To: Interested Parties
Fr: Celinda Lake, Alysia Snell, Cate Gormley, and Izzy Vinyard
Re: New poll shows widespread support for fully funding DC's child care programs
Date: March 2026

Anyone who pays attention knows child care is incredibly expensive in the District of Columbia and early educators and teachers do not always receive fair pay for their work. At the same time, over the past 14 months, the federal government laid off federal employees, canceled government contracts with local businesses and nonprofits, and Congress barred DC from spending $1 billion of DC-raised funds. This is a more challenging climate for the District, and yet new polling shows that the District's voters still solidly support investments in making child care more affordable for families and providing fair pay for early educators and teachers. In this time when families and early educators and teachers face higher costs for basics like housing, groceries, and utilities, this poll clearly shows that the DC Council and Mayor Bowser should adopt a budget that meets the needs of the people.

Key Findings

- DC voters **strongly favor fully funding** the **Child Care Subsidy Program** and the **Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund.**
  - **The Child Care Subsidy Program** – 72% favor, 50% strongly favor.
  - **The Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund** – 69% favor, 46% strongly favor.

- Voters think both **bringing down the costs of child care for families and raising wages for child care and early education educators and teachers should be priorities for the DC government (83% and 79% a priority, respectively)**.

- Three-quarters (74%) of DC voters strongly or somewhat **support increasing public investment in child care to lower the cost of child care to ensure no residents pay more than 7% of their income for care**, and about half (53%) strongly support this proposal.

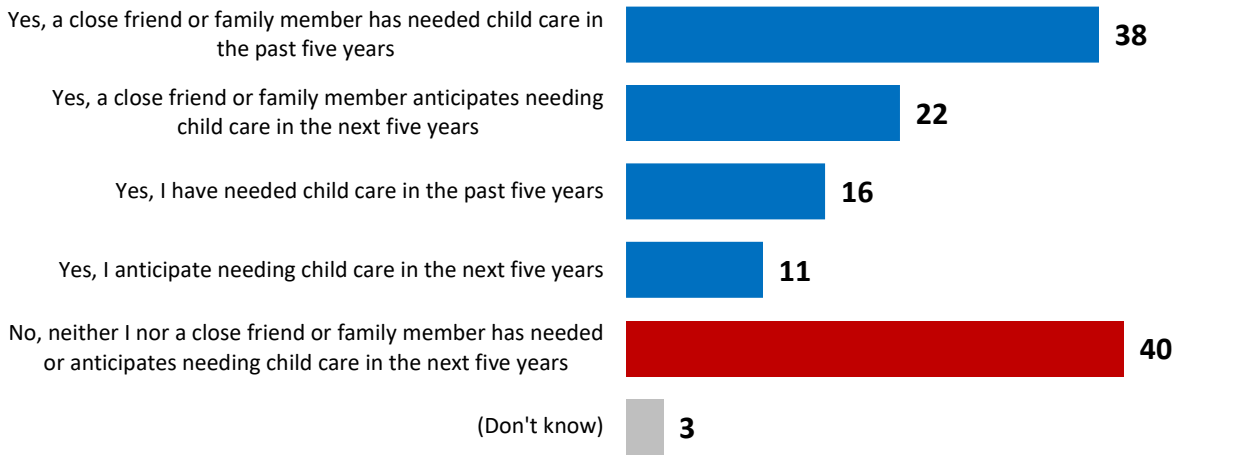
- To fund the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund and the Child Care Subsidy Program, DC voters **support raising taxes on the passive income of wealthy residents** (73% total support, 51% strongly support) and **raising taxes on the wealth held by families in the top 5% of incomes** (76% total support, 48% strongly support).

- DC voters also **support a 2% business activity tax (BAT) on certain businesses and corporations operating in DC** (74% total support, 58% strongly support) to fund the child care programs described in the survey. However, voters need an explanation of what a BAT entails; without an explanation, only 43% of voters support the BAT and 27% strongly support it, with 33% who oppose it, and 24% who are not sure.

