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Child Care Dollars: Impact of Curtailed Funding

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Executive Summary

This report presents results from a study assessing the impact of termination of child care subsidies for working parents in low-income households. In August, 2011, the program was suspended due to lack of funding. The goal of the study was to determine how families responded when funding for the program ended and the degree to which families experienced employment changes, financial difficulties, or changes in stress levels as a result of loss of subsidies.

A comprehensive list of all recipients of Childcare Dollar\$, a federally-funded, county administered program that provides partial childcare funding, is maintained by Children's Institute. A random sample of families who had applied for and received child care subsidies under this program was selected for follow-up telephone surveys. Respondents were asked a set of closed-ended questions including their past and present child care situations, employment, stress related to child care and general demographic information. A smaller subsample was also asked a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit qualitative data regarding what impact the loss of the subsidy had on their child care arrangements, employment, and family.

Quantitative data were collected from 89 former Child Care Dollar\$ recipients. More than half (57%) reported that there had been times since the loss of subsidy when they needed child care and were unable to obtain it. Nearly 70% of respondents indicated that either they or another adult member of the household had significant unfavorable employment effects following loss of funding. More than a quarter had a child requiring an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Seventy-seven percent reported more family stress since Child Care Dollar\$ ended.

Qualitative data were gathered from 24% of the parents who also participated in the primary survey. These questions dealt with the quality of the childcare arrangements families had while receiving subsidies and any changes to those arrangements that occurred after funding ended. The interviewer audio recorded the questions and answers, which were then transcribed and analyzed. Overall, respondents reported having to change their childcare arrangements to less structured care, finding alternative means to pay for childcare, or making significant changes to their employment status. Eight major themes were identified from the qualitative survey responses. These are reported and described, along with direct quotes from respondents. Parents were able to provide greater depth to their responses when answering the open-ended questions, allowing a more detailed accounting of the impact of curtailed childcare funding.

Introduction to Child Care Dollar\$

In 2000, 16% of children residing in Monroe County, NY lived in poverty. This proportion increased to 19% by 2006. The largest concentration of poor children is in the City of Rochester, where 44% of children were living in poverty in 2006-10, an increase of 6 points from 2000. Rochester is the 11th worst city in the United States for child poverty; 38% of children under the age of 12 live in poverty. In Monroe County, 64% of children (over 35,000) under the age of 6 are in need of child care because they live with two working parents or live with a single parent who is working.

The Child Care Dollar\$ program was established in 2004 to address the mounting burden low-income, working families experience when trying to pay for child care. The program was initially created as a demonstration project, intended to expand access to child care subsidies for working parents with children from birth to 12 years of age, residing in Monroe County, NY.

Children's Institute and Monroe County Department of Family Services administers the program, which is the result of a partnership between Monroe County's chapter of the New York Union Child Care Coalition (NYUCCC), members from the Greater Rochester Early Childhood Education Quality Council (ECEQC), the Family Child Care Satellite Network (FCCSN), and Children's Institute. This partnership submitted the *Monroe County Childcare Subsidy Project* plan, known now as *Childcare Dollar\$*.

In its earliest inception, this plan was funded with two and one half million dollars (\$2.5 million) appropriated in the 2004-2005 New York State (NYS) budget. Funding was designated for child care subsidies and program administration.

Eligibility for subsidies was based on parent(s)' employment, with incomes up to 275% of the Federal poverty guidelines (FPG). No restrictions were placed on family size. The primary goal of the project was to improve families' access to child care assistance through a process that is user-friendly and efficient for working families with low- to moderate incomes.

As of 2005, there were 9,916 children in Monroe County residing in households with incomes of 150-199% of FPG and 16,927 children residing in households with incomes between 200-274% of FPG¹. Applications for Childcare Dollar\$ were first accepted in 2006. At that time, it was estimated that approximately 26,843 children were eligible for subsidized care.

