INAEYC 2026 Legislative Session Priorities

INTRODUCTION

The Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children (INAEYC) is committed to ensuring that every child, birth through age eight, has access to high-quality early learning experiences supported by a well-prepared, compensated early childhood workforce. As Indiana faces challenges in early care and education access, workforce shortages, and affordability, our 2026 legislative public policy priorities call for strategic investments and policy solutions that strengthen early childhood education as a cornerstone of the state's economic and social well-being. These priorities and emphasize:

1. **Advocate for the linking of Kindergarten Readiness Indicators and increased IREAD scores to early learning experiences.**
   - INAEYC will develop a comprehensive briefing document to empower members to effectively communicate with legislators, highlighting the critical connection between early childhood education and long-term academic success. The brief will present data demonstrating how investments in early years and Kindergarten readiness drive improve student outcomes in higher grades.
2. **Advocate for the update and review of Indiana Child Care Licensing Regulations.**
   - Leverage ELAC's Indiana Licensing Framework report to review and identify outdated regulations that can be modernized to reduce costs for programs without compromising the health and safety of children and educator competence and qualifications. Submit targeted recommendations to legislators to support informed decision-making and promote a more efficient and effective regulatory environment.
3. **Advocate for the allocation of dedicated funding for Early Childhood Education.**
   - Conduct a thorough review of the current funding structure, evaluating whether early childhood education is best served within FSSA, Department of Education or an alternative state agency.

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INAEYC Chapter Locations

CENTRAL REGION Boone, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Johnson, Marion, Shelby

EAST CENTRAL REGION
Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Madison, Randolph, Rush, Union, Wayne

EVANSVILLE REGION Crawford, Daviess, Dubois, Gibson, Knox, Martin, Orange, Perry, Pike, Posey, Spencer, Vanderburgh, Warrick

NORTH CENTRAL REGION
Formerly Tippecanoe County Region
Benton, Carroll, Cass, Clinton, Fountain, Howard, Miami, Montgomery, Tippecanoe, Tipton, Warren, White

NORTH EASTERN REGION
Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, Whitley

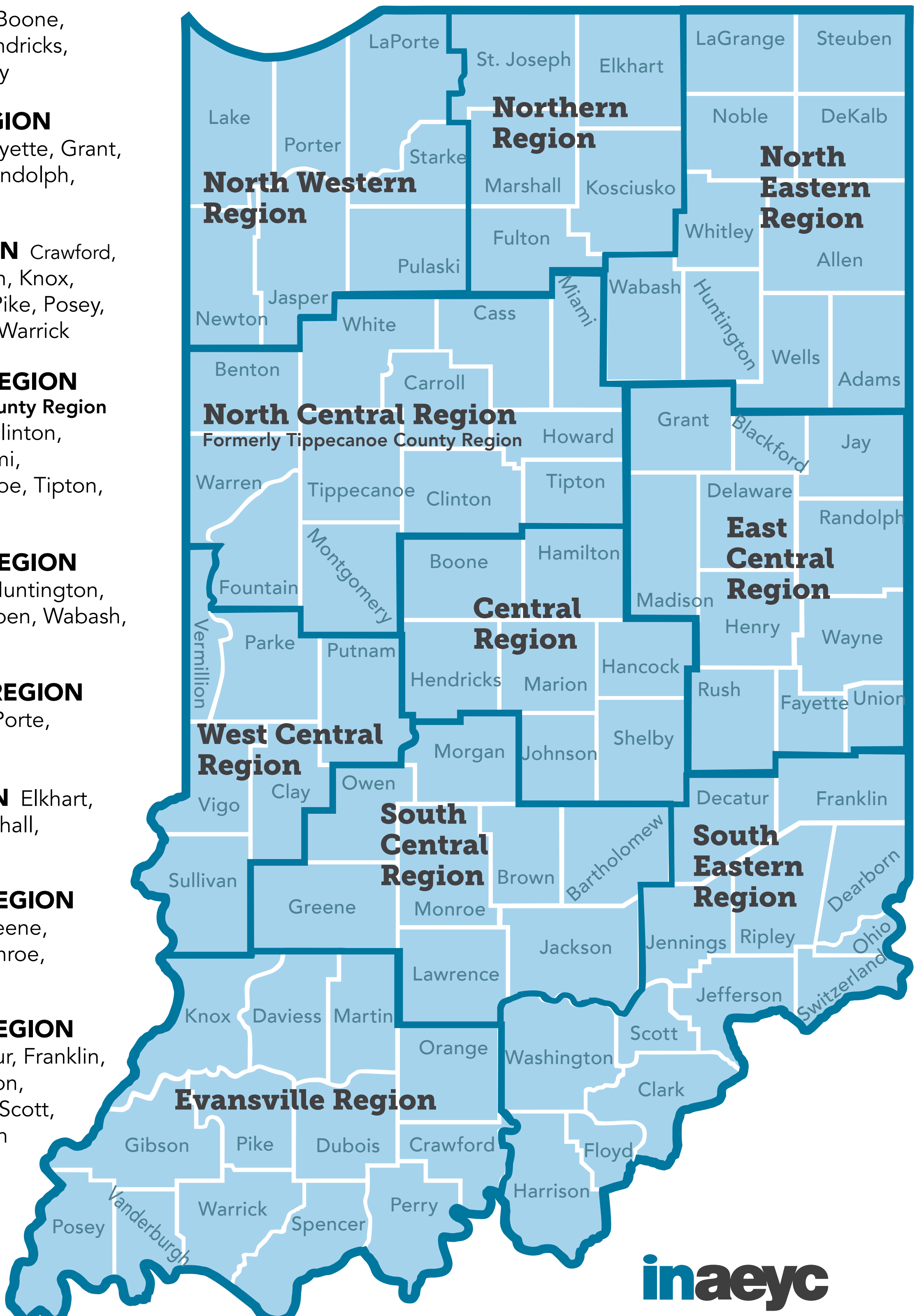
NORTH WESTERN REGION
Lake, Porter, Jasper, LaPorte, Newton, Pulaski, Starke

NORTHERN REGION Elkhart, Fulton, Kosciusko, Marshall, St. Joseph

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION
Bartholomew, Brown, Greene, Jackson, Lawrence, Monroe, Morgan, Owen

SOUTH EASTERN REGION
Clark, Dearborn, Decatur, Franklin, Floyd, Harrison, Jefferson, Jennings, Ohio, Ripley, Scott, Switzerland, Washington

WEST CENTRAL REGION
Clay, Parke, Putnam, Sullivan, Vermillion, Vigo



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Updated: 7.1.2022

An Affiliate of naeyc

Indiana Early Childhood Education Day at the Statehouse

February 5, 2026

Invest in Indiana's Future: Early Childhood Education Matters

Why Early Childhood Education (ECE) is Critical

- **Foundation for Success:** The first five years are the most important for brain development. High-quality ECE builds cognitive, social, and emotional skills that last a lifetime.
- **Not Just Childcare:** ECE is education that prepares children for school and life.

Kindergarten Readiness

- Children in quality ECE programs enter kindergarten ready to learn.
- Kindergarten readiness predicts third-grade reading proficiency—a key indicator of future academic success.
- Early learning closes achievement gaps before they start.

Support for Families

- Families depend on ECE for safe, nurturing environments while parents work.
- Affordable, high-quality care strengthens family stability and economic security.
- Reliable child care helps businesses thrive and communities grow.

Indiana Early Childhood Education Day at the Statehouse

Invest in Indiana's Future: Early Childhood Education Matters

Economic Development Impact

- Child care is **critical infrastructure** for Indiana's economy.
- Every $1 invested in ECE returns $7–$13 in long-term benefits through stronger workforce participation and reduced social costs.
- Employers cite child care challenges as a top barrier to hiring and retention — solving this strengthens Indiana's competitiveness.

The Current Landscape Highlight: The CCDF Crisis

- The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is a lifeline for working families, but funding is falling short.
- Without increased investment, thousands of families risk losing access to affordable care.
- Providers face rising costs and staffing shortages, threatening program quality and availability.
- Early childhood programs need intentional training and ongoing Technical Assistance (TA) to ensure high quality experiences for young children, support educators, and sustain strong systems.

Our Ask

- **Increase CCDF funding** to maintain access to affordable, high-quality child care.
- **Support wage increases for early childhood educators** to stabilize the workforce.
- **Invest in statewide early learning programs** to promote kindergarten readiness.
- **Recognize child care as essential economic infrastructure** and prioritize policies that strengthen access and affordability.

Together, we can build a stronger Indiana by investing in our youngest learners.

Families Understanding Quality, Access, and the CCDF Crisis in Indiana

What Is CCDF? The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) helps eligible families pay for child care so parents can work, go to school, or attend training.

Who qualifies?

