

2026 STATE CHILDCARE REGULATIONS INDEX

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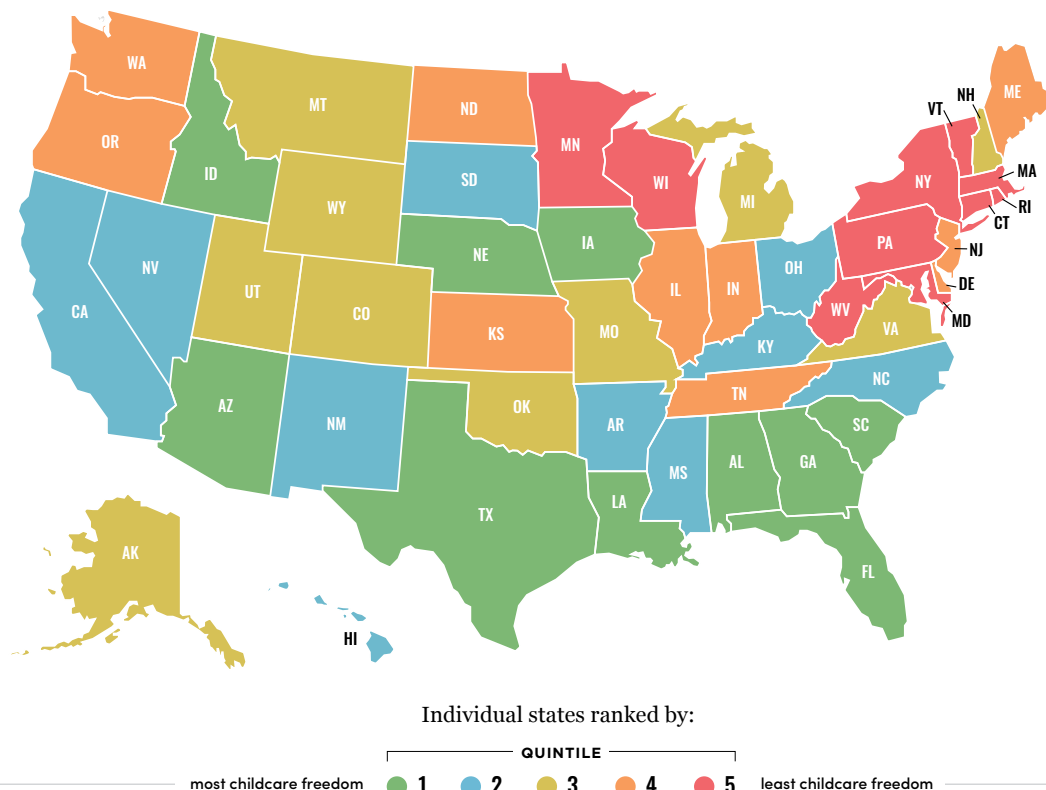
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what's
inside?

- 2 INTRODUCTION
- 3 METHODOLOGY
- 5 IMPROVING CHILDCARE
ACCESS AND
AFFORDABILITY
- 6 STATE PROFILES
- 57 AUTHORS

INTRODUCTION

Childcare regulations aim to overcome information and measurement problems in the childcare market. However, state and federal regulations can have unintended consequences such as limiting supply, raising prices, and slowing new innovation. Childcare regulation is just one area of occupational licensing that affects American workers. About 25 percent of all professions require some kind of government approval to be practiced legally.

The 2026 edition of the State Childcare Regulations Index mirrors the state-level analysis of childcare regulation highlighted in 2024 by the Knee Regulatory Research Center. For the index, we consider state policies and regulations for center-based childcare facilities, including child-to-staff ratio requirements by age, maximum group sizes by age, required annual training hours for staff, and minimum educational requirements for center directors and lead teachers.

A previous edition of this index employed data released in 2013 by advocacy organization Child Care Aware. For this edition, we used data collected in 2025 by the Archbridge Institute (“State Childcare Regulations Database 2025”) and affiliates at the Challey Institute for Global Innovation and Growth at North Dakota State University. Because of these changes in data collection, we caution readers not to assume any changes in ranking from the 2024 edition can be exclusively attributed to changes in regulatory policy.



METHODOLOGY

Childcare regulation is one example of a policy area where states demonstrate different levels of economic freedom—limited government oversight over market interactions. Following the example set by the Fraser Institute’s Economic Freedom of the World Index, our index scores all 50 states based on their licensing standards, where states with more freedom (less stringent regulations) receive higher scores.

The index is comprised of 17 variables that fall into four categories: child-to-staff ratios, group size, training hours, and education requirements. The first two categories are broken down into seven ages, ranging from six months to five years. For states that do not have a maximum group size for some or all ages, we inpute a value 25 percent higher than the largest maximum group size at each age found across all states. This imputed value serves as an estimated group size for cases in which there is no legal maximum.

Annual training hours are consistent across staff members working with any age group. Staff education requirements are separated into two variables: credentials for childcare center directors and lead teachers.¹ Overall, we found that the minimum level of education required for a teacher is less than a high school diploma or GED (12 states), and the maximum level of education required for a teacher is an associate’s degree in early childhood education or a related field (3 states). Five states require bachelor’s degrees for center directors.²

Since states typically offer several options for education requirements, a coding scheme is included in the accompanying data to find education and experience equivalents. The following equation is used to create a score between 0 and 10 for each state, where i is one of the 17 indicator variables, m_o and m are the minimum and maximum values of a given variable, and x is a value that represents a state’s regulation of that particular variable, whether it be the maximum group size for 18-month-olds or the legal number of three-year-olds per teacher.

$$\left[V_i = \frac{(x_i - m_o)}{(m - m_o)} * 10 \right]$$

In some cases, it is a sign of economic freedom for a state to be closer to the minimum value rather than the maximum value, as is the case with annual staff training hours and educational requirements. A state has more “childcare freedom” and a higher index score if teachers are required only to have a GED (14 states) rather than a Child Development Associate credential or college credits in Early Childhood Education (21 states). In these instances, the equation used to calculate index scores is inverted to the following.

$$\left[V_i = \frac{(m - x_i)}{(m - m_o)} * 10 \right]$$

We take the average of all 17 index variables to calculate the “childcare freedom score” for each state. Because states have come to different conclusions about regulating these components, each state receives a unique score that provides context for the relative intensity of its licensing rules.

