



24-Hour Childcare and Workforce Development Research and Legislative Request



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GAINESVILLE + ALACHUA COUNTY
GUIDE OF EVENTS



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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

A 24-hour childcare facility and workforce development program serving local government employees and advancing early childhood educational pathways.



BACKGROUND

Florida's shift-working public employees, including first responders and essential personnel, face a lack of access to high-quality, affordable childcare during nontraditional work hours. This unmet need limits workforce participation, undermines employee retention, and places strain on the well-being of both workers and their families.

To address this gap, this proposal seeks legislative support to establish a 24-hour childcare facility and workforce development pilot serving public employees, particularly first responders and essential personnel, including during times of declared emergencies.



3 PROGRAM PILLARS

1. **Recruitment and Retention** by providing access to childcare during nontraditional hours for public employees and essential personnel;
2. **Career Training Pathways** in early childhood education and related fields;
3. **High-quality Childcare Services** in support of early childhood best outcomes.

The center is proposed to operate within an underutilized public facility, maximizing existing infrastructure and reducing capital costs. The pilot will promote improved child development outcomes, greater workforce stability, and increased retention and recruitment of Florida's essential workers.

CHALLENGE: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Fire and Emergency Medical Services throughout the United States have struggled in attracting and retaining firefighters. Population in the State of Florida is growing at a rate that exceeds all other states in the country. As the population is increasing, additional fire rescue services are needed to address the increasing service delivery demand.





CHALLENGE: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Florida's rapid population growth is increasing pressure on emergency services statewide. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Florida was the fastest-growing state in the U.S. in 2022. This growth has contributed to increased demand for first responders.

Staffing shortages and rising call volumes are persistent challenges, creating operational adaptations such as mandatory overtime, temporary unit closures, and gaps in supervisory coverage.



RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Removes a Major Employment Barrier

Without reliable childcare, many qualified individuals, especially parents of young children, cannot accept or sustain employment, particularly in roles with nontraditional hours. Providing childcare makes these positions more accessible and attractive.

Reduces Absenteeism and Turnover

Employees with dependable childcare are less likely to miss work or leave their jobs due to care-related conflicts. This leads to greater schedule stability and lower turnover costs for employers.

Improves Job Satisfaction and Morale

When employees feel supported in balancing work and family responsibilities, they report higher job satisfaction and are more likely to remain in their roles.

Enhances Talent Pools

Offering childcare benefits can distinguish employers in competitive labor markets, attracting more applicants.

Supports Long-Term Career Progression

Consistent childcare access enables employees to commit to training, promotions, and long-term employment, which strengthens the overall workforce pipeline.

OPPORTUNITY: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Santa Fe College offers comprehensive programs in early childhood education, including Associate and Bachelor degrees, credentialing opportunities, and career training courses.

These programs prepare students to work with children from birth through age four and align with state and national standards. Through these pathways, Santa Fe College supports building a skilled, qualified early childhood education workforce to meet local and regional needs.



OPPORTUNITY: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Santa Fe College offers comprehensive programs in early childhood education, including:

Associate in Science (A.S.) in Early Childhood Education
Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Early Childhood Education

Credentialing Programs

Florida Child Care Professional Credential (FCCPC)

Child Development Associate (CDA)

Director Credential





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THE FUTURE: EARLY CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES

Early childhood (birth to age five) is a critical window for brain development, during which nurturing relationships and structured learning experiences shape long-lasting neural pathways and lifelong outcomes.

Extensive research confirms that high-quality care during those years improves school readiness, cognitive ability, health, social-emotional development, and later educational and economic success.



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THE FUTURE: EARLY CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES

During this time, approximately 90% of brain growth occurs, making early experiences, essential for forming the neural connections that support cognitive, emotional, and social development.

High-quality, enriching childcare in these early years promotes school readiness, health, and long-term educational and economic success. Research shows that investments in early care yield substantial returns for both individuals and society by reducing future costs in education, healthcare, and criminal justice.



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THE FUTURE: EARLY CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES

The Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Florida demonstrates how structured relationships, evidence-based caregiver supports, and embedded instructional coaching can improve developmental outcomes and set children on a path for lifelong success.

By serving children from infancy through age five, the program directly complements the state's School Readiness (SR) and Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) programs, ensuring continuity of care and early education for working families.



THE SURVEY: ALACHUA COUNTY STAFF

A total of **899 employees (40.1% of all 2,240 employees)** from Alachua County and Constitutional agencies participated in the survey, providing valuable insights into childcare needs across Alachua County's public sector workforce.

Survey Respondents reported their employers as: 324 from Alachua County government, including 132 from Alachua County Fire Rescue (Total staff = 1,153 / 376 Fire Rescue) / 314 from the Alachua County Sheriff's Office / 36 from the Clerk's Office / 47 from the Tax Collector's Office / 11 from the Supervisor of Elections / 18 from the State Attorney's and Public Defender's Offices.



THE SURVEY: Executive Summary

Major takeaways from the survey results highlight a significant demand for flexible and emergency childcare services, particularly for employees with non-traditional work schedules.

