

Building a Unified Early Childhood System in Nevada



The Issue

Nevada’s children and families cannot reach their full potential because **our early childhood system is broken.**

The challenge is not a lack of commitment—it is a governance structure that disperses responsibility across multiple agencies, statutes, and budget accounts without clear accountability for results. This fragmentation creates barriers for families and providers, and dilutes the impact and efficiency of state resources.

Early childhood governance reform addresses this structural issue by aligning authority, funding, and oversight to ensure public dollars are used efficiently and transparently.

Why Early Childhood Matters:

- Research shows a significant developmental gap between kindergarteners from wealthier and poorer families. In fact, this gap is so significant that, for most kids, it never goes away; they enter kindergarten behind and leave high school still behind.
- Studies have estimated the profound societal costs of not preparing kids for kindergarten—in terms of future poor job prospects, reliance on the social safety net, and crime.
- Early childhood care and education can also enable a child’s parents to work. This yields economic benefits to the family now, but also to society later. Research shows a strong correlation between the employment status of a child’s parents and that child’s economic prospects as an adult.
- Societal investments in early childhood supports are a strategy to level the playing field for children from poorer families, to make the job of our K-12 educators more manageable, and to reduce the likelihood of massive social program costs for decades to come.

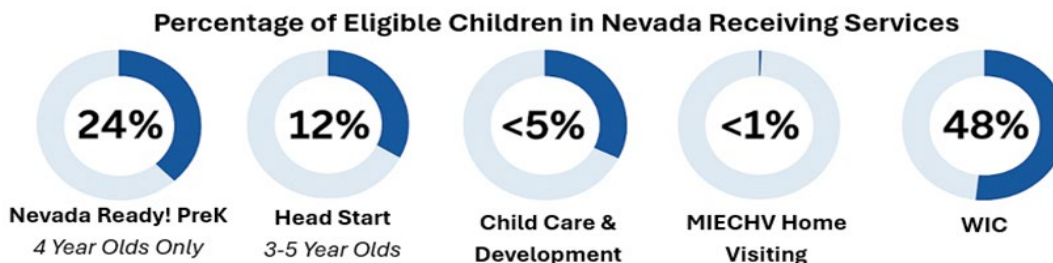
90%
of brain development occurs before age 5 - making this the most critical period to set the foundation for learning, health and behavior

The Fiscal and Accountability Problem

Nevada’s early childhood system currently spans:

- 18 state entities focused exclusively on early childhood
- 45 additional entities serving early childhood alongside other populations
- 26 chapters of Nevada Revised Statutes
- 40 separate state budget accounts

This fragmentation complicates budgeting, limits strategic planning, and makes it difficult for lawmakers to track outcomes, identify redundancies, or ensure funds are reaching intended populations. It also contributes to underutilization of programs, reducing potential impact and desired outcomes for the system as a whole.



Governance Reform—Not More Government

Establishing a Nevada Department of Early Childhood is not about creating more government. It is about modernizing governance to improve the performance of existing investments. It is about efficiency, transparency and good governance.

A Department of Early Childhood would:

- Create a single point of accountability for early childhood policy, funding, and outcomes – reducing administrative duplication and improving operational efficiency.
- Improve budget transparency by aligning programs under one department – enabling Nevada to maximize state and federal funding by improving coordination and reducing administrative barriers.
- Strengthen legislative and gubernatorial oversight through clearer reporting and performance measures – allowing for data-driven budget decisions based on outcomes and return on investment.

National research consistently shows early childhood investments yield a return of \$7–\$13 for every dollar spent, largely through reduced remediation, special education, healthcare, and social service costs.

Impact on Workforce and Economic Growth

Reliable access to early childhood services supports workforce participation and economic stability. Governance reform strengthens the systems families and employers depend on, while ensuring state investments are aligned with Nevada’s long-term economic goals.

A Proven, Bipartisan Model

States across the political spectrum—including Alabama, Georgia, Colorado, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Oregon—have established Departments or Offices of Early Childhood to improve efficiency and accountability. Others have adopted phased approaches to align governance before consolidation.

These reforms demonstrate that early childhood governance modernization is a fiscally responsible, bipartisan solution.

Why This Matters

A Nevada Department of Early Childhood provides lawmakers with:

- Clear accountability for outcomes and expenditures
- Improved oversight of state and federal funds
- Better alignment between early childhood investments and K–12 outcomes
- A stronger foundation for long-term fiscal sustainability

A Nevada Department of Early Childhood supports families:

- Simplifies access to child care, early learning, and early intervention services and supports
- Reduces administrative bureaucracy and conflicting rules to make programs more accessible
- Puts the developmental needs of children at the center of decision-making
- Increases family choice and workforce participation to support economic self-sufficiency

This reform ensures Nevada’s early childhood dollars work harder—without expanding government—and delivers measurable results for children, families, and taxpayers.



Kids First Nevada is a statewide coalition focused on aligning early childhood programs and modernizing governance structures to improve access, efficiency, accountability, and outcomes for Nevada’s youngest children.

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