State rankings are determined by each state’s overall score. Higher scores correspond with more economic freedom and less childcare regulations. The state with the highest overall score is ranked 1st, and the state with the lowest overall score is ranked 50th. **Table 1** shows the list of states by overall ranking.

Also included in the index is a measure of regulatory consistency, which is inspired by Bolen and Sobel’s (2020) paper, “Does Balance Among Areas of Institutional Quality Matter for Economic Growth?” When a state scores very high on some regulatory components but very low on others, the average score conceals inconsistencies, which can make navigating and complying with regulations more difficult.

The regulatory consistency parameter is added to penalize this unevenness so that our index reflects not only the level of regulation but also its regularity across components. The penalty uses the standard deviation of the regulatory component scores. The standard deviation is multiplied by the regulatory consistency parameter $\lambda=0.025$ and subtracted from the state’s original index score. States with lower standard deviation across component sub-scores (child-staff ratios, group size, training hours, and education requirements) receive a lesser penalty, or no penalty if $\sigma=0$.

At the end of this report, we include individual profiles for each state showing the state’s overall score, national and regional rankings, and rankings for the four sub-components.³ We highlight the level of regulatory consistency on a scale of low-medium-high, and we call attention to each state’s most and least stringent regulation.

¹ Because state terminology varies, we define a teacher as the position requiring the lowest level of education for an individual to assume sole responsibility for a group of children. When qualifications varied by center size or by the ages of children served (0–5 years), we applied the most stringent requirement. For comparability across states, we treated four ECE credits as equivalent to 120 ECE clock hours, a CDA credential, two years of high school vocational training, and 12 CEUs (per the Department of Education’s rule on clock-to-credit hour conversions). We included education requirements that had to be met within six months of hire. Experience was not counted toward education requirements; however, when a minimum education standard required more than two years of experience, we assigned the next highest level of education. Grandfathered minimum requirements were excluded.

² Minimum education was coded on an eight-point scale, where 1 indicated less than a high school diploma or equivalent; 2 indicated a high school diploma or equivalent; 3 indicated clock hours, credits, or a credential in early childhood education (ECE) below the CDA level; 4 indicated a CDA (120 ECE clock hours); 5 indicated clock hours, credits, or a credential in ECE above the CDA level; 6 indicated an associate degree in ECE or a related field; 7 indicated a bachelor’s degree in an unrelated field; and 8 indicated a bachelor’s degree in ECE or a related field.

³ States with the same regulation (or no regulation) for a given sub-component are ranked as a tie.

TABLE 1 | 2026 STATE CHILDCARE REGULATIONS INDEX STATE RANKINGS

RANK	STATE	SCORE	RANK	STATE	SCORE	RANK	STATE	SCORE
1	Idaho	8.17	18	New Mexico	4.42	35	Kansas	3.07
2	South Carolina	7.56	19	South Dakota	4.39	36	Tennessee	3.06
3	Arizona	7.48	20	Ohio	4.36	37	North Dakota	2.99
4	Alabama	7.34	21	Missouri	4.34	38	Maine	2.95
5	Florida	7.02	22	Utah	4.13	39	Oregon	2.95
6	Georgia	6.59	23	Oklahoma	4.01	40	Indiana	2.84
7	Iowa	6.51	24	Virginia	3.91	41	Minnesota	2.77
8	Louisiana	6.23	25	Michigan	3.90	42	West Virginia	2.77
9	Texas	5.65	26	Wyoming	3.82	43	Wisconsin	2.64
10	Nebraska	5.48	27	New Hampshire	3.76	44	Rhode Island	2.53
11	Hawaii	5.31	28	Colorado	3.44	45	Connecticut	2.30
12	North Carolina	5.22	29	Alaska	3.33	46	Massachusetts	2.23
13	California	5.08	30	Montana	3.28	47	Maryland	2.09
14	Kentucky	4.84	31	Illinois	3.22	48	Pennsylvania	1.88
15	Arkansas	4.72	32	Delaware	3.22	49	New York	1.87
16	Nevada	4.64	33	Washington	3.16	50	Vermont	1.31
17	Mississippi	4.57	34	New Jersey	3.15			

IMPROVING CHILDCARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

There are two potential avenues to improving access to childcare for American families. One is to meet the higher prices and shortages resulting from increased barriers to entry with subsidies and state-sponsored programs. New Mexico is taking this path and plans to offer free childcare to all residents as of November 2025. The alternative path, and the path that involves addressing the drivers of high childcare prices, is regulatory reform. Providers in Virginia recently expressed the burdensome nature of ever-increasing regulations on day-to-day operations, many of which are inflexible to the needs of the children and families they serve.

The variation across states illustrates that there is no single model of childcare regulation in the United States. The State Childcare Regulations Index offers a way to evaluate the trade-offs between regulatory intensity and access to care. By tracking how regulatory regimes evolve over time, policymakers and researchers can better understand how policies shape the childcare market.