Since its beginning in 2006, Childcare Dollar\$ in Monroe County has changed income eligibility guidelines several times. Income, expressed in terms of percentage FPG, has ranged from 125%

¹ *Access to Subsidized Quality Care in Monroe County*, Center for Governmental Research, 2007

to 165%. Families' eligibility status was subject to change as new cutoffs were adopted. At various times, a family's subsidy could be withdrawn with little prior notification.

Most of the funding for childcare subsidies in Monroe County is received from the federal level and distributed by NYS. The dispersal of this funding is at the discretion of the state government, which uses an algorithm to determine the amount each county will receive. This formula takes into account a variety of factors, including past spending habits, and reduces the amount for counties which did not use their allotted funds in prior years. As a result, Monroe County received reduced amounts in 2007 and 2008, requiring policy changes that included:

- Income eligibility lowered from 165% to 125% FPL, so fewer families would qualify
- Co-payment for participating families increased from 25% to 35% of what was deemed 'discretionary' income
- Payment to child care providers for child absences eliminated

The reimbursement rate remained untouched in keeping with State guidelines; however the lower income guidelines reduced the number of eligible families, resulting in 961 children losing their subsidy in fall 2008. This represented an 11% decrease of the children served in Monroe County.

Community-wide efforts were made to reinstate Monroe County's Child Care Block Grant Allocation beginning in fall, 2008. Nearly \$8M in additional block grant and stimulus funding for child care was received in spring, 2009. The income eligibility level was raised to 165% FPG and subsidies were extended to an additional 1000 children in 2010 (7947 to 8940 children served).

Recently, the Childcare Dollar\$ subsidy was once again curtailed from August, 2011 through January, 2012 due to depletion of funds and to a general reduction in funding. Families could reapply for the program once a new budget allocation was available. For many families, this created a substantial lapse in their subsidies that necessitated identifying alternative child care arrangements. The impact of that funding gap is the focus of this study.

Program Outcomes

One of the goals of childcare subsidies is to provide parents and guardians with more options when selecting caregivers for their children. The financial burden associated with the cost of high quality childcare often forces families to choose less optimal alternatives. In previous reports describing Childcare Dollar\$ funding, the childcare arrangements used by families receiving subsidies was tabulated and is presented below.

Use of Child Care Subsidies in Monroe County, 2009-2011

	<u>2009 actual</u>	<u>2010 est.</u>	<u>2011 est.</u>
Child Care Centers	2714 (34%)	3181 (36%)	2625 (35%)
Registered Providers: Family/Group	2937 (37%)	3249 (36%)	2775 (37%)
Legally-exempt (also known as unregulated, informal friend/family care)	2296 (29%)	2510 (28%)	2100 (28%)
Total	7947	8940	7500

Previous reports also presented information about parents' and guardians' priorities when choosing care for their children. Parents self-reported the following factors as important to their decision-making process:

- Affordability
- Level of comfort with the provider
- Type and level of services provided (informal, family and group family care, center-based care, service hours, weekend availability and wrap-around or after-school care)
- Convenience (easily accessible from home and/or work)

Methods

The current study addresses the extent to which loss of subsidy affected child care choices, quality of child care, employment options, and other factors for families. Children's Institute serves as the administrator for Childcare Dollar\$ in Monroe County. Responsibilities for this role include:

- Outreach to applicants
- Supervision of volunteers
- Coordination of training and supervision of facilitated enrollers who assist applicants
- Eligibility screenings
- Initial application processing complying with local, state and federal requirements
- Communication with applicants and childcare providers, along with other activities.

In order to establish and maintain communication with applicants and program participants, Children's Institute keeps a database of present and past recipients, including names and contact information. This list is regularly updated and is used to send mailings with information pertaining to Childcare Dollar\$ and general child care news.

DATA COLLECTION

A random sample of 239 names was selected from the master Childcare Dollar\$ database, including only those families that had, at some point, received the subsidy and for whom the

subsidy was curtailed during the period spanning August, 2011 through January, 2012. This subset of families comprised the pool of potential respondents for a telephone survey designed by researchers at Children's Institute in conjunction with the Childcare Dollar\$ project coordinator.