Child Care Matters to DC

Child care impacts a majority of voters in DC. Over half (57%) of DC's electorate have had a recent need for child care, anticipate needing child care in the next five years, or have close family or friends who need child care in the near future or recent past.

Q10: Have you or a close friend or family member needed child care in the past five years, or do you or a close friend or family member anticipate needing child care in the next five years?



Over half (57%) of parents of a child under 18 have needed child care in the past five years, and 24% of parents of a child under 18 anticipate they will need child care in the next five years. When we just look at parents of a child under 13, the need for child care increases even more. Over three-quarters (77%) of parents of a child under 13 have needed child care in the past five years, and 34% of parents of a child under 13 anticipate they will need child care in the next five years.

Black voters are similar to voters overall in their child care needs. Over half (54%) have close experience with the need for child care. Among Black voters, 15% have had a recent need for child care, 10% anticipate the need child care in the next five years, 30% have close family or friends who needed child care in the recent past, and 16% have close family or friends who will need it in the near future.

DC voters see a role for DC government in bringing down the cost of child care and raising wages for the people who provide child care. DC voters overwhelmingly think that DC government should prioritize bringing down the costs of child care for families (83% a big or somewhat of a priority, 56% a big priority) and raising wages for child care and early education educators and teachers (79% a big or somewhat of a priority, 48% a big priority).

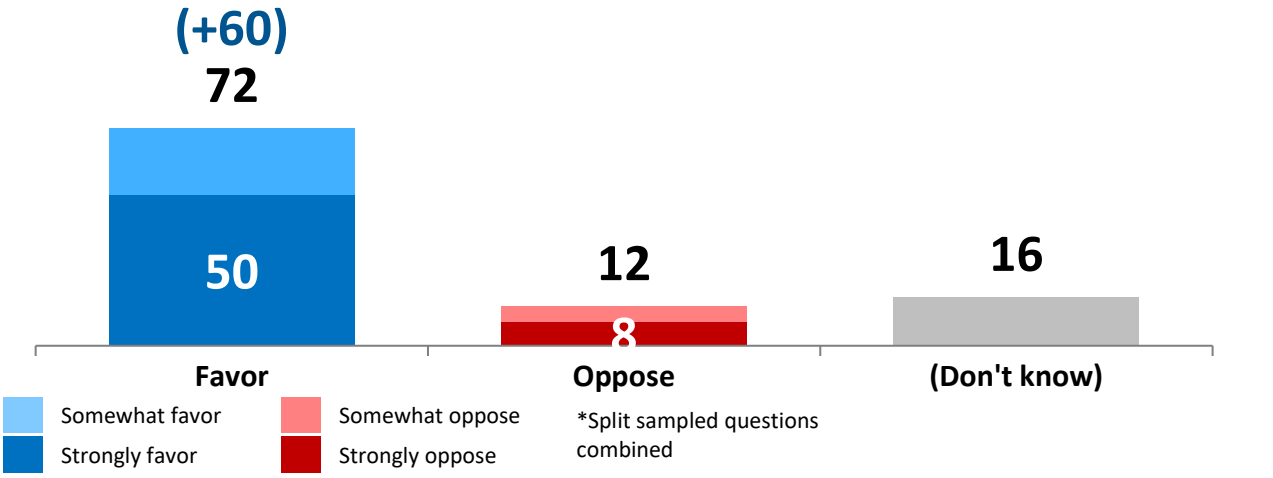
Parents of a child under age 13 are even more likely than voters overall to say DC government should prioritize bringing down costs and raising wages. Among parents of a child under 13, 90% say bringing down the cost of child care for families should be a priority for DC government (69% a big priority), and 85% say raising wages for child care and early education educators and teachers should be a priority for DC government (59% a big priority).

Black voters overwhelmingly believe bringing down costs and raising wages should be DC government priorities. Nine in ten (90%) Black voters say bringing down the cost of child care for families should be a priority for DC government (69% a big priority), and 86% say raising wages for child care and early education educators and teachers should be a priority for DC government (66% a big priority).

