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Start Strong NJ announces 2026-27 policy agenda

An affordable New Jersey depends on reducing the cost of childcare

PRINCETON, NJ, September 22, 2026 — Start Strong NJ today announced a 2026-27 policy agenda calling on state policymakers to act with urgency to make high-quality childcare affordable for every family that needs it.

“New Jersey will never be an affordable place to live until it addresses the childcare crisis. For too many hardworking families, the high price of childcare is out of reach,” said Start Strong NJ Campaign Director Sharon Levine. “Parents, especially mothers, often cut their work hours or quit their jobs entirely because care costs more than they earn.”

“Start Strong NJ calls on policymakers to prioritize the critical role childcare plays for families, businesses, and New Jersey’s economy by funding childcare at a sustainable level,” said Levine.

Start Strong NJ’s policy agenda focuses on reducing cost barriers to work – costing families much-needed income and reducing business productivity. The lack of affordable childcare costs New Jersey \$5 billion a year in lost wages, productivity and tax revenue needed for important services. The campaign’s priorities include:

- **Providing parents with more help** paying for child care by strengthening and expanding the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) so more families can afford the care they need.
 - A family at [New Jersey’s median family income of \\$126,827](#) spends 16% of its income on care — and that’s if there’s only one child. For families with two young children, child care costs can consume 30% or more of household income.
 - The \$20,200 average cost of childcare exceeds many families’ rent or mortgage.
- **Securing sustained public investment.** Establish reliable, long-term funding that reflects child care’s essential role in New Jersey’s economy, workforce, and future prosperity.

The agenda announcement marks the end of Start Strong NJ's first year as a statewide campaign uniting parents and business leaders to advance affordable, high-quality child care for New Jersey families.

"We must move childcare from the margins of public debate into the forefront of the affordability conversation in New Jersey," said Levine. For many families, childcare is their largest expense after rent or mortgage and they won't have financial stability until it becomes affordable."

Highlights of Start Strong NJ's accomplishments since its September 2025 launch:

- **Released** [*Blueprint for Affordable Child Care: New Jersey Doesn't Work Without It*](#) showing what's needed to help parents, businesses, and the childcare workforce so New Jersey's economy can thrive.
- **Won increases** for CCAP and the Child Tax Credit, called for in the *Blueprint*.
- **Built a broad statewide coalition** uniting families, childcare providers, educators, researchers, business leaders, and community partners around a shared vision for affordable, high-quality child care.
- **Engaged policymakers and the public** through conferences, childcare center visits, petitions, public education, and direct outreach – helping elevate child care as a state priority.
- **Centered the experiences of families** struggling with high costs **and providers** confronting staffing shortages, unstable funding, and rising operating expenses. .

To learn more about Start Strong NJ and join the campaign for affordable, high-quality childcare, visit startstrongnj.org. New Jersey families, childcare providers, employers, and community partners are encouraged to get involved.

About Start Strong NJ

Start Strong NJ is a statewide campaign working to make affordable, high-quality child care available to every New Jersey family that needs it. The campaign brings together parents, providers, advocates, educators, researchers, business leaders, and community partners to advance policies that strengthen families, grow businesses, and promote a more prosperous New Jersey.

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