



NEW MEXICO

Early Childhood

Education & Care Department

Legislative
Session 2026
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Family Guide to New Mexico's *2026 Legislative Session*

- 1 Why This Guide Matters
- 2 How New Mexico's Legislative Session Works
- 3 How Can Families Participate
- 4 Sharing Your Support on Social Media
- 5 Why Universal Child Care Matters for New Mexico
- 6 At a Glance: Child Care Zoning Bill
- 7 At a Glance: Tax Credit Incentive Bill

Welcome!



The Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) was created in 2019 to bring New Mexico's early childhood programs together in one place. ECECD supports children and families from pregnancy through age 5, along with the early childhood professionals who care for and serve them. This includes programs such as child care, PreK, home visiting, early intervention, and other services that help families with young children thrive.

Why This Guide Matters

Each January, New Mexico's lawmakers gather in Santa Fe. This meeting, called the legislative session, is when they make new laws and decide how to spend state money. The choices they make can change early childhood programs — both now and for years to come.

This guide is meant to help families understand:

- What the legislative session is and why it matters
- How a bill becomes a law
- How families can participate and make their voice heard
- Which early childhood issues ECECD is working on this year

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is written for families, but please share it with anyone in your community who cares about young children in New Mexico.

Remember: your voice matters! The decisions lawmakers make affect programs and services for all New Mexicans — including you and your family.

How New Mexico's Legislative Session Works

At the beginning of each year, New Mexico's elected leaders meet at the State Capitol, called the Roundhouse, for the legislative session. These leaders are called legislators. They work in two groups, the Senate and the House of Representatives. Together, these two groups make up New Mexico's Legislature.

The state holds two types of regular sessions: 60-day "long sessions" happen in odd-numbered years like 2025 and 2027. Legislators can discuss any topic during these sessions.

30-day "short sessions" happen in even-numbered years like 2026 and 2028. These focus mainly on the state budget and specific topics the Governor asks them to consider. The Governor can also call special sessions at other times of the year if something urgent comes up.

How New Mexico's Legislative Session Works



STEP 1: A BILL IS INTRODUCED

Sample text: Optimize the health, development, education, and well-being of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers through a family-driven, equitable, community-based system of high-quality prenatal and early childhood programs and services.



STEP 2: THE BILL GOES TO A COMMITTEE

The bill starts in one chamber—either the House or the Senate. A small group of lawmakers, called a committee, reviews the bill. They talk about it, ask questions, and may suggest changes.



STEP 4: THE FULL HOUSE OR SENATE VOTES

The bill is debated and voted on by all members of the House or the Senate. This is called a floor vote.

The bill goes to the other chamber: If the bill passes one chamber, it goes to the other one (House or Senate) to repeat the same steps.



STEP 3: THE COMMITTEE VOTES

The committee decides whether the bill should move forward. Each bill is typically reviewed by least two committees and must pass each.

- If they vote **yes**, the bill continues.
- If they vote **no**, the bill usually stops.



STEP 5: THE GOVERNOR DECIDES

If both chambers pass the bill, it goes to the Governor. The Governor can:

- Sign it into law
- Governor can veto with or without message or pocket veto



STEP 6: THE BILL BECOMES LAW

If the Governor signs the bill, it becomes a law. Some laws start right away. Others begin later in the year.



You might be wondering: "Can regular people like me get involved in making laws?"

The answer is yes! All legislative sessions and meetings are open to the public. See page 3 for all the ways you can participate.

How Can Families *Participate*?

Watch online

You can watch live or recorded committee meeting and House and Senate sessions.

Website: www.nmlegis.gov

Share your story!

Talk about how a bill affects your family or your experience as a parent or caregiver.

Attend in-person

Anyone can visit the Capitol in Santa Fe. It's free and open to everyone. Families can:

- Sit in the chamber galleries and watch House and Senate floor sessions
- Attend committee meetings
- Also visit legislator's offices to leave documents or messages with staff

Schedules are posted on the Legislature website and updated daily during the session nmlegis.gov/Calendar/Session, shows when hearings and floor sessions are happening. Capitol staff are available throughout the building and can help direct you to the correct room.