The survey questions asked the current status of families' Childcare Dollar\$ subsidy. If funding had already been reinstated at the time of the survey, the call was terminated. For those families who were no longer receiving the subsidy, a series of questions followed. These covered: access to child care; employment or job related events; current child care arrangement(s); ease of child care costs; family stress; children's special needs; children's ages (those in care or needing care); and household demographic information.

There were two versions of the survey. The primary form consisted of 20 key questions plus sub-questions for additional details, which required Yes/No responses, ranking, or selecting from a list of possible answers. There were a few questions requiring a numeric answer (Ex: "How many children...in child care?") or a range (Ex: household income). This version was intended to elicit quantitative data that could be used to describe, generally, the child care experiences of a random sample of former Childcare Dollar\$ recipients.

The second version of the survey contained the finite questions described above, along with four new questions. These asked about whether the family was currently receiving Childcare Dollar\$, how their childcare situation compared to their situation while they were receiving the subsidy; difficulty paying for childcare; and the ages of the children they had in care.

In addition, a set of supplemental open-ended questions probed for greater detail about the child care choices made by families after subsidies ended, the quality of care children received, and the impact families experienced as a result of funding cuts. Interviewers asked the supplemental questions after completing the primary survey with a subset of the random sample. The probes were used to get more detailed answers. These took the form of "...can you tell me more about that?" and "...are there any other ways (this situation) has changed?" Both the original surveys (and accompanying protocols) and the revised versions were reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Rochester and were granted exempt status.

All surveys were conducted by telephone with the self-identified primary caregiver, usually the mother, and responses were recorded on paper and on digital audio recorders. Audio recording was done with the knowledge and explicit permission of both the respondents and the interviewers. Parents were given the option of having the audio recording stopped at any time. Verbal consent for both surveys was obtained prior to administration of the survey questions, and respondents were encouraged to ask questions to verify their understanding of the purpose and intended use of their survey data.

Surveys were administered by trained interviewers who were conversant with the Childcare Dollar\$ program, but were not linked to the participants in any way. The interviewers were contracted for this study by Children's Institute and had not been part of the program application or enrollment process.

RESULTS

Quantitative (Full-Sample) Survey Data

An initial sample of 239 was selected from Children's Institute's administrative records. Of these, 34 (27%) did not have a telephone number and were therefore excluded. The remaining 239 were eligible for the study. Interviewers made up to 5 attempts to contact each of the families on the list. Many of the telephone numbers were no longer in service, with no further information allowing those families to be contacted. Several potential respondents had their Childcare Dollar\$ subsidy reinstated prior to the beginning of the study. Because the study sought to assess the impact of loss of subsidy, these families were not included. A larger proportion were unavailable (did not answer or did not return call) after 5 attempts. The final sample of 89 (37% of eligible) respondents completed the primary (quantitative) survey, and 21 supplemental (qualitative) surveys were completed. Unfortunately, there are little data for those who were unreachable with the exception of number of children in care and location of childcare at the time of enrollment. There were no differences between those who participated in the survey and those who did not on the basis of number of children in care or type of childcare arrangement at the time of enrollment.

After verifying that the parent/caregiver was not currently receiving Childcare Dollar\$, the first question asked if there had been times, since losing the subsidy, they had difficulty getting childcare. More than half (57%) stated that there had been times that childcare was needed but that they were unable to obtain it.

A list of potential problems that parents may have experienced with regard to their employment was provided, with parents indicating if they or another parent in the household had experienced any of these since funding ended. These are presented in the table below.

Employment problems following termination of Childcare Dollar\$ subsidy

	YES (%)
Changed your work schedule	45
Been absent from work, not due to illness	39
Decrease in job performance, lower productivity, received poor evaluation	27

Looked for a different job	26
Had to work fewer hours	24
Changed your current job in a big way	19
Made decisions that will make it harder to get a job in the future	16
Stopped looking for work	14
Turned down a job	11
Had to quit a job	7
Any significant employment impact	70

Parents were asked to report on the level of family stress due to childcare problems that the family experienced after Childcare Dollar\$ ended. Very few (7%) indicated that they were experiencing less stress. Several parents reported about the same level of stress (15%), but the majority (78%) stated that they were experiencing more family stress after childcare subsidies ended.

