



July 26, 2024

The Honorable Matt Cartwright
2102 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Cartwright,

Northeastern Pennsylvania continues to set historic marks with the lowest unemployment rate in decades (3.6% as of May 2024*). This is, at one level, something to celebrate—a sign that our local economy is thriving. That said, a decrease in unemployment also leaves a smaller pool of available workers to fill the existing job openings.

As of this writing, there are more than 2,100 job openings (May 2024*) in Lackawanna County across a broad range of business sectors and job categories.

The reality is that there are a number of barriers to hiring certain cohorts of workers, such as job readiness, access to transportation, language, and the availability of affordable childcare, to name just a few. These barriers demand collaboration between and among employers, service providers, the public sector, and prospective employees themselves.

The issues surrounding childcare are particularly unique in that the system is challenged on multiple levels.

First, the cost of childcare for many working families can be disproportionate to the amount of their household income—in many cases making more sense for one parent/guardian to stay home with young children. Further, this situation impacts women at much higher levels than men—and, in the end, has the effect of keeping talented, productive individuals out of the workforce, lowers the income capacity of families during important formative years, and leaves employers with even fewer qualified workers to fill the above-referenced need.

Second, childcare has barriers from the provider's perspective, too. Regulations on staffing ratios, the high cost of education, and certifications at levels that often make it cost-prohibitive for providers to maintain operations. The result is that many providers, particularly in the private sector, are simply closing their doors, reducing the availability of childcare, and further exacerbating the problem.

These barriers leave employers short of needed talent, providers without enough experienced and qualified workers, families without access to services, and costs that lead many to stay out of the workforce.

As elected officials, you have heard all of these arguments, and a number of public policy options have been and are being advanced in multiple forums to address the issues surrounding affordable childcare.

The Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce calls upon its northeastern delegation in Harrisburg and the U.S. Congress to examine these challenges and recognize it for what it is: a systemic problem having an enormous negative impact on our economy and society. The Chamber stands prepared to work with you and engage experts in the childcare field to seek reasonable opportunities to resolve this complex matter.

I thank you for your kind attention to the concerns of our local business community and the families and individuals that make them run.

*Source: PA Department of Labor and Industry

Sincerely,



Jerry Musheno, Esq.
Chair, The Chamber



Vince Galko
Chair, Government Affairs Committee



Bob Durkin
President, The Chamber