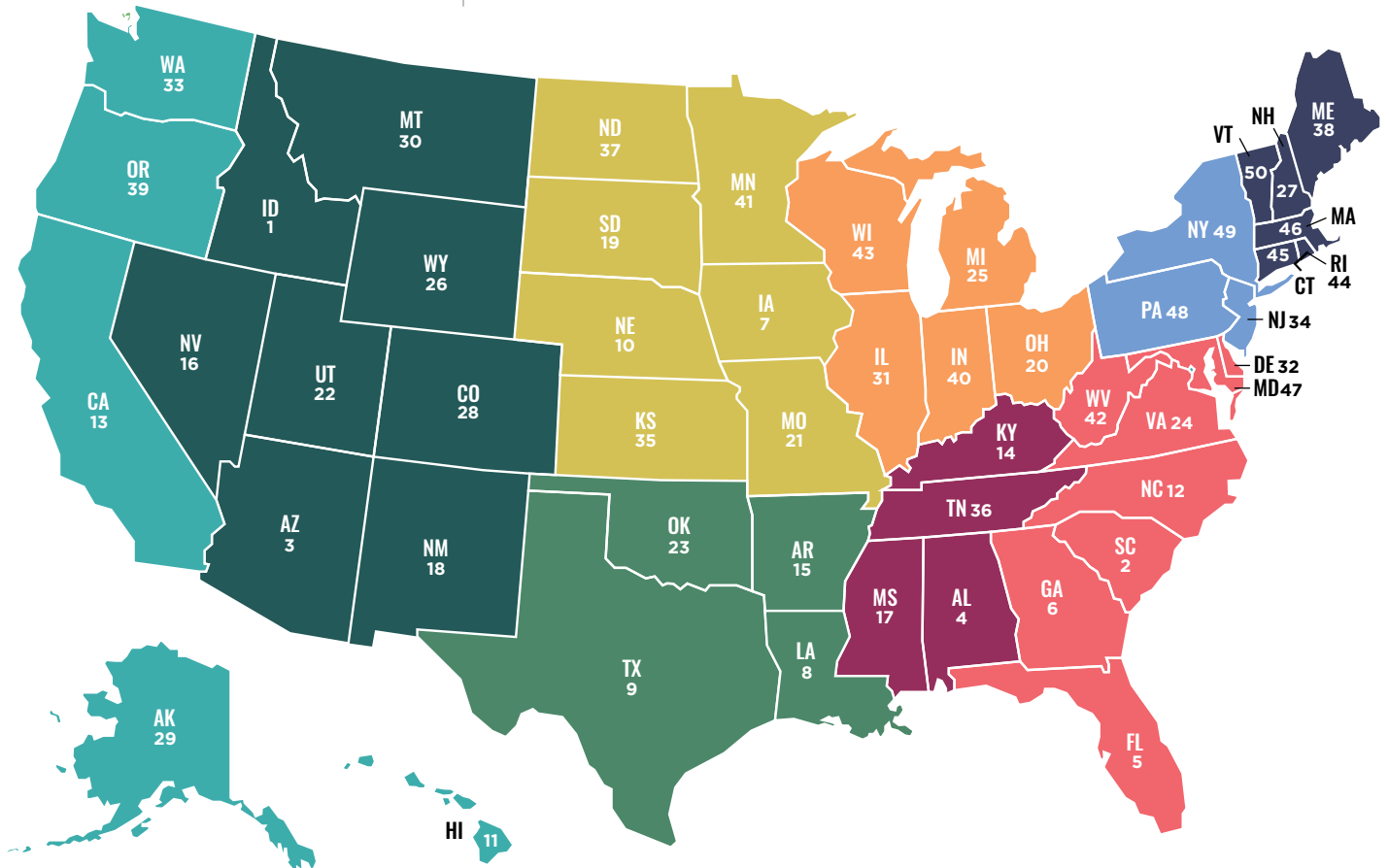


2026 STATE CHILDCARE REGULATIONS INDEX

state profiles



MAP | 2026 STATE CHILDCARE REGULATIONS INDEX REGIONAL MAP



- | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| SOUTH | WEST | MIDWEST | NORTHEAST |
| ● West South Central | ● Pacific | ● West North Central | ● Middle Atlantic |
| ● East South Central | ● Mountain | ● East North Central | ● New England |
| ● South Atlantic | | | |



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

ALABAMA’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
4TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
7.34

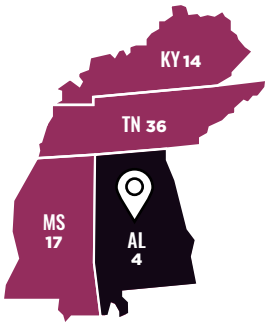
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	12
Group Size	1

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	8
Education Requirements	26

EAST SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

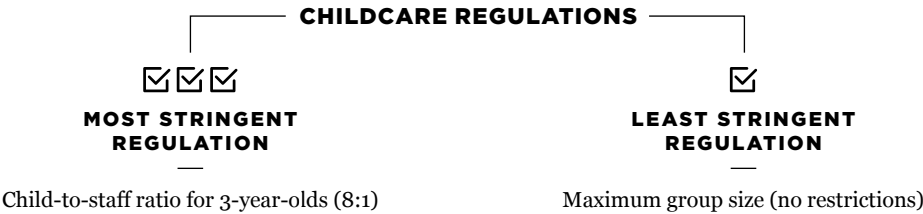
Alabama ranks 1st in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 4=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Alabama ranks 4th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 2 South Carolina
- 3 Arizona
- 4 Alabama**
- 5 Florida
- 6 Georgia



