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Spencer County Leaders Address Child Care Shortage, Explore Opportunities to Strengthen Local Workforce

Employer roundtable highlights child care barriers, tax incentives and collaborative solutions as SCEDA board members pursue additional opportunities to expand access

SPENCER COUNTY, Ind. – Access to reliable child care is becoming an increasingly important part of Spencer County's economic future, with local leaders working to address a shortage that affects working families, employers and the community's ability to support continued growth.

North Spencer School Superintendent Chad Schieders hosted a recent employer child care roundtable, bringing together local industry leaders and community stakeholders to explore solutions that support employees, strengthen businesses and address child care challenges throughout Spencer County.

Representatives of the Spencer County Economic Development Authority (SCEDA) recently participated in an employer child care roundtable focused on identifying barriers to child care access, exploring financial incentives for businesses and encouraging greater collaboration among employers, educators and community organizations.

The discussion comes as local data illustrates the challenges facing Spencer County families. According to information presented by Uplands Smart Start, approximately 908 children under age 6 need child care, while the county has a total regulated child care capacity of just 290 seats. An estimated 68% of children needing care lack access to regulated programs, and only 98 seats are offered through programs meeting Indiana's high-quality standards.

For local employers, the shortage creates challenges extending beyond individual families. Limited child care options can affect employee attendance, workforce participation,

recruitment and retention, making child care an important consideration in the county's broader economic development strategy.

"Spencer County has tremendous opportunities ahead, but economic growth means more than attracting new businesses and investment," said Spencer County Commissioner Heather Gries, who serves as chair of SCEDA. "We have to make sure the people who live and work here have the resources they need to succeed. Child care is a critical part of that conversation. By bringing employers, community leaders and service providers together, we can build on the work already happening in our county and identify solutions that support our families and strengthen our workforce."

A central focus of the roundtable was Indiana's expanded Employer Child Care Expenditure Credit under House Enrolled Act 1177.

Camille D. Blunt, representing the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, discussed recent legislative changes designed to make the tax credit more accessible to businesses investing in employee child care support.

Under the expanded provisions, qualifying businesses with 500 or fewer employees may be eligible for a state tax credit covering 50% of eligible child care expenditures, up to \$100,000 per employer, subject to program requirements and statewide funding limits.

The expanded incentive creates opportunities for businesses to consider child care investments beyond constructing new facilities, including certain financial arrangements and partnerships with licensed child care providers.

Jennifer Myers, director of Uplands Smart Start, also shared examples of child care initiatives being implemented across Indiana, including employer-supported child care seats, shared tuition models and partnerships designed to expand access to high-quality early learning programs.

Participants discussed how these approaches could help communities address child care challenges while recognizing the financial and operational realities facing both employers and child care providers.

"One of the most important things we can do is bring the right people together and understand where the barriers exist," said Christy Powell, director of SCEDA. "We know child care affects whether people can participate in the workforce, and we recognize that employers and providers face challenges of their own. There is not going to be a one-size-fits-all solution for Spencer County. Our focus is on identifying opportunities that make sense for our businesses, support our families and create sustainable progress for the community."

SCEDA Board Members Explore Additional Child Care Opportunities

Beyond the roundtable, SCEDA board members are independently exploring opportunities that could help expand child care availability in Spencer County.

As part of those efforts, board members have been in discussions with Communication Logistics Inc. (CLI), which owns an existing building adjacent to Nancy Hanks Elementary School. The company has expressed a willingness to lease or sell the property for potential child care use.

While discussions remain preliminary and no formal child care project has been announced, the property presents a possible location for community partners to evaluate as they consider opportunities to increase local child care capacity.

Additional considerations would include facility suitability, potential operating partners, financing and the needs of families and employers throughout the county.

"Addressing child care challenges requires more than recognizing that a need exists. We have to explore practical opportunities and bring together people who can help move solutions forward," Powell said. "Our board members are taking an active interest in identifying possibilities within the community, including potential facilities and partnerships that could help increase access to care. These conversations are an important part of understanding what may be achievable for Spencer County."

Building on Spencer County's Economic Development Efforts

For SCEDA, addressing child care access is part of a broader approach to economic development that recognizes the relationship between business investment, workforce readiness and quality of life.

As Spencer County continues to pursue new economic opportunities, local leaders recognize that issues such as housing, infrastructure, workforce development and child care are interconnected. Preparing for future growth requires consideration of the services and resources that allow residents and businesses to thrive.

SCEDA's approach emphasizes collaboration with existing businesses, local government, educational institutions and community partners while building on the efforts that have helped shape Spencer County's economy.

"Success will not come from one organization or one employer solving this alone," Gries said. "It will come from listening, working together and making thoughtful decisions that support both the people who have built this community and the generations who will shape its future."

Moving forward, continued conversations with employers, child care providers and community stakeholders will be important in identifying potential partnerships, evaluating available resources and determining which approaches can best address Spencer County's needs.

About the Spencer County Economic Development Authority

The Spencer County Economic Development Authority (SCEDA) works to strengthen Spencer County's economy by supporting existing businesses, encouraging new investment and advancing initiatives that improve infrastructure, workforce readiness and quality of life. Through collaboration with local government, employers and community partners, SCEDA is committed to responsible, sustainable growth that builds on the county's strengths and creates opportunities for future generations.

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