Families are invited to attend Early Childhood Day at the Roundhouse from 10 a.m.–3 p.m., Saturday, February 14.

This is a welcoming, family-friendly event at the State Capitol where ECECD and our partners share resources, celebrate early childhood, and connect with families.

Contact your legislators

Your state senator and representative want to hear from you. Not sure who your legislators are?

Visit: nmlegis.gov/Members/Find_My_Legislator

How to reach them:

- Call the session switchboard at **505-986-4300** and leave a message
- Email them directly (contact info is on their legislative profile)

You don't need to be an expert—your experience as a parent, caregiver, or community member matters. A short, polite message is powerful:

For technical questions about the nmlegis.gov website or for general questions about the Legislature [Contact the Legislative Council Service](#) by sending an email to lcs@nmlegis.gov.

See the next page for email and telephone scripts to guide your messaging. 

Conclusion

Legislative sessions are always an exciting time for New Mexicans. It's when legislators make big choices that impact you, your children, and your community. We hope this guide helps you feel more comfortable with the process and empowers you to participate. Remember: the lawmakers at the Roundhouse represent you and care about what families have to say. You can watch from home, call your representatives and senators, participate in Early Childhood Day, or even testify at a hearing. No matter what, you and your family are a part of New Mexico's future.

Sharing Your Support *on Social Media*

Access All Social Media Graphics Here

(English and Spanish)

Video Testimonial Series:

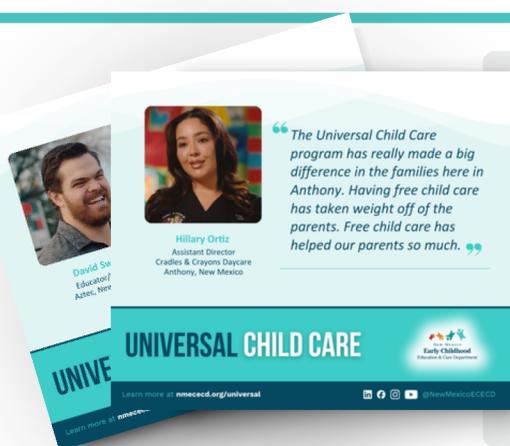
Suggested caption:

Universal Child Care makes a real difference for families and educators across New Mexico. This story is one example of how access to child care supports parents, children, and our communities.

[Insert Video Link Here]

Watch and learn why protecting Universal Child Care matters.

Suggested #s: #UniversalChildCare #ChildCareForAll #MakingHistory #NewMexicoECECD #FirstInTheNation



Youtube Links:

Hillary Ortiz Video

<https://tinyurl.com/4wh8buye>

Dawn Green Video

<https://tinyurl.com/y9xwvey2>

Karen Sanchez Video

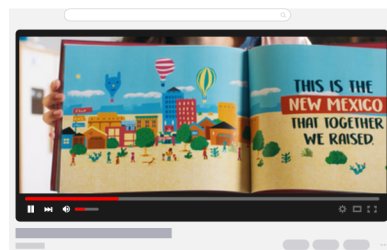
<https://tinyurl.com/5n87b42w>

David Sweet Video

<https://tinyurl.com/yw7fxdwk>

You can share the Universal Child Care Storybook too!

<https://tinyurl.com/23hvdv95>



Family Voices Series:

Suggested caption:

Universal Child Care affects families' ability to work, learn, and care for their children. These stories highlight what access to child care means for New Mexico families.

Suggested #s: #VoicesFromNM #UniversalChildCare #NMCommunity



Family Guide to New Mexico's 2026 Legislation Session

Why Universal Child Care Matters for New Mexico

New Mexico became the first state in the nation to offer no-cost, universal child care on November 1, 2025. This created better access to families no matter their income, with savings of \$14K on average, and often much more - per child each year. This historic investment makes families stronger and more stable, supports the early childhood workforce, and gives families access to higher quality child care.

How it helps New Mexico's Economy

More parents can work or return to work: When child care is affordable and reliable, parents can get jobs, keep jobs, or increase the number of hours they work.

More jobs in child care: Free child care increases demand, which helps child care programs grow and hire more staff.