Alabama

- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

- Alabama
- Alaska**
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

ALASKA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK

29TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE

3.33

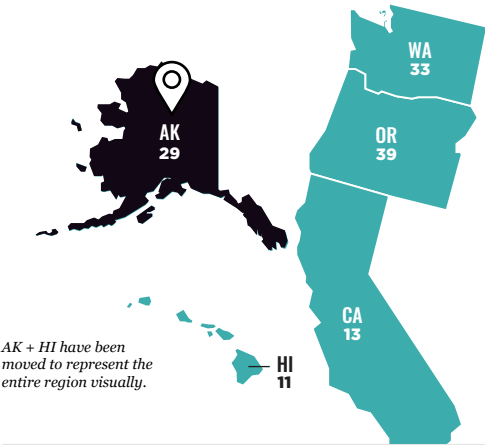
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY

MEDIUM

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	20	Training Hours	37
Group Size	40	Education Requirements	7

PACIFIC REGION

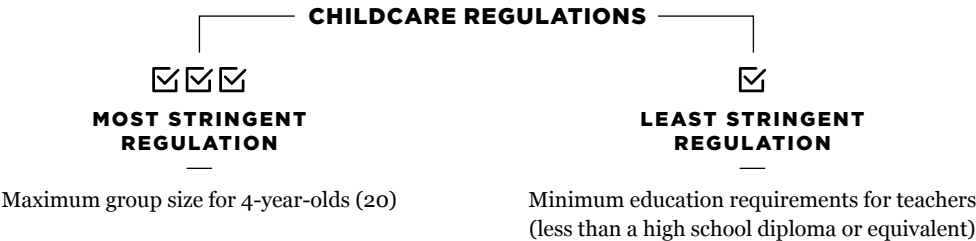
Alaska ranks 3rd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 5=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Alaska ranks 29th in the nation for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 50=worst)

- 27 New Hampshire
- 28 Colorado
- 29 Alaska**
- 30 Montana
- 31 Illinois





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

ARIZONA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
3RD

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
7.48

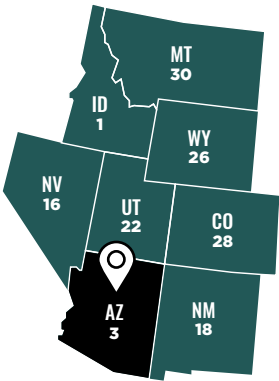
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	11
Group Size	1

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	31
Education Requirements	14

MOUNTAIN REGION

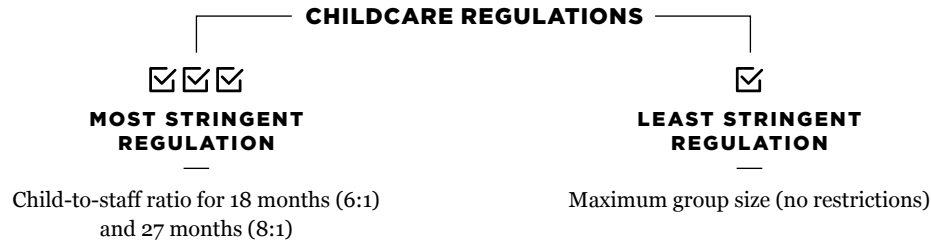
Arizona ranks 2nd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Arizona ranks 3rd in the nation for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 50=worst)

- 1 Idaho
- 2 South Carolina
- 3 Arizona
- 4 Alabama
- 5 Florida





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas**
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

ARKANSAS'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
15TH

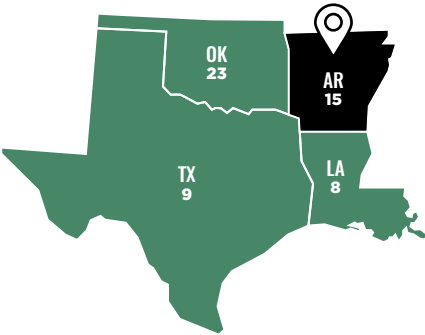
CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
4.72

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	9	Training Hours	18
Group Size	18	Education Requirements	42

WEST SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

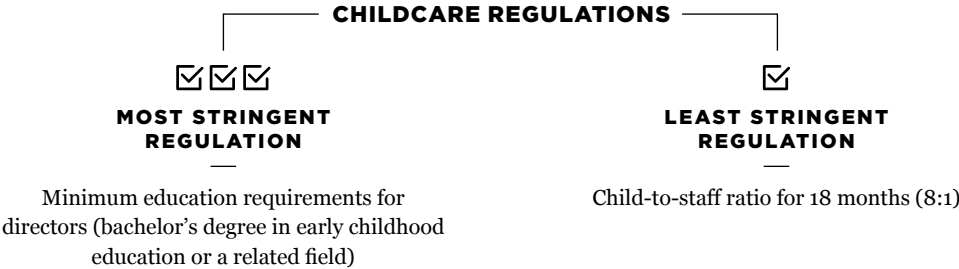
Arkansas ranks 3rd in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 4=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Arkansas ranks 15th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 13 California
- 14 Kentucky
- 15 Arkansas**
- 16 Nevada
- 17 Mississippi





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California**
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

CALIFORNIA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
13TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
5.08