A substantial proportion of parents reported that one of the children for whom they had been receiving childcare subsidies had either an Individual Education Plan (IEP-24%), an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP-6%), or was believed to have special needs (3%). In total, this affected approximately 33% of the children who had been receiving subsidized childcare under the Childcare Dollar\$ program.

A goal of childcare subsidies is to allow parents greater choice of care arrangements and to encourage parents to obtain the highest quality childcare available to them. Parents in this study indicated their children were currently in the following childcare situations:

Current Childcare Arrangement	(%)
Child care center	46
Family member	18
Group family	12
Family child care	11
None	8
Child care center + other	3
Legally exempt	2

The parents in this study had a range of children under the age of twelve needing childcare. Three of the parents reported no longer having any children under the age of 12. Their children aged out prior to the study. For the rest of the survey respondents, 42 (47%) had one child under

the age of 12; 30 (34%) had two children, 10 (11%) had three children, and 2 (2%) had four children under age 12 and needing childcare.

General demographic information was obtained from the parents. Twenty percent of responders indicated that they or another parenting adult in their household were members of a union. Most (98%) were employed. Seventy percent were employed full-time and/or working 40 or more hours per week and 28% were working less than 40 hours per week. The 2% who reported being unemployed were currently looking for work.

Household size ranged from 2 persons to 7 persons living in the household; 3-person households were the most frequently reported. Most of the survey respondents were female (98%). The majority indicated their marital status as “never married” (71%), with 10% married, 11% separated, and 8% divorced.

Annual gross total household income levels were reported as category ranges, from \$15,000-74,999. One point of interest: the 2 families in the highest income category had 3 or 4 children under the age of 12 in need of childcare. The gross annual incomes are described in the table below.

<u>Income range</u>	<u>% of households</u>
\$15,000 - \$19,999	7
\$20,000 - \$24,999	16
\$25,000 - \$29,999	22
\$30,000 - \$34,999	17
\$35,000 - \$39,999	15
\$40,000 - \$49,999	10
\$50,000 - \$59,999	7
\$60,000 - \$74,999	2
Did not answer	4

The racial and ethnic characteristics of those surveyed is consistent with the characteristics of all families who received Childcare Dollars subsidies. About half (48%) were African-American or Black, 37% were White, 9% identified themselves as “other”, without specification, 2% were multi-racial, 1% was Native-American, and 2% declined answering. Eleven percent identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino.

The majority of respondents had obtained some higher education beyond high school. Twenty seven percent had at least some college, 36% had an Associate’s degree, and 18% had Bachelor’s degrees. Another 18% had graduated high school or obtained GEDs. The remaining

1% reported their highest level of education as less than high school.

Qualitative (Subsample) Survey Data

After parents completed the quantitative portion of the survey, a random subsample was asked to complete an additional set of questions. These questions were open-ended and allowed parents to provide greater detail about the childcare arrangements they had while they received Childcare Dollar\$ subsidies and how those arrangements changed after subsidies were curtailed. All parents who were asked to complete the additional questions agreed. Digital audio recorders were used to collect the responses. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and were analyzed using appropriate qualitative methods. There were 21 supplemental (qualitative) surveys available for analysis.

Results:

Theme 1: For some interviewees, the loss of childcare dollars subsidy resulted in them placing their child(ren) in more unstructured and less developmentally appropriate and/or less enriched child care environments. Often these new settings were less reliable and dependent on family and friends. There was wide variability in the choice of new childcare arrangement.

An African-American, never married, college educated mother of one child reported, "...while I was receiving the subsidy, I was able to have her [child] at an actual center and they did more academic activities and when it ended, I did have to switch her to a group where the care... was limited, so I would say that the most significant downfall [of losing the subsidy] is that the care isn't the same" (I109). Later in the interview, she clarified, "I would say that it's just not, the quality [of current child care] isn't as good as the center she was at. It's a home, you know, there's no playground and it's just not as good as the previous center" (I109).