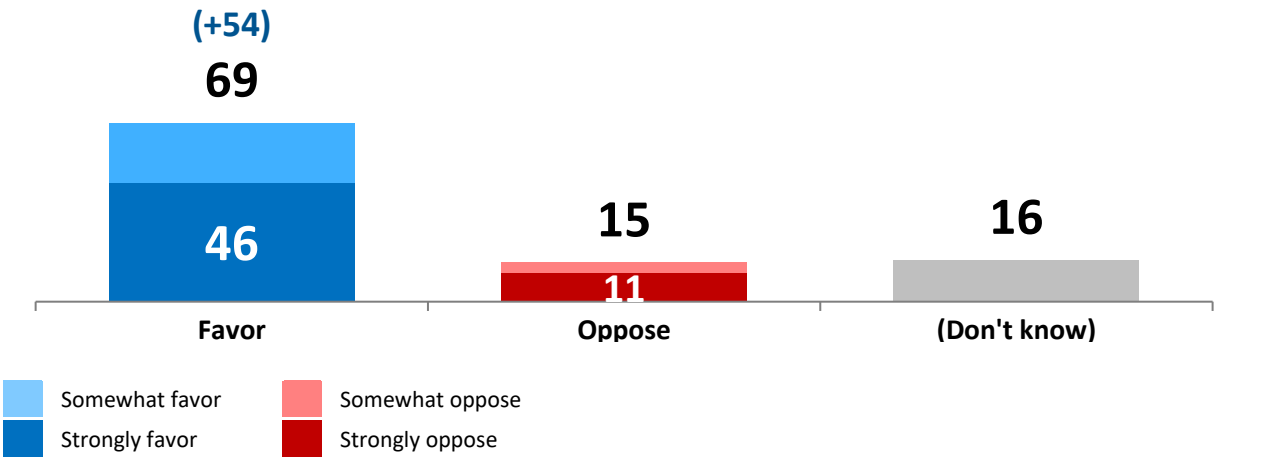
Funding Child Care

DC voters favor fully funding the Child Care Subsidy Program and the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund by huge margins and with strong intensity.

Q18/19: The Child Care Subsidy Program, which is currently underfunded and about to undergo an enrollment freeze, helps DC families pay for the cost of child care. The program supports families with low and moderate incomes, or other special circumstances that create a need for child care assistance, to access high-quality child education and care in the District. [The program is underfunded by $35 million and] the District's budget cuts funding for the Child Care Subsidy Program. Knowing what you know now, do you favor or oppose restoring and fully funding the Child Care Subsidy Program?*



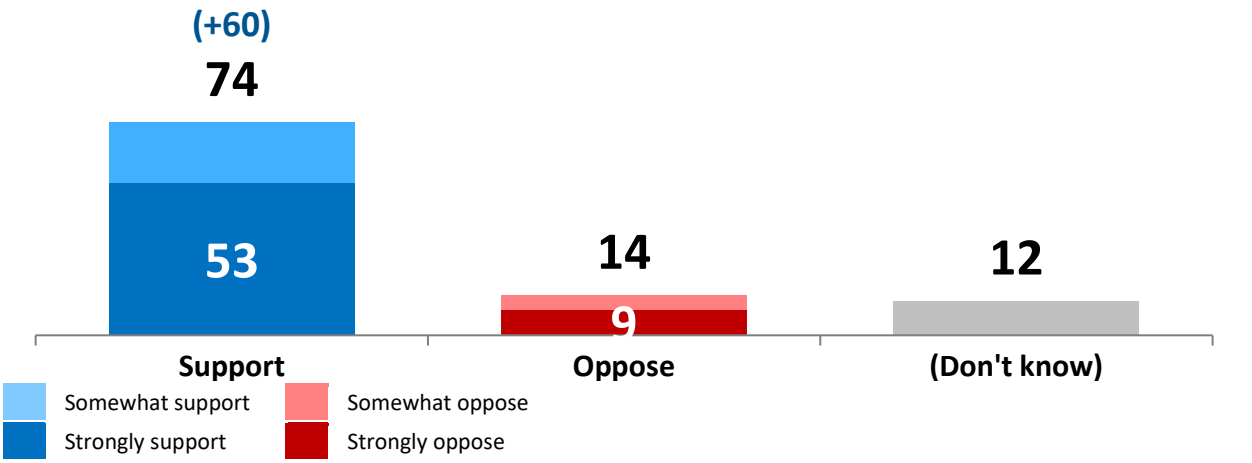
Q21: The Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund seeks to address low pay and promote recruitment and retention among child care and early education educators by bringing child care and early education educator salaries in line with similarly trained and certified public school teachers. The District's budget cuts funding for the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund which will cut the earnings of child care and early education educators by up to $25,000. Knowing what you know now, do you favor or oppose fully funding the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund?