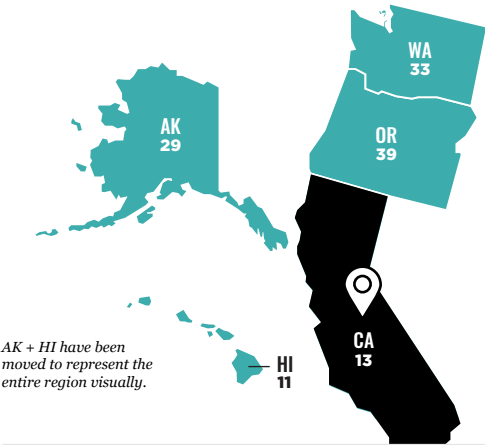
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
LOW

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	25
Group Size	8

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	27
Education Requirements	44

PACIFIC REGION

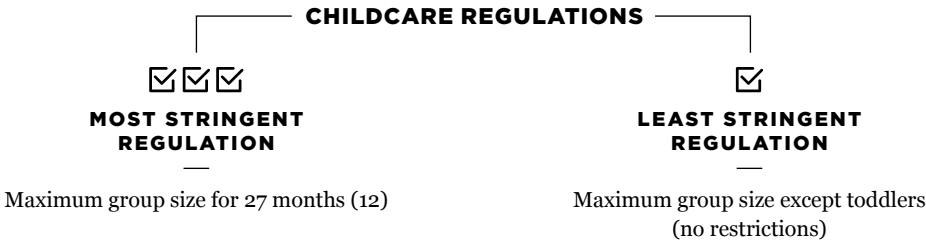
California ranks 2nd in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 5=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

California ranks 13th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 11 Hawaii
- 12 North Carolina
- 13 California**
- 14 Kentucky
- 15 Arkansas





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado**
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

COLORADO'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
28TH

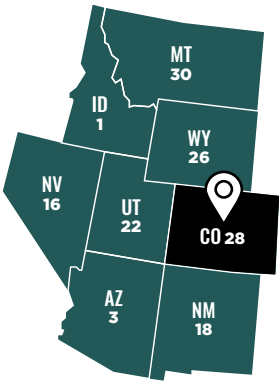
CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
3.44

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	19	Training Hours	18
Group Size	33	Education Requirements	32

MOUNTAIN REGION

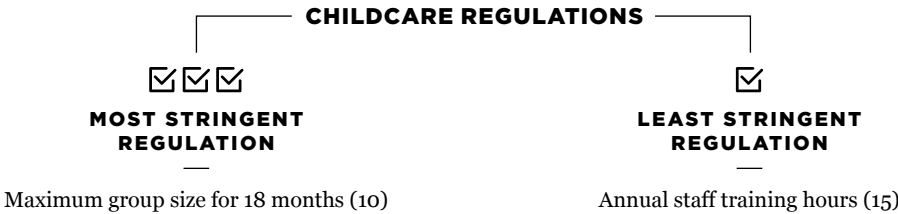
Colorado ranks 7th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Colorado ranks 28th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 26 Wyoming
- 27 New Hampshire
- 28 Colorado**
- 29 Alaska
- 30 Montana





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut**
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

CONNECTICUT’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
45TH

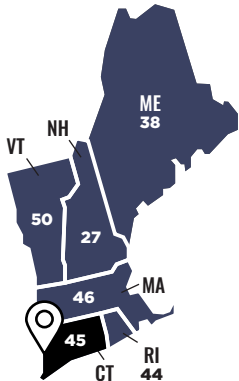
CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
2.30

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	45	Training Hours	36
Group Size	49	Education Requirements	12

NEW ENGLAND REGION

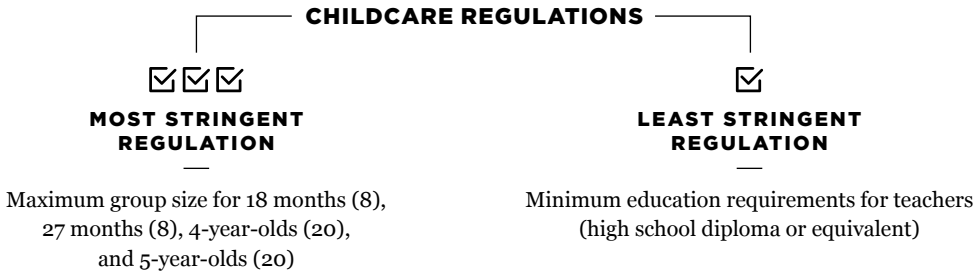
Connecticut ranks 4th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 6=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Connecticut ranks 45th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 43 Wisconsin
- 44 Rhode Island
- 45 Connecticut**
- 46 Massachusetts
- 47 Maryland





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut

Delaware

- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

DELAWARE'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
32ND

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
3.22

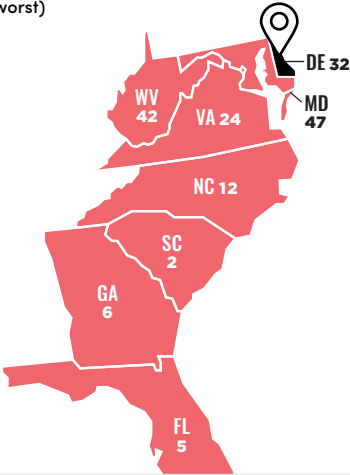
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	21
Group Size	34

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	18
Education Requirements	44

SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

Delaware ranks 6th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Delaware ranks 32nd in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 30 Montana
- 31 Illinois
- 32 Delaware**
- 33 Washington
- 34 New Jersey

CHILDCARE REGULATIONS



MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Maximum group size for 6 months and 9 months (8)



LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Annual staff training hours (15)



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

FLORIDA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
5TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
7.02