Similarly, a high school educated, white, single mother explained how she had had to change the child care arrangement when the subsidy ended from a daycare facility where the quality was "great. We loved it" to "...a half-day home setting daycare, the space is a little more limited as far as gym access and outside play and some of that stuff. It's a little less structured and there's more variety of age groups versus him being around kids all his age, so he does seem like he's adjusted well but I would prefer to get him back into a school setting" (I104).

Another college educated, African-American mother expressed a similar transition "She [the child] was in an accredited childcare facility which also had universal pre-K in it and now she is in a less structured place. She's not getting the same academic challenges that she was getting at the old place [accredited center]. ...childcare is less reliable" (I103). A white, single mother of two children reported that, as a result of the loss of funding, quality suffered because "their [the kids'] schedule got messed up. So they were one day with me because I would take the day off from work, and then another day with another family member, and if they couldn't do it I had to

find somebody else. It was confusing to the kids” (I111). This subtheme of inconsistency was also present in other interviews, when asked about the impact of the subsidy loss an African-American mother with three children stated, “Having different people come into my home to do the childcare, and like I said once again, me not being home as much [be]cause I have to pick up more time to work to pay the bills” (I106).

Not all changes occurred from structured and enriched center programs to more informal settings. In one case, a mother reported switching care from private home care to paid care by a grandparent (I126). In another case a mother reported grandparents providing assistance by both providing pay and care “well, my parents are helping pay; my parents are now watching my kids, two of my kids, because, like I said, I can’t afford to put them in a before and after school program at school... the schedule is kind of inconsistent” (I 124). A fifteen year old child was left taking care of a younger sibling, aged 8, “but the most negative impact for me as a parent is my older son may not have the ability to do an extracurricular activity at school because he’s got to be home and watch his brother” (I128).

In some cases, a parent decided to stay home “one person had to stay home to make sure that one child [who] was not in school, that he was properly taken care of”, and doing so had an impact on “his [the child’s] socialization. He’s a child with disabilities and not having the multiple socialization setting has definitely slowed him down on progressing for socializing” (I129).

Theme 2: For some interviewees, the loss of childcare dollars subsidy resulted in them choosing to keep their children in the same childcare arrangement and finding new ways to pay for the childcare.

In some cases the arrangement was made possible by changing work schedules. “It [the subsidy loss] has had no effect on my kids, it is an effect on me because I am paying everything out of pocket and I get no help for the money in the household” (I130). “One of us had to change our hours a little bit to accommodate our schedules and what we could afford for childcare without one of us having to be home all the time. ... We overlap hours, one of us goes to work early, so one of us is home getting the kids all together and then at night one of us is still at work, and so we just had to, whereas before we both worked the same schedule and had the same hours and days off, and it worked” (I125)

“Nothing is going to change, I still have to work, he’s still going to have to go to daycare so I can go to work. Again, the only thing that’s going to change is money out of pocket, which I don’t have, so it will be quite stressful” (I105). “It hasn’t affected my child in any way. It really affects the parents financially; not having the assistance, especially when there’s only one parent that is providing for the child. ... I don’t understand how they figure that you make enough money to take care of your child and provide your child with the best care, because, yes, there are daycares

out there that may charge you less but you've got to look at the quality of daycare. Like it's always been said, you get what you paid for" (I110).

Theme 3: Some families were not impacted by the loss of Childcare Dollars subsidy.

A White, never married mother of two children making less than \$25,000 annually who used before and after-school care at a nonprofit community child care reported that "There is really no stress, no change. I actually end up paying less through the program I'm in now" (I107). In particular some recipients expressed not needing the subsidy once the child reached school-age, "he's in school now, so I no longer need full day childcare" (I112); and when asked what was the impact of the subsidy loss on the family generally "It's not affecting anyone being that I don't need for full time childcare, I have it worked out fine" (I112). Similarly, another mother reported "I was lucky in, when it [subsidy] was ending; he [the child] was getting ready to go into preschool and pre-kindergarten, so I was a lucky one... I didn't need the childcare anymore, thank God" (I131).

