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Start Strong NJ Campaign Launch Marks First Post-Debate Event with Ciattarelli and Sherrill Campaigns Committing to Action for Affordable Child Care

WEST WINDSOR, NJ — One day after New Jersey's gubernatorial debate, both campaigns expressed support for Start Strong NJ's goal of affordable child care for all New Jersey families. **Republican gubernatorial candidate Jack Ciattarelli** and **Democratic lieutenant governor candidate Dr. Dale Caldwell** spoke at the launch of Start Strong NJ's statewide campaign to put child care at the center of New Jersey's economic and public policy agenda.

Ciattarelli said he would make child care one of his top 3 policy priorities.

"We have an affordability crisis in New Jersey," Ciattarelli said. "This is one of the top three aspects of the affordability crisis – and we need to fix it. And we can do that in the next administration."

Caldwell echoed the urgency of the affordability crisis.

"Child care is critical to getting parents back to work and setting our kids up for a lifetime of learning and success. Mikie and I are going to prioritize quality, affordable child care to support our kids, families, and businesses."

The event, hosted by the [First 1,000 Days NJ Policy Coalition](#) at the Boathouse at Mercer Lake, also spotlighted a keynote speech from **State Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz**, who underscored the need for long-term investment in New Jersey's child care infrastructure, and **called for creating a state cabinet-level Department of Early Childhood.**

Commissioner **Beth Bye** of the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, Deputy Commissioner **Elena Trueworthy**, and **All Our Kin CEO Jessica Sage** shared lessons from that state's recent \$300 million fund created to expand access to child care.



Panels throughout the day highlighted the economic and human stakes of child care:

- **“Priced Out”** shared stories of families squeezed by costs consuming nearly 20% of household income.
- **“Child Care is Everyone’s Business”** drove home the \$3.6 billion annual economic loss to New Jersey when parents are forced out of the workforce.
- Parents and providers gave firsthand accounts of what’s at risk without urgent action.

The [launch video for Start Strong NJ](#) rallied attendees around a shared vision: child care that works for families, educators, and employers alike.

“Federal guidelines say that families shouldn’t spend more than 7% percent of their income on child care, yet here in New Jersey, they’re spending nearly 20%. said **Winifred Smith-Jenkins**, Director of Early Childhood Policy and Advocacy at Advocates for Children of New Jersey. “That means impossible tradeoffs between bills, careers, and stability.”

About Start Strong NJ

Start Strong NJ is a campaign of the **First 1,000 Days NJ Policy Coalition**, bringing together business leaders, policymakers, providers, parents, and advocates committed to making affordable, high-quality child care available to every family in the state. The campaign’s policy agenda emphasizes affordability, a stable workforce, and lasting public investment to strengthen New Jersey’s economy and secure a strong future for children.

Learn more at www.startstrongnj.org and follow **@StartStrongNJ** on social media. Additional materials for press use can be found [here](#).