Demand for Childcare Services

- A strong need for childcare exists.
- High interest in flexible, 24-hour childcare center
- State of Emergency care is crucial

Prioritized Features

- **Safety is paramount**
Experienced/certified caregivers, Affordable pricing
Flexible scheduling
- **Preferred services:**
Backup/emergency care, Drop-in/flexible scheduling,
Enrichment activities.

Workforce Demographics & Financials

- Diverse staff work schedules need matching childcare services.
- Affordability is a concern. A majority support a sliding scale tuition model to address affordability.



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THE SURVEY: Work Schedules

Just over half of respondents (51%) work traditional weekday, daytime hours, while **nearly half (49%) report working evening, overnight, 24-hour, or weekend shifts**. All respondents (99.9%) reported working Monday-Friday, while **36% work Saturdays and 34% work Sundays**.

The most common work schedule reported was **administrative office hours** (8:30 AM – 5 PM) at 39.7%, followed by **12-hour shifts** (20.4%), and **day shifts** (7 AM – 3 PM) at 13.7%. 24-hour shifts (9.5%), on-call or irregular hours (8.7%), and rotating or swing shifts (4%).



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THE SURVEY: CHILDCARE NEEDS

- 30% currently have children who require childcare.
- 21% anticipate needing childcare in the future.
- 49% do not have children, and do not anticipate having children, in need of care.

Of the respondents who currently have, or anticipate having, responsibilities to secure childcare arrangements for dependent children, multiple follow-up questions were asked to gather more detailed information.

THE SURVEY: Current Childcare Arrangements

Respondents reported a variety of current childcare arrangements.

- 36% Care by family or friends
- 29% Licensed care centers
- 7% Babysitters/nannies
- 3% In-home daycare providers
- 9% Other arrangements





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THE SURVEY: Interest in the Childcare Program

Interest in the Childcare Program

71% expressed interest in a 24-hour childcare center offering overnight care for shift workers, 22% said maybe, and 7% were not interested.

Childcare Facilities and Services

The majority of respondents (87%) prefer a traditional childcare facility setting, while 13% prefer a licensed in-home setting.

THE SURVEY: Important Features of the Program

Safety and security measures are by far the most important feature of a facility with 97% rated very important.

- Experienced/certified caregivers (88%)
- Affordable pricing (75%)
- Flexible scheduling (63%)
- Educational programming (53%)
- Enrichment activities (37%)
- Proximity to home/work (37%)
- On-site health services (38%)
- Recreation programs (30%)

THE SURVEY: Childcare Services

Respondents identified a range of valuable childcare services, with the most commonly selected being **traditional weekday care (71%)**.

- Backup/emergency care (58%)
 - Drop-in/flexible scheduling (58%)
 - Enrichment activities (50%)
 - After-school care (44%)
 - Tutoring/homework assistance (40%)
- Weekend care (37%)
 - Evening care (36%)
 - Overnight care (31%)
 - Before-school care (18%)

THE SURVEY: Overnight Care

When asked how often overnight childcare services would be used:

- 48% of respondents indicated they would use it occasionally, in emergencies, or if regular care falls through;
- 22% said they would use it more regularly, including:
 - 14% every night they work
 - 8% few nights per week
 - 27% said they would rarely or never use overnight care.

THE SURVEY: Declared Emergencies

A strong majority of respondents (81%) indicated they would use a childcare service located in a shelter-rated secure building that remains open during emergencies to support first responders and essential personnel, while 19% said they would not.

About half of respondents (51%) reported experiencing difficulty securing childcare during a declared state of emergency, while 49% did not.



THE SURVEY: Declared Emergencies

During emergencies, challenges respondents face include:

- 58% a lack of backup or emergency childcare options
- 56% increased work hours making childcare harder to arrange
- 56% concerns about child safety and security
- 40% reported that their current provider closes during emergencies.

THE SURVEY: Declared Emergencies

Respondents indicated additional services that would be helpful in an emergency childcare program, including:

- 71% guaranteed availability for first responders
- 69% Extended hours for long shifts
- 69% Meals
- 69% Monitoring capabilities
- 66% Allowing parental visits
- 61% Flexibility with extended hours
- 56% Priority enrollment for essential workers
- 45% Provide care for sick children
- 44% Administer medications
- 42% Temporary evacuation sheltering
- 41% Care for special needs children



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THE SURVEY: Fee Structure and Payments

Childcare expenses as a percent of family income:

- 18% report spending less than 10% on childcare
- 18% spend 10-20% on childcare
- 13% spend 21-30% on childcare
- 10% spend 31-40% on childcare
- 5% spend more than 40% on childcare
- 36% not sure of the exact percentage



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THE SURVEY: Fee Structure and Payments

A majority of respondents (54%) support a sliding scale tuition model based on income to ensure affordability, while 36% are unsure, and 10% do not support the idea.

A strong majority of respondents (76%) expressed potential interest in a County childcare program offered as part of their employee benefits package, with 21% unsure and only 2% not interested.

THE SURVEY: Workforce Development

Respondents showed strong interest in paid apprenticeship programs for community members.

