding. The states filed suit against the administration and as of January 9, 2026, the freeze is on a temporary hold pending further litigation.**

Notes: ACF tables were used in conjunction to calculate the total number of enrolled children only ages 5 and younger. Percent program coverage is based on federal eligibility at 85% State Median Income (SMI); Some states have stricter eligibility standards that may mean fewer families are able to enroll; Others have since enacted policies that expand eligibility (e.g., New Mexico), which is not accounted for in these data. Colorado has reported, in other places, updated estimates on children receiving child care assistance through CCDBG for 2025. Without updated data for all states, through the Administration for Children and Families, the most recent available data, from 2022, has been included above. More information specific to Colorado is available here: Taylor Dolven, Jennifer Brown, and Erica Bruenlin, "[Colorado child care centers, counties scramble as feds say they are freezing funds for poorest families](#)," January 7, 2026.

Source: Center for Law and Social Policy, "[CCDBG FY2024 State-by-State Appropriations Distribution Estimates and Increases](#)," April 2, 2024; Office of Child Care, "[FY 2022 Preliminary Data Table 7 - Number of Child Care Providers Receiving CCDF Funds](#)," (last accessed January 2026); CCDF data come from the Office of Child Care, "[FY 2022 Preliminary Data Table 1 -- Average Monthly Adjusted Number of Families and Children Served](#)," (last accessed January 2026); Office of Child Care, "[FY 2022 Preliminary Data Table 9 -- Average Monthly Percentages of Children in Care by Age Group](#)," (last accessed January 2026).

Table: Center for American Progress

The payment structures encouraged by the 2024 rule enabled providers to

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accountability, drive up costs for parents, and risk child care program closures, which threaten access for families nationwide.

## Conclusion

Quality child care is the backbone of the nation's economy and the foundation for children's success throughout life. Early educators enter the field because of a commitment to supporting children's early learning and benefitting their communities. But the actions taken by the administration undermine those efforts and embolden everyday individuals to replace existing federal accountability measures, terrorizing educators and endangering teachers' and children's safety. The Trump administration is once again attempting to steal from vulnerable young children and their families, stoking widespread panic and uncertainty and undermining an already fragile child care system. The resulting harms will be felt directly by providers, families, and—most importantly—children.

*\*Authors' note: This estimate is inclusive of all CCDBG-accepting providers, both licensed and legally unregulated. The estimate of affected center, family, and group-home care providers is approximately 44,200.*

*\*\*Authors' note: This estimate was reported by a Minnesota child care advocate on January 7, 2026 and is on file with the authors.*

*\*\*\*Authors' note: Clip from January 7, 2026 House Oversight Committee hearing. The full recording is available at <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/oversight-of-fraud-and-misuse-of-federal-funds-in-minnesota-part-i/>.*

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