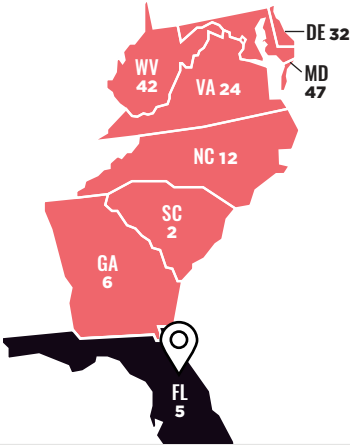
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
LOW

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	5
Group Size	1

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	45
Education Requirements	39

SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

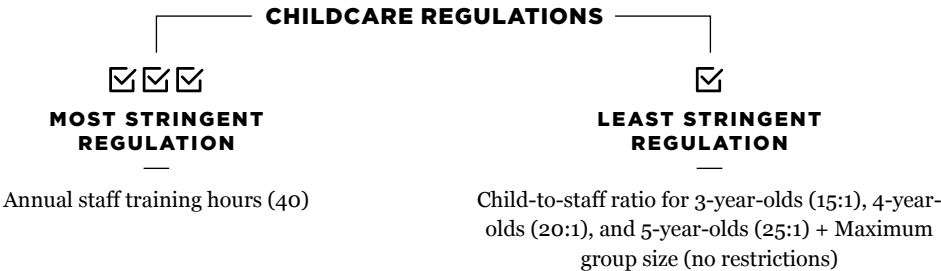
Florida ranks 2nd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Florida ranks 5th in the nation for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 50=worst)

- 3 Arizona
- 4 Alabama
- 5 Florida**
- 6 Georgia
- 7 Iowa



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida**
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

GEORGIA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
6TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
6.59

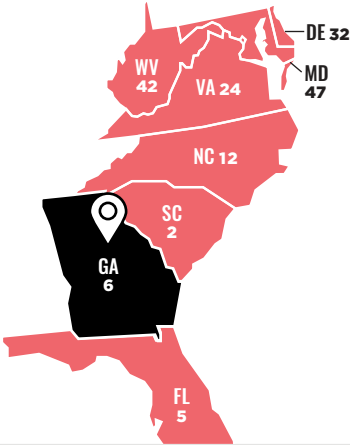
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	1
Group Size	11

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	5
Education Requirements	14

SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

Georgia ranks 3rd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Georgia ranks 6th in the nation for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 50=worst)

- 4 Alabama
- 5 Florida
- 6 Georgia**
- 7 Iowa
- 8 Louisiana

CHILD CARE REGULATIONS
 MOST STRINGENT REGULATION
Maximum group size for 6 months and 9 months (12)

LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION
Child-to-staff ratio for 6 months (6:1), 9 months (6:1), and 3-year-olds (10:1)

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia**
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

HAWAII'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
11TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
5.31

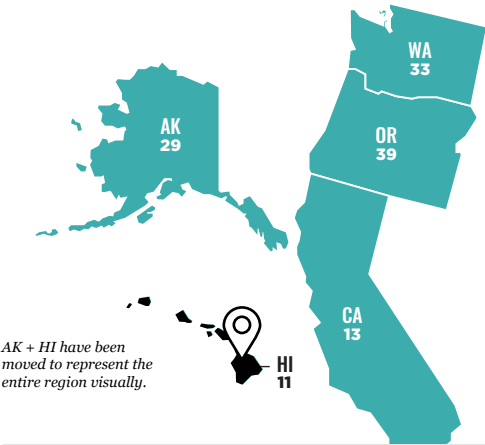
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
LOW

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	16
Group Size	9

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	27
Education Requirements	36

PACIFIC REGION

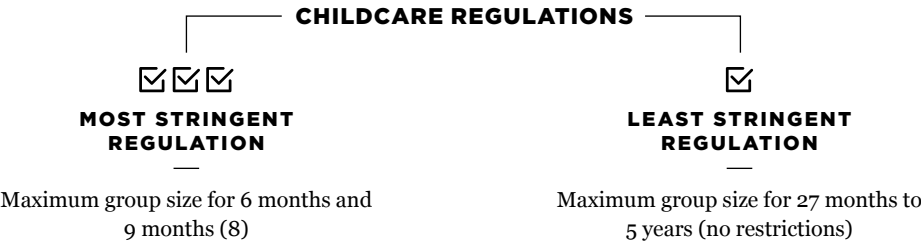
Hawaii ranks 1st in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 5=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Hawaii ranks 11th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 9 Texas
- 10 Nebraska
- 11 Hawaii**
- 12 North Carolina
- 13 California



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii**
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

IDAHO'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
1ST

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
8.17

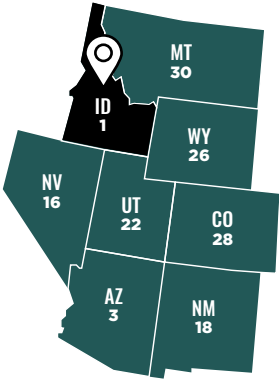
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	6
Group Size	1

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	8
Education Requirements	1

MOUNTAIN REGION

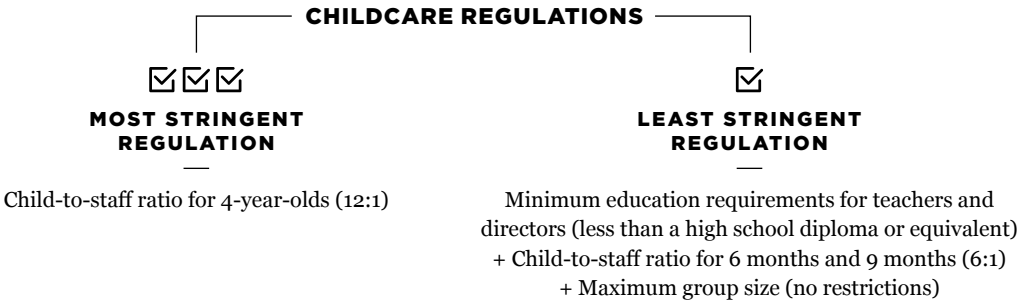
Idaho ranks 1st in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Idaho ranks 1st in the nation for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 50=worst)