Every demographic subgroup and voters across Wards favor fully funding the Child Care Subsidy Program and the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund. Black DC voters express robust support for funding both child care programs. Over three-quarters (77%) of Black DC voters favor restoring and fully funding the Child Care Subsidy Program (63% strongly favor), and over seven in ten (73%) Black DC voters favor fully funding the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund (54% strongly favor).

When informed that the "average cost of child care in the District is more than $2,000 per month, per child, more than what many families pay for housing," DC voters **overwhelmingly support a proposal to increase public investment in child care to lower the cost of child care to ensure no resident pays more than 7% of their income for care** (74% support, 53% strongly support).

Q17/Q27: Currently, the average cost of child care in the District is more than $2,000 per month, per child, more than what many families pay for housing. Do you support or oppose increasing public investment in child care to lower the cost of child care to ensure no resident pays more than 7% of their income for care?



DC voters overwhelmingly support the proposal to increase public investment in child care to lower the cost of child care across demographic subgroups and Wards. Strong support for the proposal to ensure that no residents pay more than 7% of their income for care through increasing public investment is even higher among the District's Black voters. Over three-quarters (79%) of Black voters support this proposal, and 62% strongly support it.

Child care is a budget priority in the District. Voters overwhelmingly believe it is important to maintain funding for fair pay for early educators and teachers and child care assistance in the DC Budget. By extremely wide margins, DC voters say it is important to them to maintain funding in the DC Budget for fair pay for early educators and teachers[1] (82% very or somewhat important, 66% very important) and child care assistance (73% very or somewhat important, 46% very important).

For DC's voters, maintaining funding in the Budget for fair pay for early educators and teachers is even more intensely important than other priorities like food assistance (80% very or somewhat important, 58% very important) and housing and rental assistance (81% very or somewhat important, 58% very important).

[1] Split sampled question

Similarly, for DC voters, maintaining funding in the budget for child care assistance is just as important as maintaining funding for the DC Child Tax Credit (72% very or somewhat important, 46% very important) and income assistance (72% very or somewhat important, 44% very important).

A whopping nine in ten parents of children under 13 say it is important to them to maintain funding for DC programs for children and families: fair pay for early educators and teachers (90% very or somewhat important, 80% very important), the DC Child Tax Credit (90% very or somewhat important, 63% very important), and child care assistance (89% very or somewhat important, 63% very important).

Among Black voters, 85% say it is very or somewhat important that the DC Budget maintain funding for fair pay for early educators and teachers (80% very important), and 73% say it is very or somewhat important to maintain funding for child care assistance (54% very important).

Voters have little appetite for a DC Budget that cuts funding for child care programs. Voters would be concerned if the DC Budget cuts funding for fair pay for early education teachers or child care assistance. Over eight in ten (82%) DC voters would be very or somewhat concerned, and 58% would be very concerned if the DC Budget cuts funding for fair pay for early education teachers. About two-thirds (68%) would be very or somewhat concerned, and 40% would be very concerned if the DC Budget cuts funding for child care assistance.