Theme 4: Often, the subsidy loss was accompanied by high stress and psychological problems.

In many cases, respondents reported higher levels of stress for a variety of reasons: "It's stressful ... because it [new unstructured child care arrangement] is less reliable" (I103); "There's an extremely higher amount of stress even to this day" (I108). "It was just [the] stress of being broke" (I131).

The level of financial concern manifested itself in increased stress and psychological impacts that ranged from mild to serious. One mother reported "It was just very stressful, we had less money –obviously- in the household for a lot of just really, really anything. So that made it stressful, I guess it was very stressful financially; because of that, you know, I mean I wasn't in the best mood at times" (I111). Other parents expressed more concerning psychological impacts on both parents and children: "Well, stress because I am not working anymore so I don't have the means to provide as I would before, especially we were used to living a certain lifestyle and the adjustment could be for the worst, especially a financial decrease, it just led to deep depression; and I sought services for that and rectified the situation but that had also led my daughter to depression because mommy is usually happy, seeing mommy sad makes her sad" (I127).

Another mother reported a similar experience caused by childcare-related stress "she [child] had to see me cry and stuff more because I get a little stressed out and stuff. So, just stuff like that, that's going to impact her and maybe scar her for the rest of her life, but , you know, she does still have the stability that she's so happy to go to school" (I108).

Theme 5: For some families subsidy loss resulted in having to quit their jobs or make other decisions that impact employability negatively.

In some cases the impact of subsidy loss on the employment of the parent was quite measurable, as was its impact on the family budget. “Because the subsidy has ended I no longer couldn’t [sic] work because I couldn’t afford the childcare subsidy so I was forced to quit my job. ... I mean the worst that could happen is that you’re forced to be unemployed because you’re not able to provide childcare, you know, it’s worst now because childcare is just as much as rent every month” (I127).

“Basically I had to quit my job, ultimately that’s really all I can say... I am unemployed right now, and it causes stress, obviously, to try to get bills paid. I’m trying to get on public assistance temporarily until I can get back up on my feet, but even not having Childcare Dollars it hurts to try to find arrangement for daycare when you’re not working to be able to pay for childcare to even go to an interview” (I129).

In other cases, the family had to adjust to make the new arrangement works. “My husband has to work different hours to be able to accommodate my schedule. I can’t work nearly as much as I was supposed to” (I124). Similarly another mother reported “I’m working nights and weekends now because of the Childcare Dollars [ending]. I was working days [before]” (I132).

Finally, some families described how they were tempted to quit their jobs and careers:

“I’m about ready to like step down from management at [National Bank Company] in order to open my own daycare and stay at home or something because I’m going to make just as much, even though maybe in the future I may not be a \$100,000 heir, but it like you know I have to look to maybe not advance my career, or not do things that are more career advancement but I was ready to go answers phones, and I hate that, just because they’re making more money than the supervisors in my group. I even consider quitting my job and staying home and watching my kid because sometimes it’s like it is not worth it. Then, you do not know if they [children] are delayed because they went to daycare their whole life or are they delayed because they are not spending enough time with me?”(I108).

Theme 6: Some families struggle made difficult tradeoffs between basic needs and childcare expenses.

An African –American, never married, high school graduate mother reported that:

“Her [the original provider] care was really good, like I said, he [the child] is been there since he was one. I did remove him because of the cost; it cost too much so that’s the reason I removed him. At one time, I admit, I was able to afford it but then the doctor’s visits he had to do ... I was finding that I was struggling to pay [the visits] because I was missing time from work to take care of his health needs” (I102).

Other parents reported having to dramatically curtail their expenses, “It is just less money for things we can do around the house and less money for everything like food and stuff like that. Major budgeting.” (I130); “I had to give up eating in order to feed my child. So she ate very, very well but I lost 40 pounds” (I108).