Those who:

- Earn less than 135% of the Federal Poverty Level
- Are currently employed or actively working in an education/training program
- Have children that meet these requirements:
  - Are under 13 years old or under 19 years old if they have a documented special need
  - Are a U.S. citizen or qualified legal alien
- Choose a child care program that is eligible to accept CCDF vouchers

What does it cover? Part or full cost of care at licensed centers, homes, or ministries

Where to apply?

Families can apply for assistance at FSSA at **https://www.in.gov/fssa/carefinder/child-care-assistance**

As a reminder, there is a waitlist for CCDF enrollment, and you will be placed on the list once you submit your application. Priority on the waitlist will be given to OMWPK applicants, families who earn below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and children of child care workers. All other applicants will receive vouchers on a first-come, first-served basis as funding is available. Spanish and provides online support and videos to help guide you through the process

What's Changed in Indiana (2025)

No new enrollments through the end of 2025 (waitlist is back)
Voucher rate cuts: Up to 35% less funding for school-age care
Fewer providers: Some centers are closing or limiting spots due to funding loss

What High-Quality Child Care Looks Like

Look For

Warm, responsive teachers
Safe, clean environment
Age-appropriate learning
Family involvement
Accreditation (e.g., NAEYC)

Watch Out For

High Staff Turnover
Overcrowded or chaotic rooms
Too much screen time
Lack of communication
No clear curriculum

High Quality Comes with High Expenses!

Small in size, child care businesses are mighty in their economic reach

Revenue

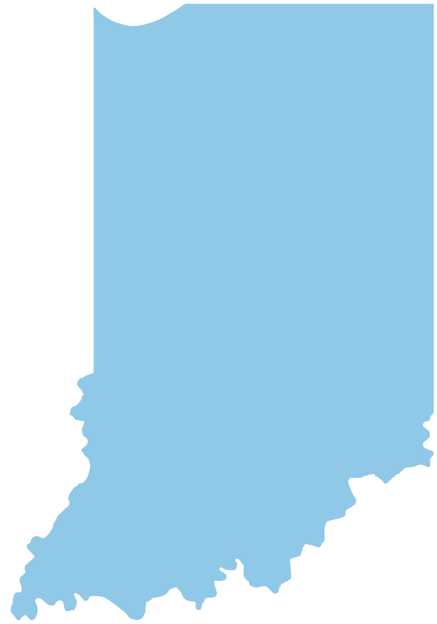
Operating Expenses

Rent/Mortgage and Utilities

Supplies & Equipment

Business Operations

Salaries



Child care costs **$12K+ yearly per child**

Median early childhood educator wage is **$11.95/hour**

Programs can't raise wages without charging more than families can afford to pay. Educators can't afford to continue to work.

Impact On Economy

A **lack of accessible childcare** causes parents to miss work, decrease hours or leave the workforce thus **Indiana loses $4.22 billion per year in productivity.**

How To Fix The Problem

Public & private investment into child care programs and educators.

Regard child care as part of **Indiana crucial infrastructure.**

Fund a system that works and is shared by families, businesses and the government.

What You Can Do

- **Join the conversation:** Share your story with local leaders, legislators, find your legislator on the **Indiana Goverment Assembly** website at **https://iga.in.gov/information/find-legislators**
- **Stand by your child's program:** Champion the educators, values, and learning environment that help your child thrive, because when you support their foundation, you strengthen their future.
- **Explore alternatives:** Ask about scholarships or sliding-scale tuition, ***but don't move your child to low quality!***
- **Stay informed:** Follow updates from INAEYC and FSSA

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Early Childhood Programs' Closure and Capacity Loss

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is a federal program administered by Indiana's FSSA Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning. It helps low-income working families pay for licensed child care — including centers, homes, and ministries — so parents can work, attend school, or get training. Eligibility is typically set at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Pandemic Era Expansion and Sudden Retrenchment

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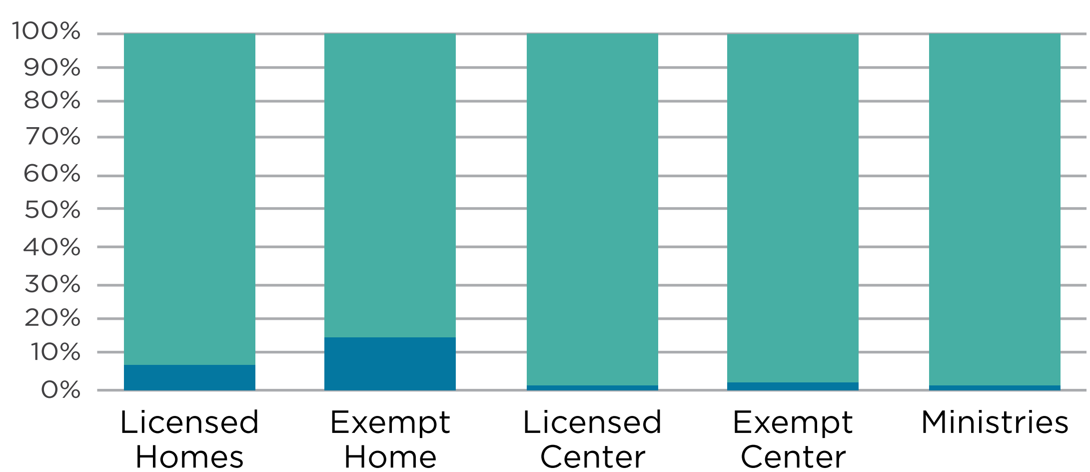
- By late 2024, temporary funds had dried up. Facing a $225 million state funding shortfall, FSSA:
  - Froze new voucher enrollments (waitlist implemented December 2024).
  - Reduced provider reimbursement rates by 10–35%, depending on child age.
- By mid2025, approximately 55,000 children remained in CCDF, with 25,000–30,000 on the waitlist.

Early Care and Education Strain & Closures

- Early Learning Indiana reports statewide losses of approximately $3.8 million weekly due to reduced enrollment and reimbursement.
  - 19% of providers have already closed at least one classroom.
  - 11% may close entirely within a year, risking a loss of nearly 10,000 care seats.
- Notable closures include infant programs shuttered due to lack of voucher-bearing families, and entire centers forced to close.



Current Challenges in Child Care: Your Voice Matters

November 2025 Survey Results

Introduction

Early learning programs are essential infrastructure. They provide long-term benefits to children's learning, enable parents to participate in the workforce and create a foundation for communities across Indiana to prosper. Despite these demonstrated benefits, the early education industry remains unstable and currently faces substantial pressures that endanger the long-term sustainability of the sector and put the future success of children, families and entire communities at risk.

Early Learning Indiana has been monitoring the provider experience closely in recent months, following an announcement by the State of Indiana in December of 2024 that it was suspending the release of new Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) vouchers and initiating a waitlist for those services. At present, the waitlist has grown to almost 32,000 children.

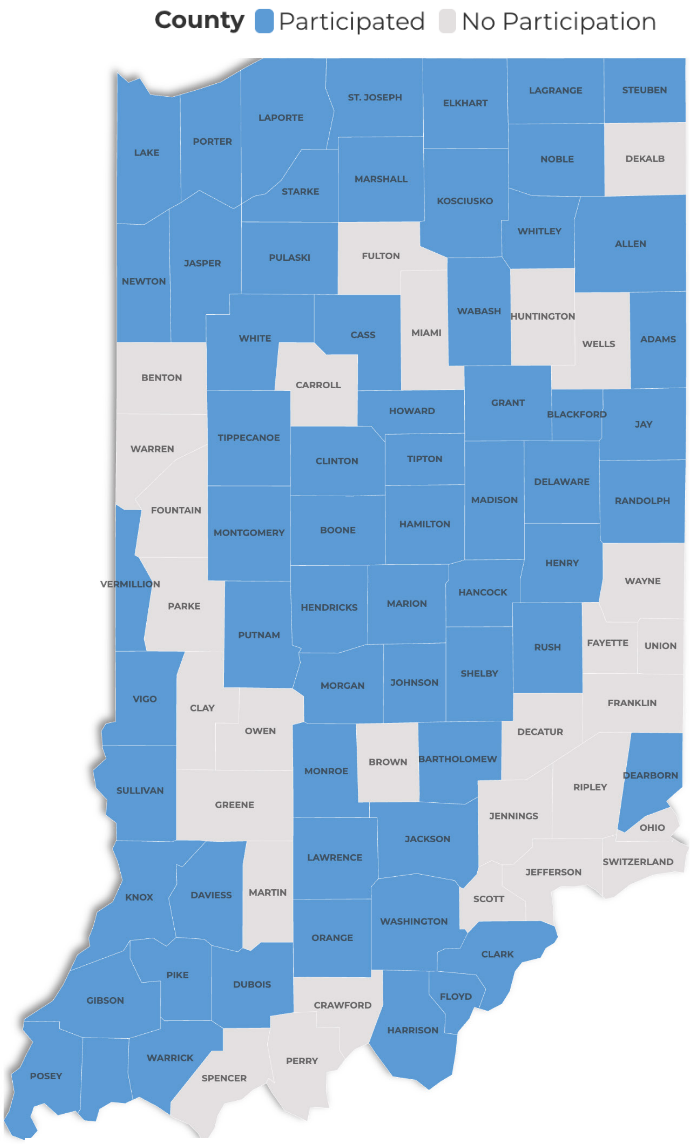
Early Learning Indiana first surveyed providers in August, with results pointing to troubling employment and enrollment trends for early learning programs. Shortly after that release, the State of Indiana lowered CCDF reimbursement rates, resulting in providers receiving less revenue for providing services to the most vulnerable children and families, as described on this dashboard. In recognition of continued challenges in the operating environment, Early Learning Indiana surveyed providers again from November 6-18, to continue to monitor how they are experiencing and responding to these changes.