- 1** Idaho
- 2** South Carolina
- 3** Arizona
- 4** Alabama
- 5** Florida



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho**
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

ILLINOIS'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK

31ST

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE

3.22

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY

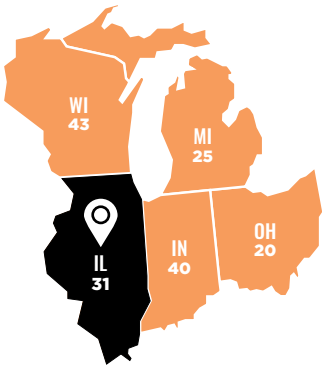
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	22
Group Size	32

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	18
Education Requirements	44

EAST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

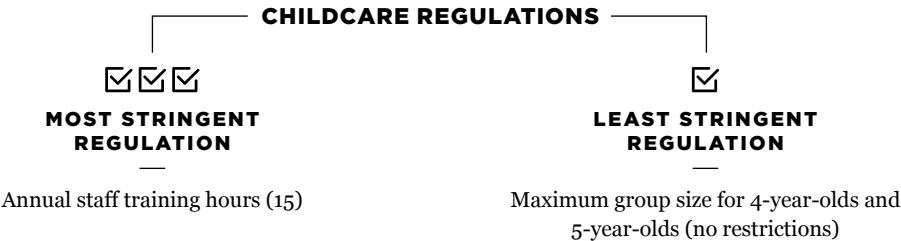
Illinois ranks 3rd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 5=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Illinois ranks 31st in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 29 Alaska
- 30 Montana
- 31 Illinois
- 32 Delaware
- 33 Washington



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois**
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

INDIANA’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
40TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
2.84

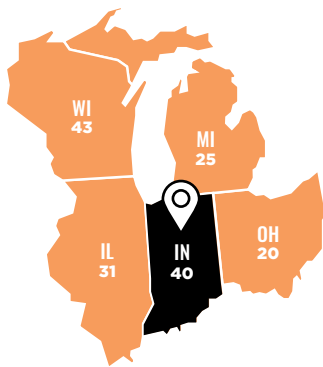
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	37
Group Size	38

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	8
Education Requirements	42

EAST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

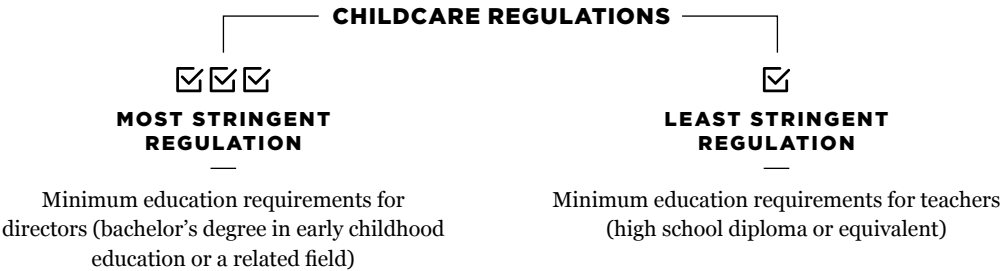
Indiana ranks 4th in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 5=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Indiana ranks 40th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 38 Maine
- 39 Oregon
- 40 Indiana**
- 41 Minnesota
- 42 West Virginia



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana**
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

IOWA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

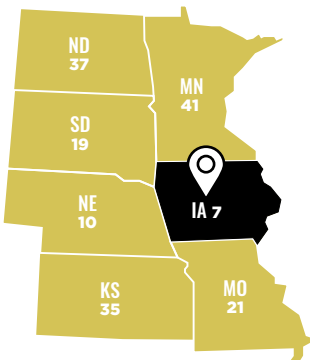


AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	34
Group Size	1

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	1
Education Requirements	4

WEST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

Iowa ranks 1st in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 7=worst)



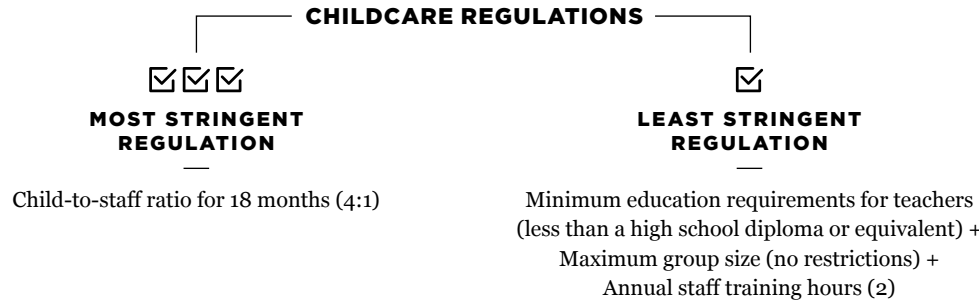
OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Iowa ranks 7th in the nation for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 50=worst)



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana

- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

KANSAS'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
35TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
3.07

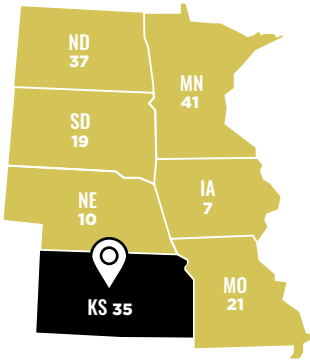
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	41
Group Size	35