Theme 7: Some families suffered logistical impacts because of the subsidy loss.

In some cases the new arrangement had gone from a single provider for three children, to three different providers for three different children at a cost of almost \$1500 monthly. The mother explained the challenges of coordinating schedules:

“I’m a teacher so I’m on salary, but I have to [work], I can’t stay late or come in early, so like Friday nights after I leave work, I have to drop off all my kids and leave them with my husband, I have to go back to work because I can’t stay late [at work]. I can’t do anything because I have to pick them all up at different times and different places by 5:00, but if I could stay at work I could get my work done and I wouldn’t have to go back to work at 9:00 at night on Friday... but I have to” (I124).

Theme 8: Families that had received and lost Childcare Dollars subsidies found the program to be a societal benefit that was also helpful to them.

When asked what they would want the decision makers to know about the Childcare Dollar program, several respondents were quite articulate in describing what the program had done for them and their children.

“Cutting it [Childcare Dollars] has a huge negative impact ... [the program] allowed [me] mostly to be independent and not too dependent. I know we all have to cut on some things, but I don’t think that [Childcare Dollars] is the one thing. I mean some people have families that can help... they have, you know, aunts and uncles, or they have moms and dads, I wasn’t that lucky. I didn’t have a very supportive family so the Childcare Dollars for me, or the subsidy enabled me to provide for my children, give them opportunities that they may not necessarily have, and the interactions with other children” (I128).

“That it truly helped us and we can’t really pay for the daycare in its entirety and it is a pretty good service” (I132).

“I think in the long run, it would help the system, because I think it keeps more people off welfare system and also other programs, and [keeps people] employed” (I131)

“With not having as much funding, [it] definitely hinders the lower-to-middle class from being able to work and not get on assistance, and try to better their lives, not only for themselves but for their family and their future” (I129).

“That it [Childcare Dollars] is very, very beneficial to working parents. I’m not a single parent, I mean I am not married but we are both providers. It is just so helpful, when you

think of \$400 for one child a week, or even two kids per week... that's like your paycheck" (I125).

"That for someone like me, I work, my husband works, we are a family unit. I have four kids and I am penalized because I do everything, because I work, I don't qualify for any programs. There are no programs for me. But if I were a single mom, or if I were on a different status, all of the sudden I would get all this extra help. So people like us, we always fall between the cracks. I am a teacher, I am not working in an entry level position, I am an educated person, but I have four kids and my husband was laid off. It wasn't like we were sitting down doing nothing and expecting the government to pay for us, but if there is an option for someone like us to get some assistance, it would be nice" (I124).

"If they cut the program even more, you will have two times more people on Social Services, because they're being put in the same predicament, either forced to quit or get terminated" (I127).

"It is a great program for people who make a little bit more than people who get other types of services" (I 126).

"It is stressful when I am doing that [pay in advance for childcare] and providing for my child like I'm supposed to, as a responsible parent, and not having that little assistance that I did get from Childcare Dollars, whether it was \$40 a week, that assistance did help" (I110).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The need for subsidized childcare continues for children and families in Monroe County. As parents transition from public assistance programs to join the ranks of the low-earning employed, the paradox of needing childcare in order to work, but being unable to afford quality care due to low to moderate income becomes apparent.

Parents were quick to distinguish between traditional public assistance and childcare subsidies. Respondents clearly saw the Childcare Dollar\$ program as an adjunct that alleviated some of the financial burden associated with the costs of higher quality, reliable, and structured child care arrangements.

Evidence has consistently demonstrated that high quality early childhood care and education results in children who are better prepared for elementary school and beyond, both emotionally and academically. Yet, also consistently, parents are forced to defer higher quality childcare options due to financial constraints, often relying on informal childcare or care that falls outside quality monitoring. The findings presented here provide a strong case for urging policy makers,

legislators, and other key stakeholders to consider reinstating support for child care subsidies for lower-income families.