Survey Participation

This survey garnered 442 responses from regulated programs in 63 counties. The respondents represented programs with the capacity to serve more than 30,000 children. The overall total of responses was very similar to the August round, and just under half of responses (n=191) represented the same program across both survey sets.

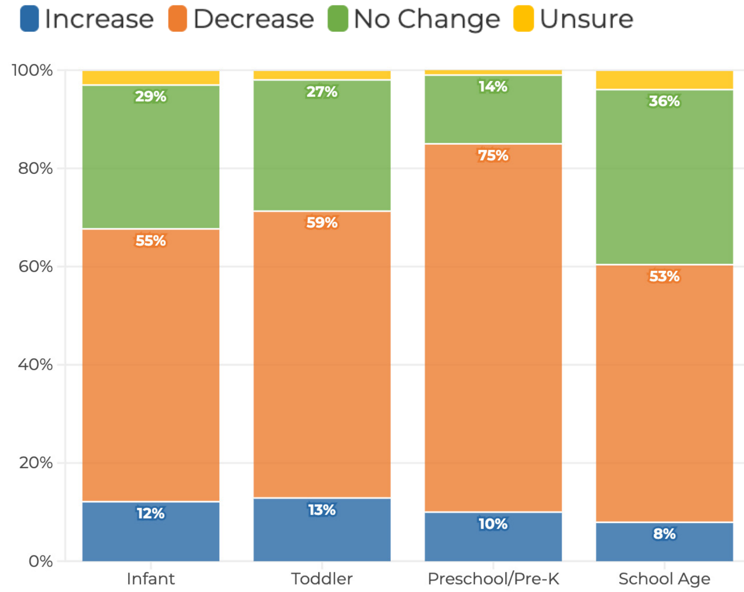
Responses came from a variety of program types, with most coming from licensed homes (181), licensed centers (138) and ministries (96). While a variety of Paths to QUALITY™ (PTQ) participation levels were represented, 79% of responses came from providers operating Level 3 or 4 programs.

Figure 1: Survey Participation by County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 boundaries, U.S. Census Bureau 2021 population estimates

Figure 2: Enrollment Changes by Age Group, Past 12 Months



Enrollment and CCDF Participation

Survey responses continued to suggest a downward trend in program enrollment, across all age groups served. Only 12% of respondents reported full enrollment, down from 16% in August, and about 73% of respondents indicated that enrollment is lower currently than it was at this time last year.

Given the lack of new CCDF vouchers released in 2025 and lower reimbursement rates, it is unsurprising that most providers (83%) reported decreased funding from the voucher program.

When a program's tuition rate is higher than the CCDF reimbursement rate, providers may charge families the "overage" amount to make up the difference. Just under two-thirds, or 63%, of responding providers are currently charging the overage. While this may be helpful in meeting their revenue needs, *Survey Participant Response*

This is my life's work, and I'm scared I'm about to lose it.

providers also acknowledged the challenge it presents to low-income families. As one provider stated, **"It is forcing families to pay the overage out of pocket and they cannot afford it, which means they may no longer afford our services."**

Threatened Supply

Low enrollment, combined with a lack of qualified staff, often results in temporary or permanent classroom closures.

When asked about future plans, 19% of providers said they plan to close one or more classrooms, and 17% plan to close their programs entirely, while only 6% plan to expand classroom capacity in the next year. This proportion of planned closures has increased since August, when 11% said they believed their programs would be forced to close entirely. Among classroom-based programs such as centers and ministries, 81% indicated at least one closed classroom, adding up to 420 closures across these programs. Nearly 500 classrooms are operating at single ratio, meaning that half of the capacity of those classrooms has been temporarily closed.

Staffing challenges are also reflected in temporary classroom closures, which drives the reduction in the supply of seats within existing programs. Across all respondents, there were 336 full-time and 192 part-time open positions. Of the classroom-based programs that responded, 61% reported at least one open teaching position. Open positions continue to be most prevalent in urban counties, including Marion (144), Lake (46) and Allen (33). While staffing demands are shrinking within some providers due to low enrollment, related pressures may exacerbate longstanding recruitment issues within the industry. Early learning professionals have historically faced low wages compared to other occupations. Although many providers have increased wages in the past year, 20% decreased teacher wages. Other concerning changes include reduced hours (44%) and reduced benefits (26%). If these trends continue, it will be even more difficult for early learning providers to compete for talent.

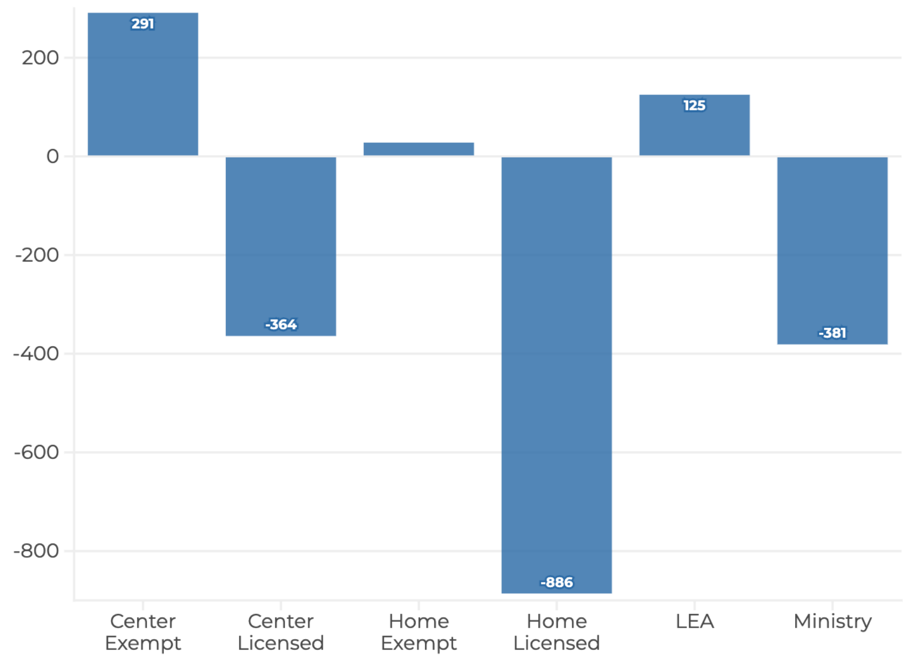
Beyond the Survey: Changes to Statewide Capacity

Survey responses continue to raise red flags about the health of the early learning system, even as the full effects of changes to the CCDF program and resulting impacts are likely yet to come. Based on currently available data from the State of Indiana, from mid-August to the end of November, there were 197 program closures statewide. The effects of these closures were partially mitigated by 115 new programs opening during this period, adding 4,958 seats. The net result has been a capacity loss of 1,187 seats. Many of these changes took place in licensed family child care homes, with 49 homes opening while 119 closed, for a net capacity loss of 886 seats. Additional capacity was lost through the closure of 27 licensed centers and 33 ministries, netting 745 fewer seats when taking newly-opened programs into account. Of the 6,145 seats lost through program closures, 2,074 seats, or 34%, existed within high-quality (PTQ Level 3 & 4) programs, with a net loss of 41 programs.

Learning Impact

Operating challenges in the current environment threaten program stability and capacity and put the entire early learning environment and children's learning outcomes at risk. Throughout the survey, providers referenced the challenge of reducing expenses while maintaining high-quality programming. Although trusted relationships with families enhance child outcomes, many providers have eliminated family engagement activities (187), family workshops (90) and home visits (29). As one provider remarked, **"If I'm not operating at full capacity, I cannot afford these extra services."** Several providers also referenced reluctantly making cuts to curriculum, educational supplies or materials, while acknowledging the challenges this presents to maintaining a quality learning environment. Despite these issues, providers recognized the importance of continuing to serve the learning needs of vulnerable children, with 89% of respondents indicating they plan to continue accepting CCDF vouchers moving forward.