Families have more money: When families do not have to pay for child care, they can save money or spend it on other needs like rent, food, medicine and local businesses.

Businesses are more likely to come to New Mexico: Families and employers want to live and work where there is good, reliable child care. Universal child care gives New Mexico an advantage.

What this means for New Mexico families. Families who work or go to school can get child care assistance with:

No income limits: Families qualify no matter how much they earn.

No co-pays: Child care is free—no monthly payments or hidden costs.

Flexible schedules: Families can choose care that works for their lives. Kinship caregivers, grandparents raising grandchildren, and unhoused families can qualify even if they are not working.

More opportunities: Parents and caregivers can work, train for new careers, or go back to school—helping their own families and the state's economy.

Let your legislator know that by approving ECECD's FY27 budget request of \$160.6 million for universal child care, they will:

- Help families meet their money plans in the future.
- Make it easier for families to find good, safe places for their children to stay and learn.
- Support better pay and clear job goals for early childhood workers.
- Help families grow, and communities become stronger.

What the \$160.6M FY27 Investment Delivers:

- Universal eligibility • Provider stability •

56,800

• Infants • Toddlers •
Preschool • School-age

**Children
Served
Statewide**

Projected **Increase** in Children Served

by June 2027 Compared
to Pre-UCC FY25 Baseline

+24K

\$606M

State + federal
funds combined

**Total
Child Care
Spending**



Explore high-level information on ECECD's 2026 legislative priorities at our website!

Toolkits, one-pagers, and calendar of events available at nmeccd.org/2026-legislative-session

At A Glance: For Families *Child Care Zoning Requirement Act*



What is this Bill?

New Mexico is working toward Universal Child Care, so families throughout the state can find care where they live, work, and go to school. To make that possible, we need more child care options in every community. Right now, local zoning rules make it hard for child care programs to open or grow. The Child Care Zoning Requirement fixes this by creating clear, statewide rules that make it easier to open child care homes and centers.

Why is this Bill Needed?

Many child care providers face barriers like:

- Not being allowed in housing areas
- Slow, expensive approvals
- Extra rules that do not apply to other homes or businesses
- High fees, permits, or parking requirements
- Rules from homeowner associations that don't allow child care in homes (HOAs)

These issues make it harder for families to find safe child care and slow down the push for Universal Child Care.

Why it Matters

To deliver Universal Child Care to all families who need it, New Mexico needs about 15,700 more child care spaces.

If passed, **this bill will help people who want to open and expand their child care programs**, especially those who want to offer child care in their homes with flexible care that works for all families.

What Does the Child Care Zoning Requirement Do?

Removes red tape and supports those who want to open child care centers by:

- Allowing child care homes in areas where families live
- Allowing child care centers in areas with houses, apartments and businesses all together
- Treating child care like other homes and businesses in the same area
- Cutting out extra costs and taxes
- Making fewer and simpler rules for parking and building



Call to Action

Support the Child Care Zoning Requirement and help bring child care to families and make communities across New Mexico stronger.

At A Glance: For Families *Tax Credit Incentive for Donations to Child Care Facilities*



Why this Matters

Child care helps New Mexicans work. Families, employers, and communities depend on child care providers every day. Parents and caregivers can only work when they have safe, reliable child care. Many child care providers are small businesses that need extra support to grow and serve all the families in their neighborhood.

What this Bill Does

- This bill allows people and businesses to get an income tax credit when they donate to a child care program licensed by ECECD
- This encourages businesses and people to give money to child care centers
- It makes it easier for child care providers to tap into community support
- The bill supports both child care centers and home-based programs, many of which are small, local businesses

*Tax Credit
Incentive for
Donations to Child
Care Facilities
unlocks new
funding streams
for child care
providers*

What It Means for Families and Providers

- It enable child care providers to fundraise for projects and enhancements that are not typically covered by their base budgets
- Donations can be used to buy new books, toys, and playground equipment, or invest in staff training
- These donations help centers expand so more families in your neighborhood can find a spot for their child



Bottom Line

This bill helps child care providers raise funds, helps families support the care they trust, and strengthens New Mexico's child care system.