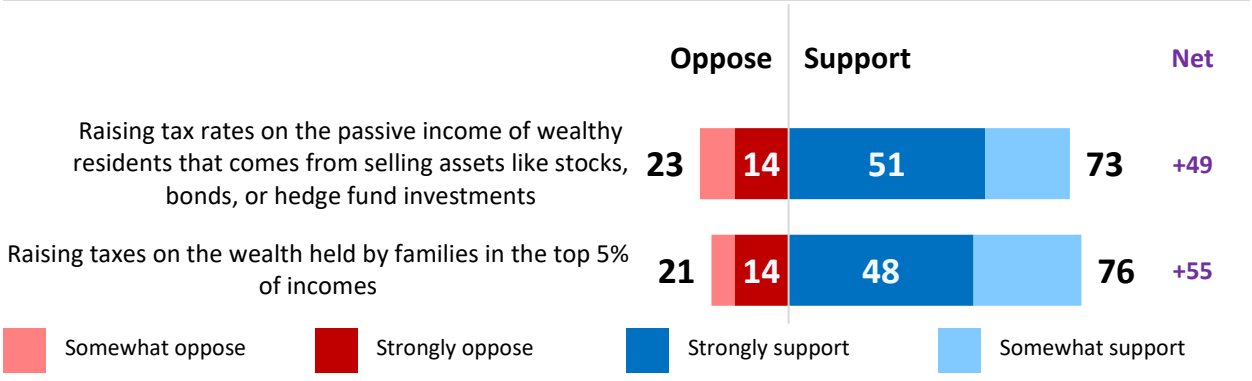
Voters are just as concerned as parents when it comes to these potential budget cuts: 54% of parents of a child under 13 feel very concerned about the DC budget cutting funding for fair pay for early educators and teachers, and 40% of parents of a child under 13 feel very concerned about the DC budget cutting funding for child care assistance. **Voters do not need a personal connection to child care programs to want to see them funded.**

Black voters also express considerable intense concern toward the idea that the DC Budget would cut funding for fair pay for early educators and teachers (90% feel very or somewhat concerned, 71% feel very concerned) or for child care assistance (75% feel very or somewhat concerned, 53% feel very concerned).

Voters' Attitudes toward Raising Revenue for Child Care

Voters appreciate that funding for the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund and the Child Care Subsidy Program needs a source, and they **robustly support raising taxes on the Districts' wealthiest and closing a business tax loophole.**

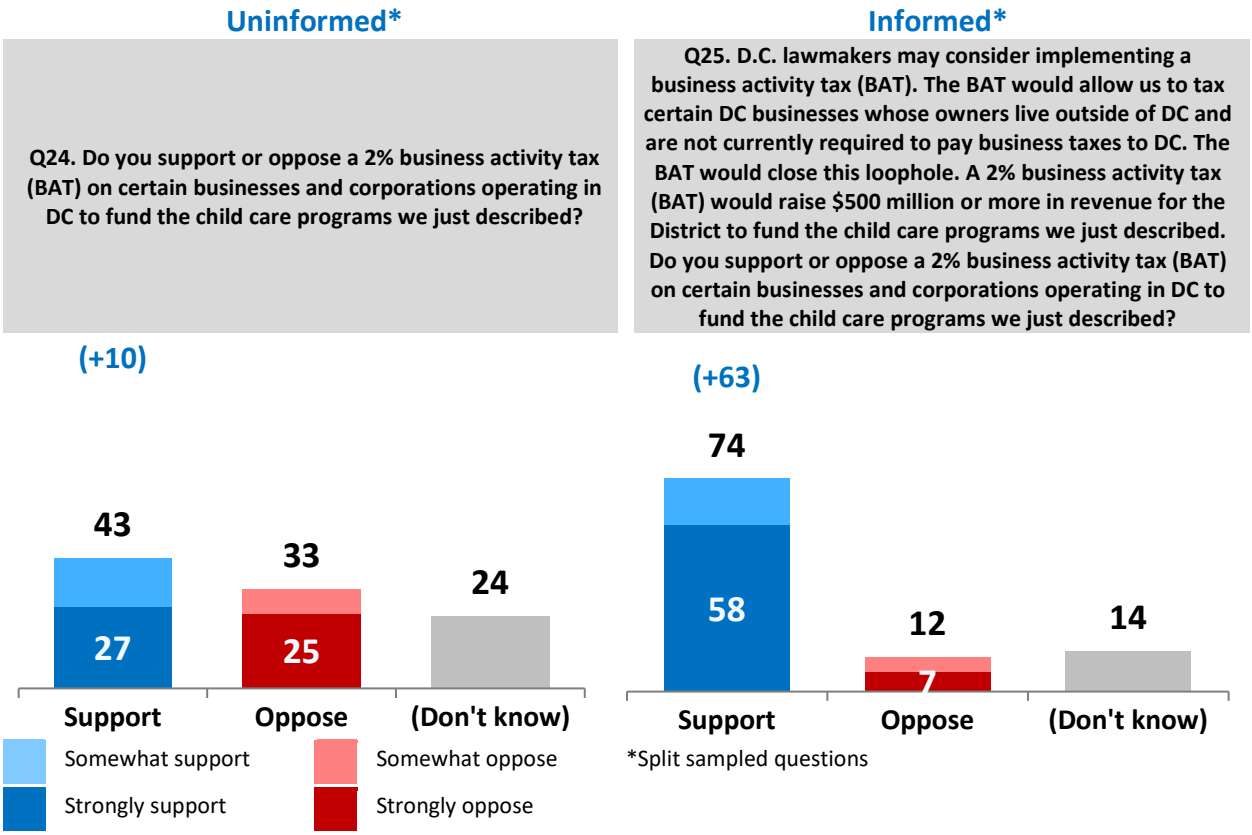
Q23. Do you support or oppose... to fund the child care programs we just described?