Figure 3: Net Capacity Change by Provider Type



CONCLUSION

Effective early learning programs serve two-generational needs: 1) prioritizing the learning and developmental needs of young children and helping prepare them for kindergarten and beyond; and 2) enabling families to work and/or take advantage of additional education and training opportunities. Responses to Early Learning Indiana's two recent surveys suggest that environmental changes threaten both of these goals, putting supply at risk while eroding the educational experience.

As the CCDF waitlist builds and providers adjust to the new (lower) reimbursement rates, survey responses suggest a continuing trend of reduced program enrollment, classroom-level and program closures and unstable child care supply at the community level, particularly in areas with programs most reliant on CCDF funding as a source of revenue. Early Learning Indiana will continue to monitor these dynamics as providers and communities respond to the changing landscape.

“

Survey Participant Response

Our program is working hard to balance rising operational demands with the need to provide high-quality care for children and strong support for families. Staffing shortages, increasing administrative requirements, and fluctuating enrollment patterns all place pressure on our team. Even so, we remain committed to maintaining safe environments, nurturing relationships and consistent learning experiences for every child.

Early Learning INDIANA

Risk of Permanent Supply Loss

19%

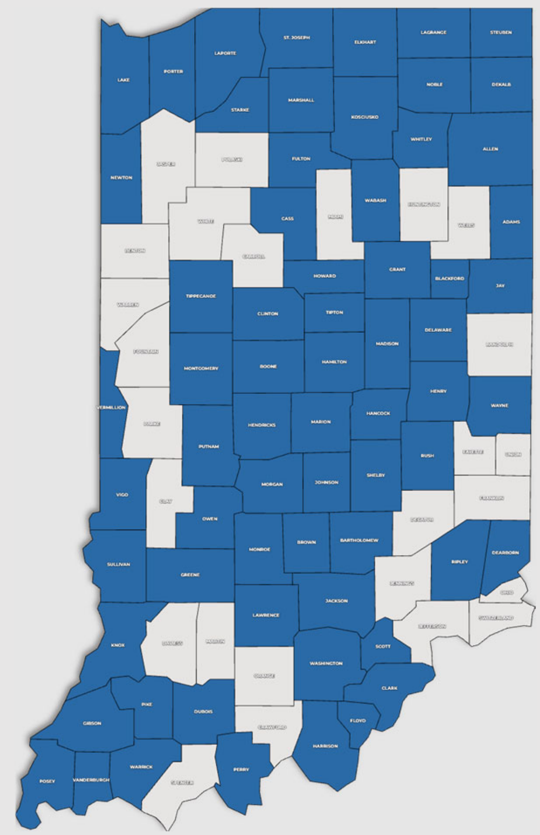
Providers reported at least one classroom closure, with total closures including 364 classrooms.

11%

Providers believed their programs will close entirely within the next year.

Extrapolating this sample statewide would suggest that Indiana's child care supply could shrink by nearly 10K seats over the next 12 months if conditions *remain unchanged*.

In August 2025, Early Learning Indiana conducted a survey to better understand how the CCDF waitlist is affecting early learning programs:



443
Providers Responded

67
Counties

15%
Total Child Care Capacity

Early Learning INDIANA

Reduction in Reimbursement Rates

In September, the State announced that it would reduce the rates that it reimburses child care providers on behalf of low-income families by an average of 16%. However, the precise rate changes vary based on the provider type, their quality level and the ages of the children being served.

$1.91M

Reduction in *weekly* revenue for providers statewide due to the loss of vouchers.

$1.84M

Reduction in *weekly* revenue for providers statewide due to the reduction in rates of reimbursement.

$195M

Aggregate *annual* impact on revenue for child care providers statewide.

Early Learning Indiana has developed a new interactive dashboard to help community leaders see the estimated revenue loss by county and better understand how these changes impact children, families and early learning programs in their area. Scan the QR code to view the dashboard:

CENTRAL REGION

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Chapter Closure and Dashboard

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is a federal program administered by Indiana's FSSA Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning. It helps low-income working families pay for licensed child care — including centers, homes, and ministries — so parents can work, attend school, or get training. Eligibility is typically set at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Pandemic Era Expansion and Sudden Retrenchment

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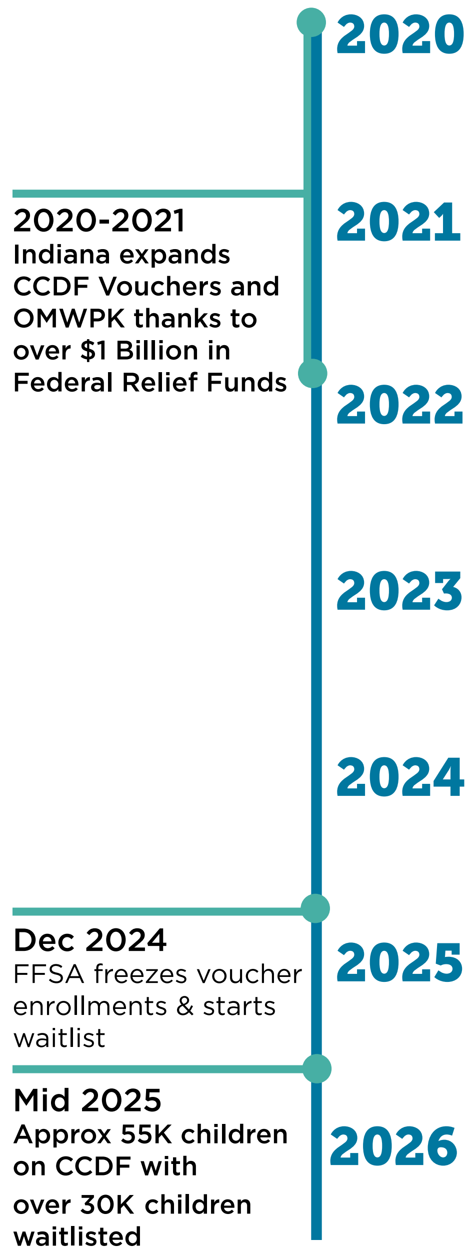

Early Care and Education Strain & Closures

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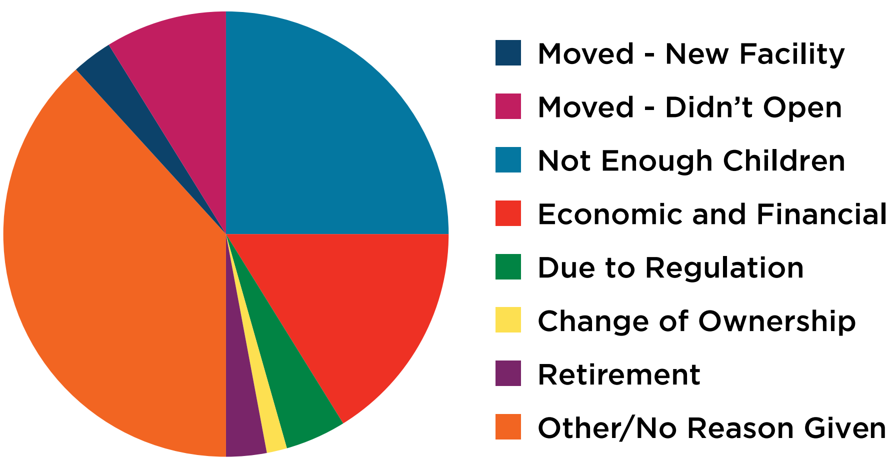
- Notable closures include infant programs shuttered due to lack of voucher bearing families, and entire centers forced to close.

	FCC	Licensed Centers	Ministries	Exempt	Capacity	PTQ Levels 3 & 4
Marion	39	5	14	3	1,798	15
Boone	0	1	0	0	99	1
Hamilton	0	2	0	0	326	1
Hendricks	3	0	0	0	36	0
Johnson	2	0	0	0	22	0
Total	**44**	**8**	**14**	**3**	**2,228**	**17**

Figure 1: Facilities Closure Auspices by County- Indiana State Reports (September 2025 - December 2025)

Reasons for Closures



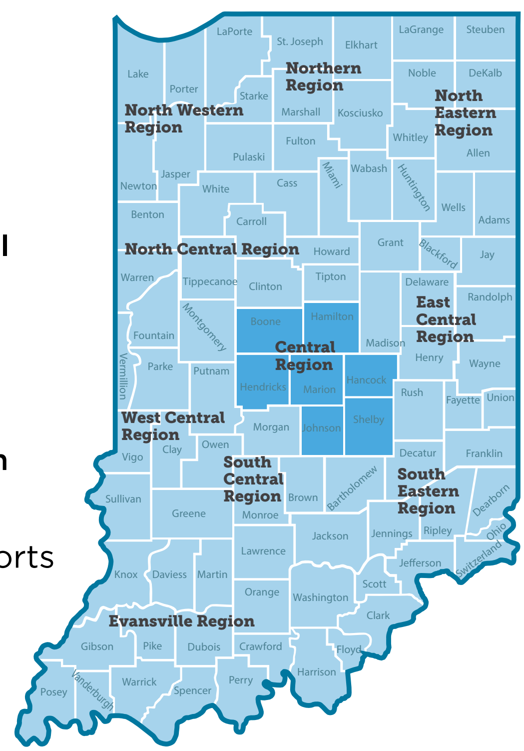


Figure 2: Reported Reasons of Closure- Indiana State Reports (September 2025-December2025)