- 58% interested in Early Childhood Education
- 50% in Teaching
- 46% in Family & Community Services
- 45% in Social Work
- 36% in Public Health
- 14% expressed interest in other career areas

The most valuable workforce development opportunities identified include:

- 74% tuition assistance for certification programs
- 71% Paid on-the-job training
- 67% scholarships for higher education
- 52% Mentorship from experienced professionals
- 46% Career placement assistance



The How: Implementation Plan and Budget

Pilot Program Modeling Assumptions for a 24-hour childcare for a licensed, Gold Star-rated center serving 120 children total, ages infant through Pre-K. Operating 24/7, Monday through Sunday. Assuming full capacity during the day (120 children) and 50% capacity during evenings, overnights, and weekends (60 children), using Florida DCF staff-to-child ratios.

3 shifts per day: Day Shift (Full Capacity): 7 AM – 3 PM (15 direct caregivers) / Transition Shift: 3 PM – 11 PM (8 direct caregivers) / Overnight Shift: 11 PM – 7 AM (8 direct caregivers)

Implementation Plan and Budget

Daytime Direct Care Staffing Estimates

120 Children ages infant through pre-K

Age Group	Ratio	Children	Caregivers
Infants	4:1	20	5
Toddlers	6:1	20	4
2-Year-Olds	11:1	20	2
3-Year-Olds	15:1	20	2
4-Year-Olds	20:1	20	1
Pre-K	20	20	1
Total Day	—	120	15

Transition and Overnight Direct Care Shift (50% Capacity)

Up to 60 children total, consolidated into 3 age group clusters

Age Group Cluster	Ratio	Children	Caregivers
Infants + Toddlers	4:1	20	5
2s + 3s	11:1	20	2
4s + 5s	20:1	20	1
Total Overnight	—	60	8

Primary weekday shifts: 75 shifts Weekday overnight + transition: 80 shifts / Weekend (all shifts at 8 staff): 48 shifts

Total weekly shifts = 75 + 80 + 48 = 203 shifts/week

Estimated Operating Budget

Staffing & Compensation Summary by Role

Role	FTEs	Hourly Rate	Annual Salary (with 30% benefits)	Total Cost
Day Shift Direct Care	21.0	\$22.00	\$59,520	\$1,249,920
Overnight Direct Care	11.2	\$22.00	\$59,520	\$666,240
Transitional Shift (3–11 PM)	11.2	\$22.00	\$59,520	\$666,240
Admin / Supervisory	6.0	\$22.00	\$59,520	\$357,120
Kitchen Staff	2.0	\$22.00	\$59,520	\$119,040
Custodial	1.0	\$22.00	\$59,520	\$59,520
Subtotal				\$3,118,080
Apprentices / Trainees	21.0	\$22.00	\$59,520	\$1,249,920
Total FTEs	73.4			\$4,367,000

Estimated Operating Budget

Category	Details	Cost
Personnel (73.4 FTEs)	Staff and benefits	\$3,118,080
Apprenticeship Program	Training stipends	\$1,249,920
Food, Supplies, Maintenance	Consumables, upkeep	\$275,000
Security & Safety	Cameras, check-in systems, ID badges	\$40,000
Technology & Admin Software	Childcare management, payroll, records	\$35,000
Licensing & Insurance	Coverage and licensing fees	\$200,000
Evaluation & Data	Program metrics, reporting, research	\$75,000
Contingency (5%)	Contingency on total operating	\$194,578
Estimated Operating Budget		\$5,586,578



Capital Budget (Non-Recurring)

Category	Estimated Cost
Facility Acquisition or Lease	TBD
Renovation/Buildout	\$1,700,000
Equipment & Furnishings	\$ 400,000
Soft Costs & Contingency	\$ 300,000
Total Capital Budget	\$2,400,000

Estimated Revenues

Tuition: Estimated at \$250/week or \$1,000/month

120 daytime children enrolled = \$120,000/month	\$1,440,000 (annual)
60 transition/weekend/overnight = \$60,000/month	\$ 720,000 (annual)

Subtotal \$2,160,000

Estimated needed additional funds: \$3,425,578

Potential Funding Strategies for consideration

- State General Revenue appropriation
- Local match: Children's Trust wage subsidy for trainees
- Federal/Philanthropic: Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), Department of Labor Apprenticeship grants, National Law Enforcement Foundation (NLEF)
- Parent Fees: Income-based sliding scale model



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SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

24-Hour Childcare & Workforce Development Pilot Program: Key Benefits

1. Supports first responder recruitment and retention
2. Strengthens child development outcomes
3. Expands the early childhood education workforce pipeline
4. Repurposes unused/underutilized existing public infrastructure
5. Demonstrates scalable, cross-sector solutions for working families

Potential Partners: Alachua County School Board, Children's Trust, CareerSource, Santa Fe College, University of Florida, Early Learning Coalition, SWAG CHILD Center

Provide direction to staff to continue to work with potential partners and solidify local pledges and investments in support of the Legislative Request for the 24-Hour Childcare & Workforce Development Pilot Program.