Every demographic subgroup and voters across Wards express widespread support for these wealth tax measures to fund child care programs. Over three-quarters of Black voters support both methods to raise funding for child care programs through taxing wealth. Seventy-eight percent of Black voters support raising tax rates on the passive income of wealthy residents that comes from selling assets like stocks, bonds, or hedge fund investments (59% strongly support). About eight in ten (79%) Black voters support raising taxes on the wealth held by families in the top 5% of incomes (57% strongly support).

Over seven in ten white voters support the wealth taxes to raise funds for child care programs. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of white voters support raising taxes on the wealth held by families in the top 5% of incomes (42% strongly support). Seven in ten (71%) white voters support raising tax rates on the passive income of wealthy residents that comes from selling assets like stocks, bonds, or hedge fund investments (47% strongly support).

DC voters also support a 2% business activity tax (BAT) on certain businesses and corporations operating in DC to fund the child care programs we describe in the survey. However, voters need education on the scope and purpose of the BAT; half of the voters surveyed heard a detailed description of the BAT, and we found DC voters are much more likely to support the BAT when informed – 74% support, 58% strongly support.



Black voters also support a BAT on certain businesses and corporations operating in DC to fund these child care programs. Black voters support a BAT without information (55% strongly or somewhat support, 37% strongly support), but the information about closing a loophole on owners who live outside of DC and the

information about raising $500 million or more in revenue increases support among Black voters drastically (83% support, 70% strongly support).

White voters support a BAT as a source of funding for the child care programs. Without information about the BAT, 40% of white voters support it, 21% strongly support it, 31% oppose it, and 29% don't know if they support or oppose a BAT. Providing information increases support among white voters drastically – 70% support it, 52% strongly support a BAT, and only 16% oppose it with 14% who don't know.

Methodology

Lake Research Partners designed and administered this phone survey that was conducted March 19 to 25, 2026 by text to online (a portion of the sample received a text to their cell phone with a link to complete the survey online) and phone using professional telephone interviewers. The survey reached a total of 500 likely 2026 voters in DC which includes a base sample of 400 likely 2026 voters, with an oversample of 100 parents of children ages 0-12 likely 2026 voters. The oversample was weighed down into the base sample to their proper proportion of the universe for a total sample size of 400.

Survey respondents were drawn from TargetSmart and screened to be likely 2026 voters. The data is statistically weighted to ensure the sample's demographic and political composition reflects that of likely 2026 voters in DC. The base sample of likely 2026 voters was weighted by region, region by gender, age, race by gender, and education and parents of children ages 0-12 were weighted by gender, region, race, race by gender, and education.

The margin of error is +/-4.4%.