EAST CENTRAL REGION

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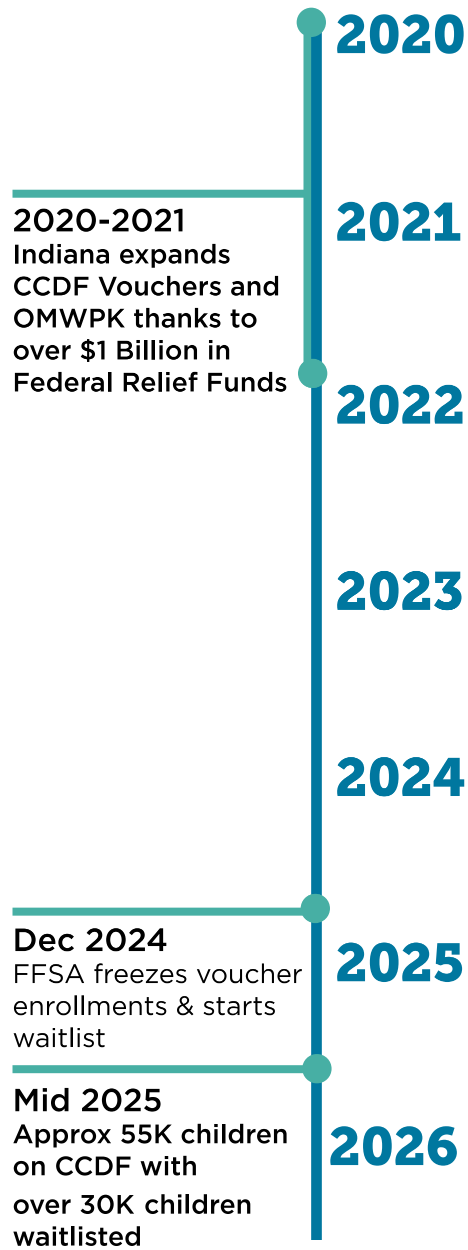

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Delaware	2	0	1	1	24	3
Grant	0	0	1	0	148	1
Madison	0	1	0	0	160	1
Wayne	0	7	0	0	269	0
Total	**2**	**8**	**2**	**1**	**601**	**5**

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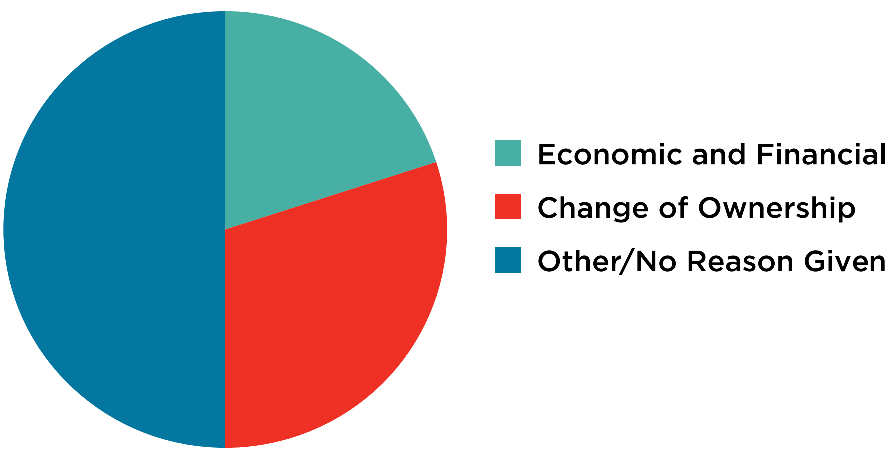

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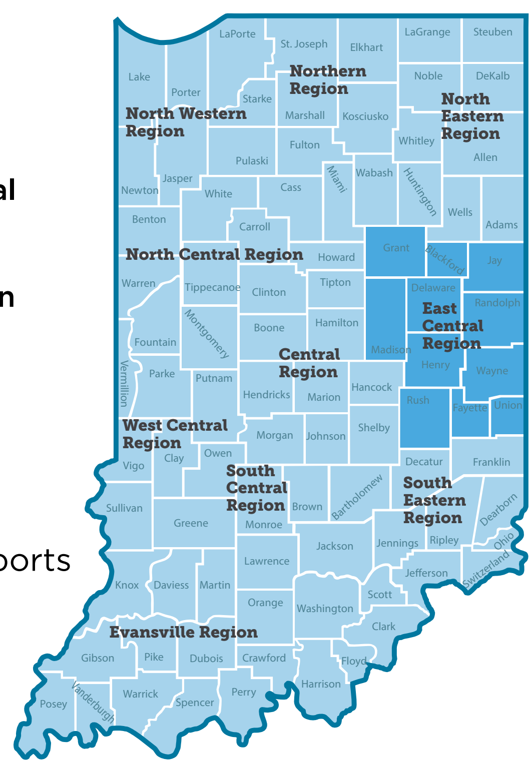

EVANSVILLE REGION

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2020

2021

2020-2021
Indiana expands CCDF Vouchers and OMWPK thanks to over $1 Billion in Federal Relief Funds

2022

2023

2024

Dec 2024
FFSA freezes voucher enrollments & starts waitlist

2025

Mid 2025
Approx 55K children on CCDF with over 30K children waitlisted

2026

- Notable closures include infant programs shuttered due to lack of voucher-bearing families, and entire centers forced to close.

	FCC	Licensed Centers	Ministries	Exempt	Capacity	PTQ Levels 3 & 4
Crawford	0	0	0	0	0	0
Daviess	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dubois	6	0	0	1	220	0
Gibson	1	0	0	0	16	1
Knox	1	0	0	0	16	0
Martin	0	0	0	0	0	0
Perry	1	0	0	0	12	0
Pike	0	0	0	0	0	0
Posey	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spencer	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vanderburgh	3	0	0	0	40	1
Warrick	1	0	0	0	16	0
Total	**13**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**320**	2

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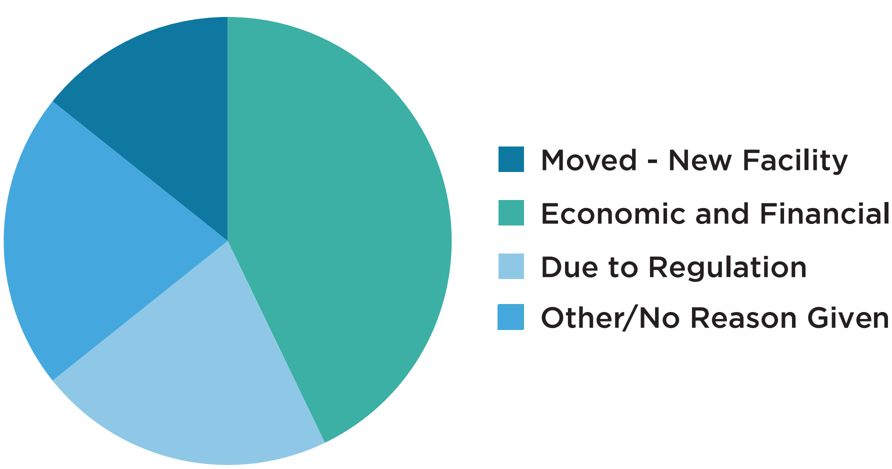

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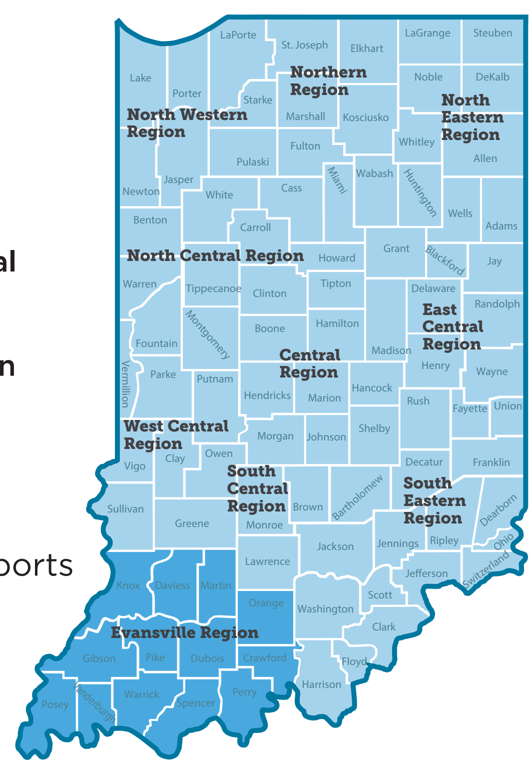

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

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	FCC	Licensed Centers	Ministries	Exempt	Capacity	PTQ Levels 3 & 4
Benton	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carroll	1	0	0	0	12	0
Cass	1	0	0	0	12	0
Clinton	2	0	1	0	117	1
Howard	0	0	1	0	15	0
Miami	0	0	0	0	0	0
Montgomery	0	0	3	0	498	0
Tippecanoe	5	2	0	0	156	4
Tipton	0	0	0	0	0	0
Warren	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**9**	**2**	**5**	**0**	**810**	**5**

Figure 1: Facilities Closure Auspices by County - Indiana State Reports (September 2025 - December 2025)

Reasons for Closures

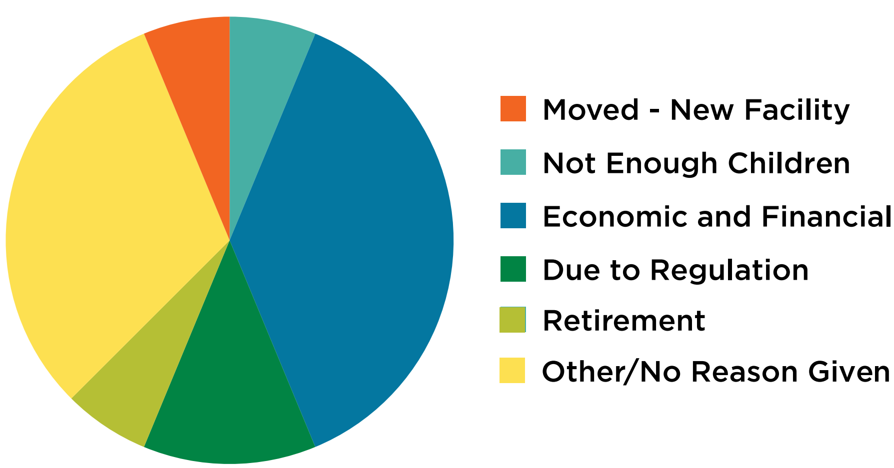
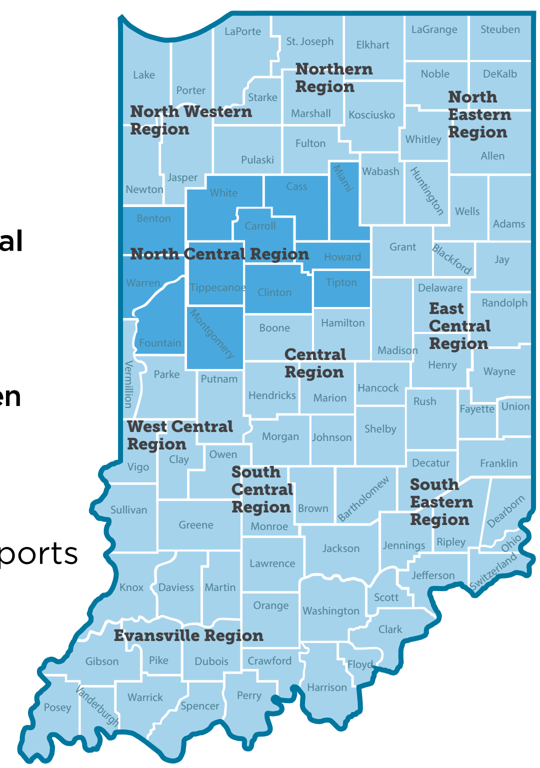


Figure 2: Reported Reasons of Closure - Indiana State Reports (September 2025 - December 2025)



NORTH EASTERN REGION
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	FCC	Licensed Centers	Ministries	Exempt	Capacity	PTQ
Adams	0	0	0	0	0	0
Allen	12	1	0	2	286	2
Dekalb	0	0	0	0	0	0
Huntington	0	0	0	0	0	0
LaGrange	0	0	0	1	0	0
Noble	0	0	0	0	0	0
Steuben	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wabash	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wells	0	0	0	0	0	0
Whitley	0	1	0	0	125	1
Total	**12**	**2**	**0**	**3**	**411**	**3**

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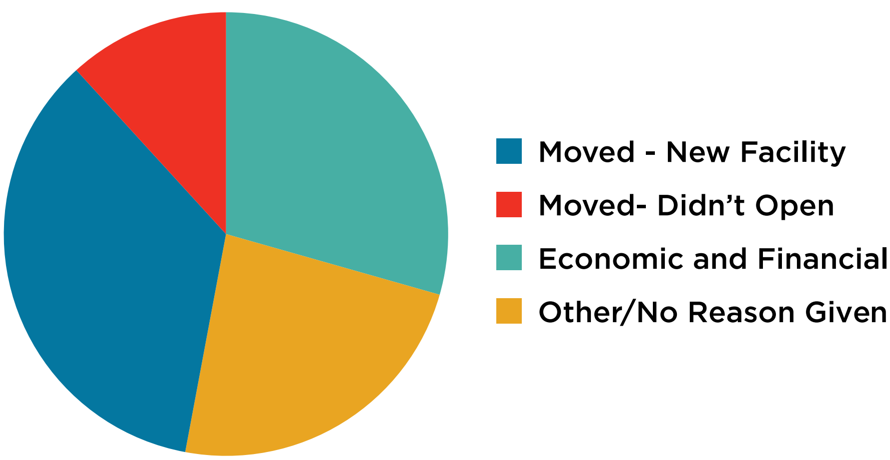

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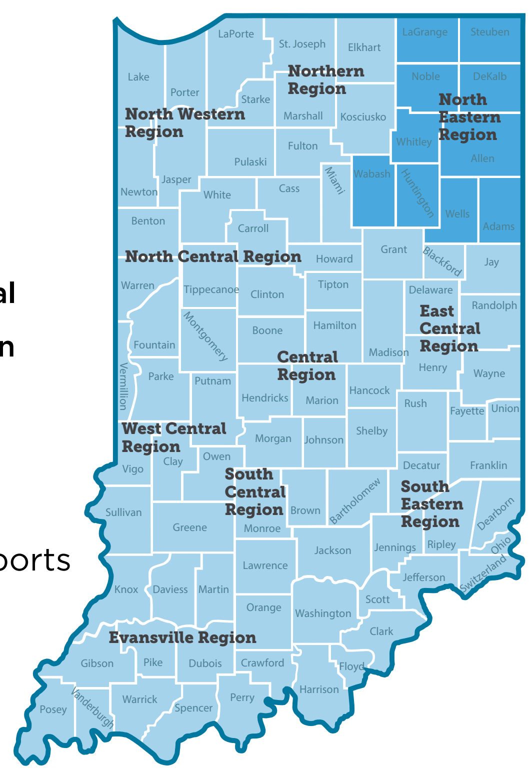

NORTHERN REGION

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	FCC	Licensed Centers	Ministries	Exempt	Capacity	PTQ Levels 3 & 4
Elkhart	0	0	1	0	0	0
Fulton	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kosciusko	1	0	0	0	16	0
Marshall	0	0	0	0	0	0
St. Joseph	4	0	1	0	93	0
Total	**5**	**0**	**2**	**0**	**109**	**0**

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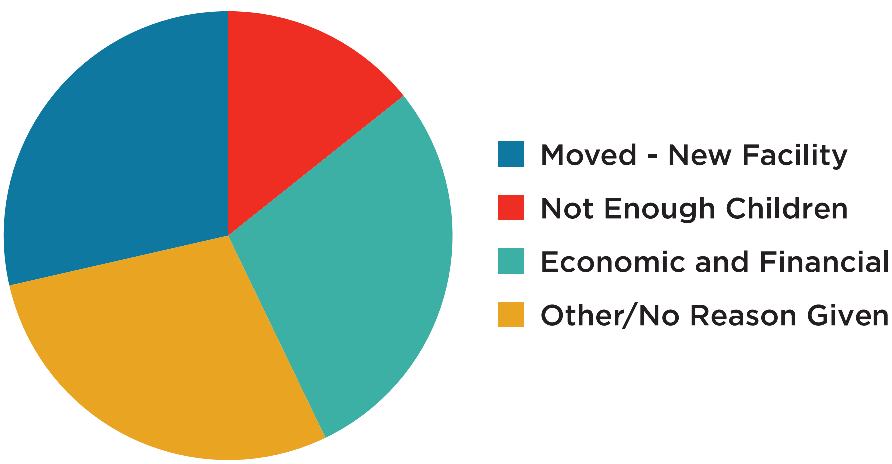

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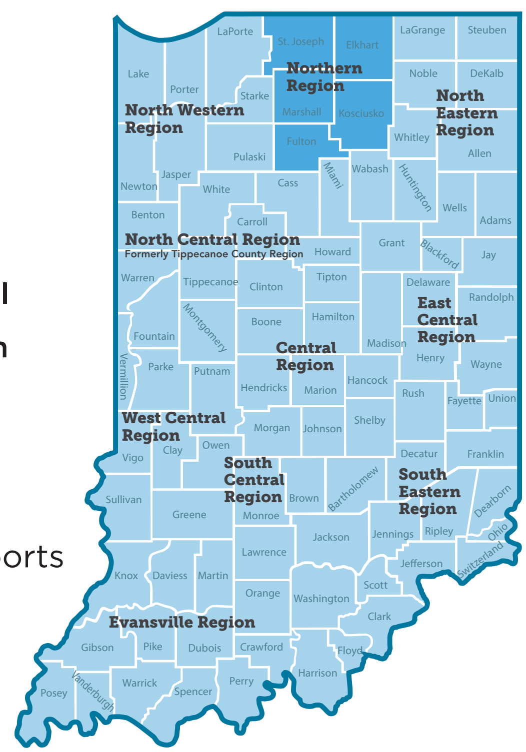

NORTH WESTERN REGION

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Jasper	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lake	11	1	1	0	295	2
LaPorte	1	1	0	0	146	1
Newton	0	0	0	0	0	0
Porter	2	1	0	0	94	1
Pulaski	0	0	0	0	0	0
Starke	0	0	0	0	0	0
White	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**14**	**3**	**1**	**0**	**535**	**4**

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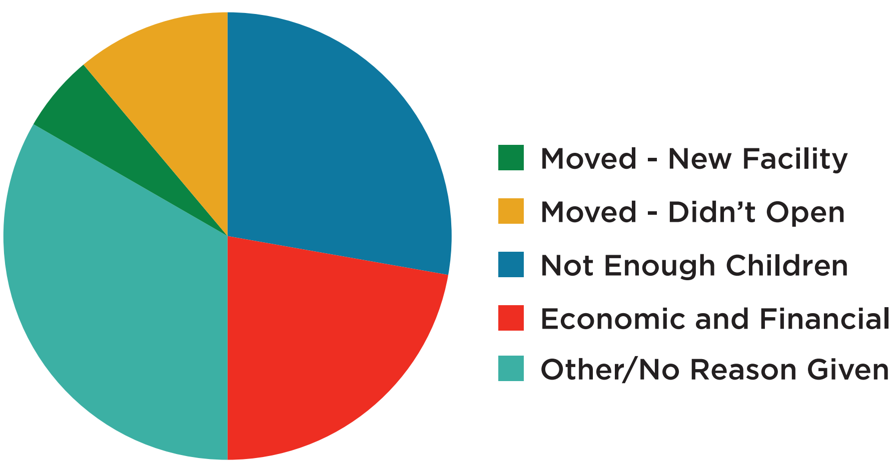

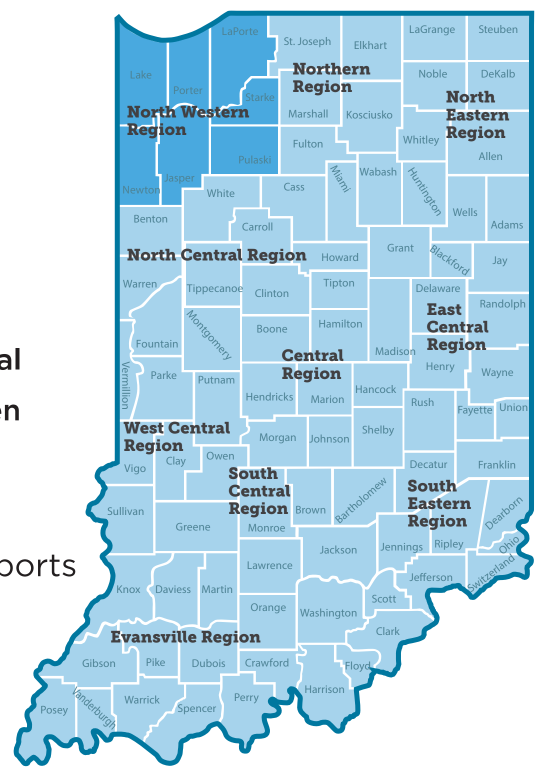

Figure 2: Reported Reasons of Closure - Indiana State Reports (September 2025 - December 2025)

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

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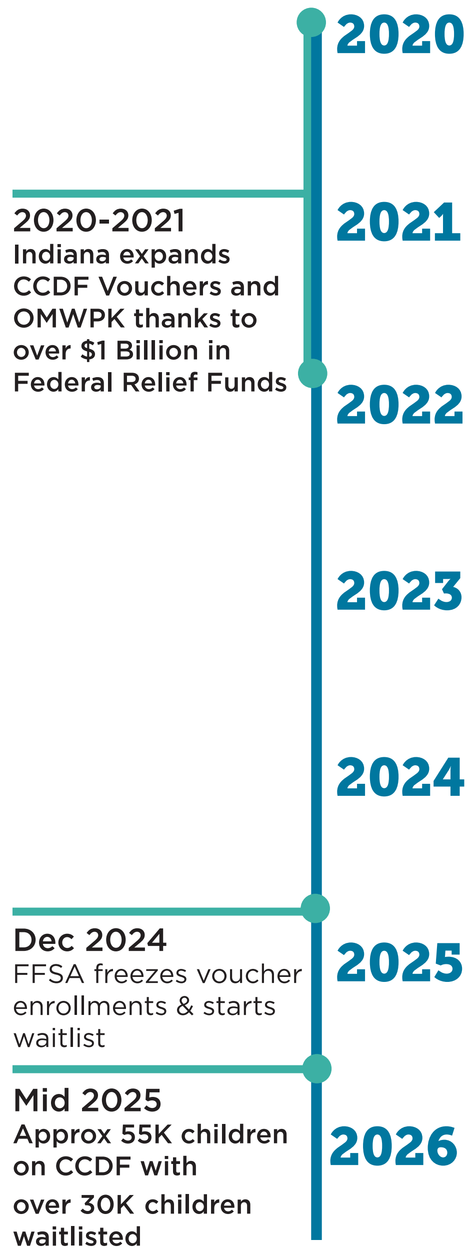

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	FCC	Licensed Centers	Ministries	Exempt	Capacity	PTQ Levels 3 & 4
Bartholomew	1	1	0	0	58	0
Brown	1	0	0	0	16	0
Greene	1	0	0	0	16	0
Jackson	1	1	0	0	45	0
Lawrence	0	0	0	0	0	0
Monroe	1			1	12	2
Morgan	0	0	0	0	0	0
Owen	0	0	1	0	56	0
Total	**5**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**203**	**2**

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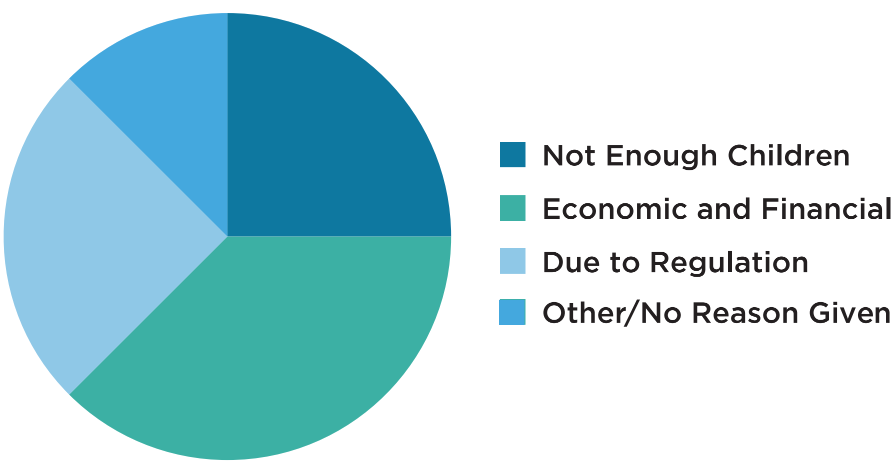

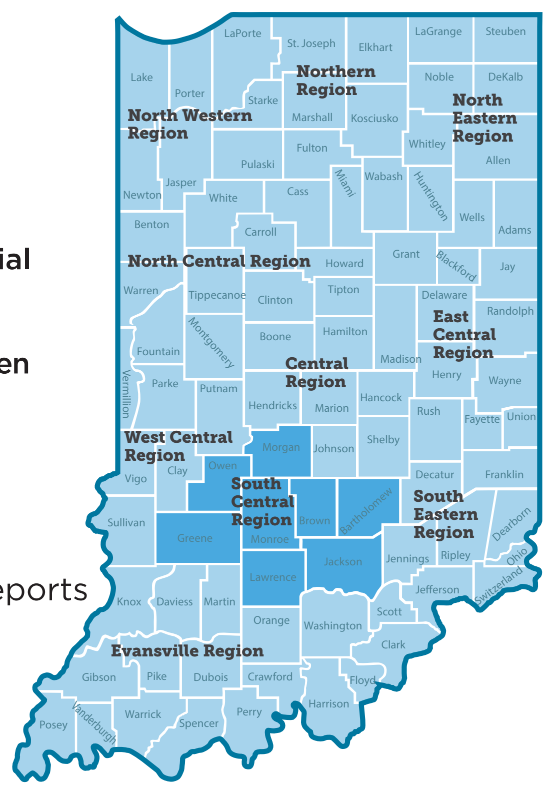

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	FCC	Licensed Centers	Ministries	Exempt	Capacity	PTQ Levels 3 & 4
Clark	2	3	0	2	435	2
Dearborn	0	0	0	0	0	0
Decatur	0	0	0	0	0	0
Floyd	2	2	0	0	150	1
Franklin	0	0	0	0	0	0
Harrison	1	0	0	0	12	0
Jefferson	1	0	0	0	11	0
Jennings	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ripley	1	0	0	0	16	0
Scott	0	0	0	0	0	0
Washington	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**7**	**5**	**0**	**2**	**624**	**3**

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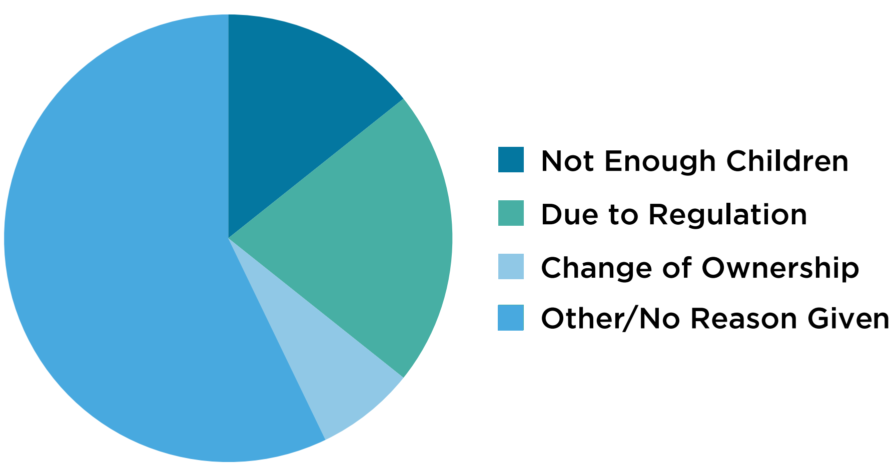

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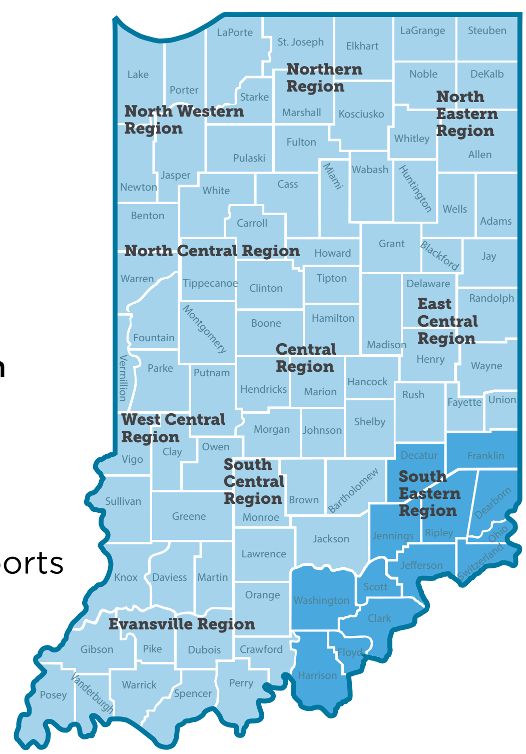

WEST CENTRAL REGION
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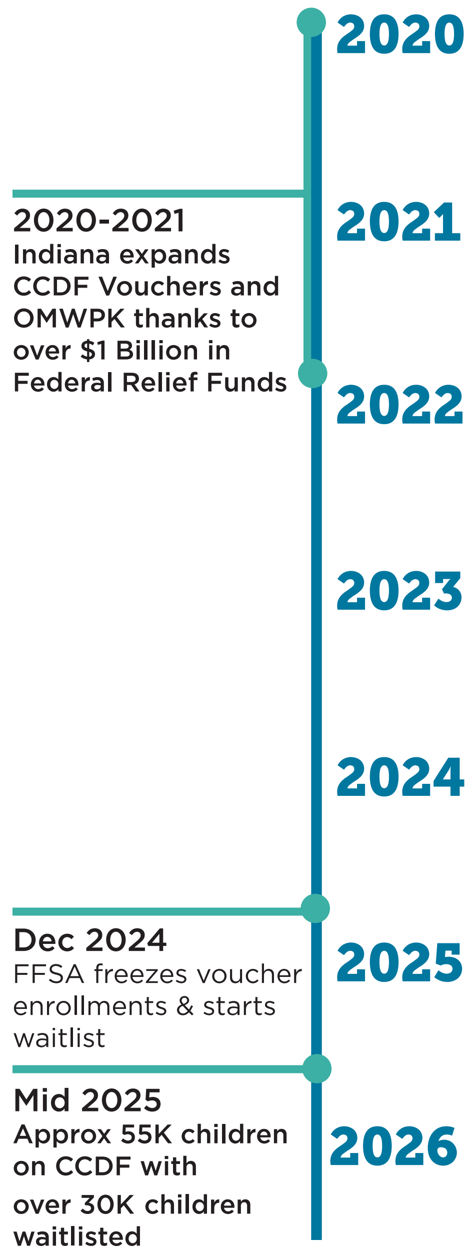

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Clay	1	0	0	0	16	0
Parke	0	0	0	0	0	0
Putnam	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sullivan	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vermillion	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vigo	4	2	1		234	3
Total	**5**	**2**	**1**		**250**	**3**

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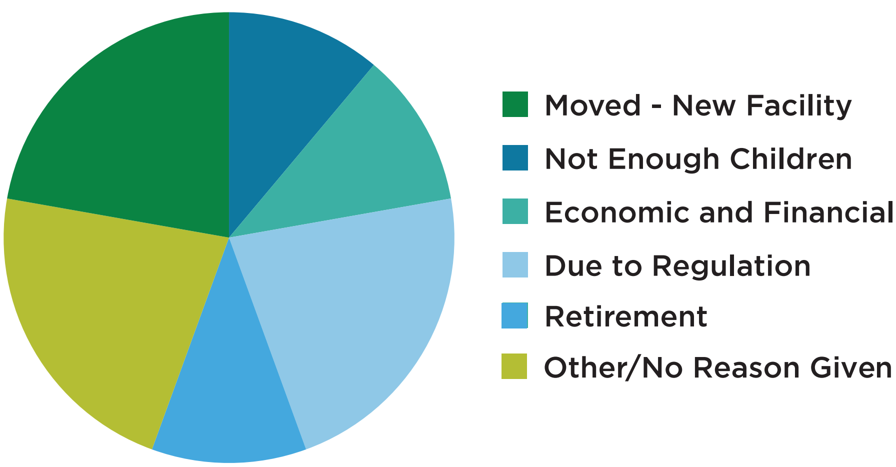

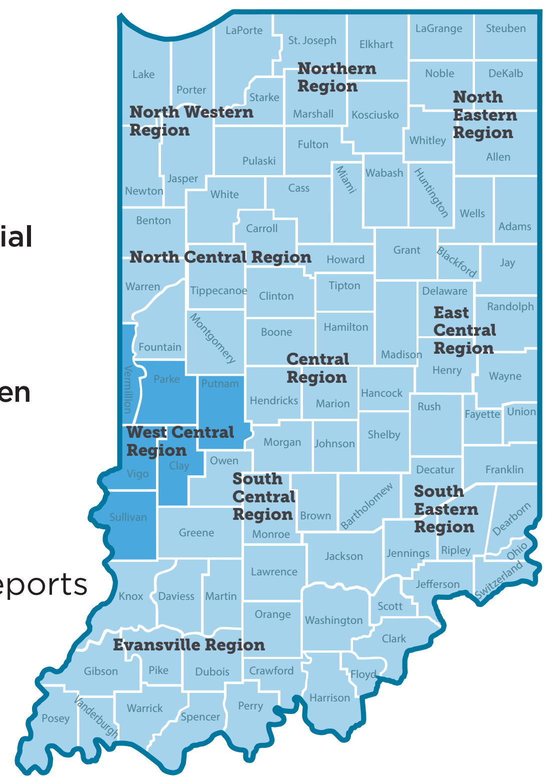

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