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	27
Education Requirements	14

WEST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

Kansas ranks 5th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 7=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Kansas ranks 35th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 33 Washington
- 34 New Jersey
- 35 Kansas
- 36 Tennessee
- 37 North Dakota



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas**
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

KENTUCKY’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
14TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
4.84

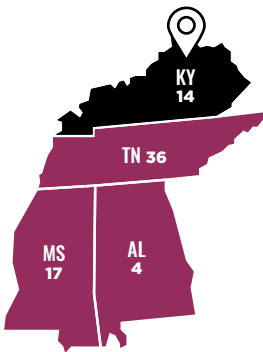
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	13
Group Size	22

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	18
Education Requirements	6

EAST SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Kentucky ranks 2nd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 4=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Kentucky ranks 14th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 12 North Carolina
- 13 California
- 14 Kentucky**
- 15 Arkansas
- 16 Nevada

CHILDCARE REGULATIONS



MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Maximum group size for 6-9 months (10)



LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Minimum education requirements for directors
(high school diploma or equivalent)

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky**
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

LOUISIANA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
8TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
6.23

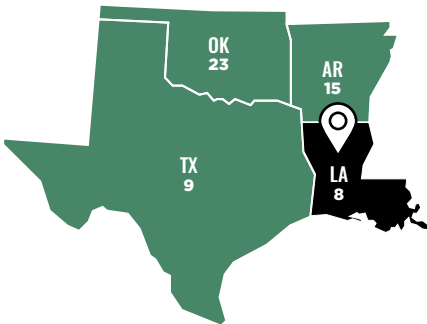
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	7
Group Size	10

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	8
Education Requirements	4

WEST SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

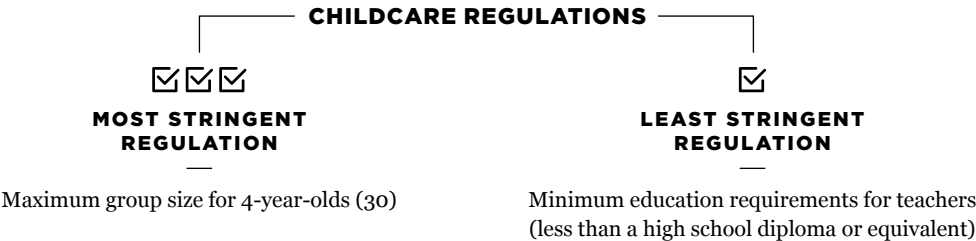
Louisiana ranks 1st in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 4=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Louisiana ranks 8th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 6 Georgia
- 7 Iowa
- 8 Louisiana**
- 9 Texas
- 10 Nebraska



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana**
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

MAINE’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
38TH

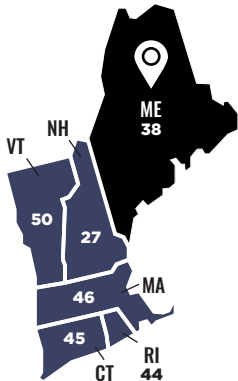
CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
2.95

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	34	Training Hours	42
Group Size	31	Education Requirements	31

NEW ENGLAND REGION

Maine ranks 2nd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 6=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Maine ranks 38th in the nation for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 50=worst)

- 36 Tennessee
- 37 North Dakota
- 38 Maine**
- 39 Oregon
- 40 Indiana

CHILDCARE REGULATIONS



MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Maximum group size for 27 months (10) and 4-year-olds (20)



LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Maximum group size for 5-year-olds (no restrictions)

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine**
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

MARYLAND'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
47TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
2.09

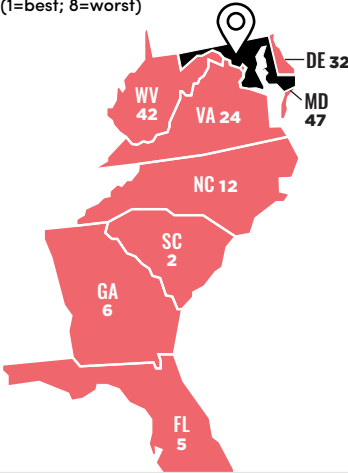
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	47
Group Size	46

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	8
Education Requirements	32

SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

Maryland ranks 8th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Maryland ranks 47th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 45 Connecticut
- 46 Massachusetts
- 47 Maryland**
- 48 Pennsylvania
- 49 New York

CHILDCARE REGULATIONS



MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Child-to-staff ratio for 6 months, 9 months, and 18 months (3:1) + Maximum group size for 6 months (6), 9 months (6), and 4-year-olds (20)



LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Annual staff training hours (12)

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland**
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

MASSACHUSETTS'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
46TH

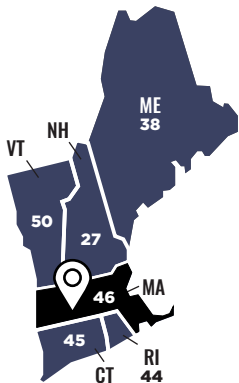
CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
2.23

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	50	Training Hours	33
Group Size	39	Education Requirements	32

NEW ENGLAND REGION

Massachusetts ranks 5th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 6=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Massachusetts ranks 46th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 44 Rhode Island
- 45 Connecticut
- 46 Massachusetts**
- 47 Maryland
- 48 Pennsylvania

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts**
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

CHILD CARE REGULATIONS

MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Child-to-staff ratio for 6 months, (3:1), 9 months (3:1), and 27 months (4:1) + Maximum group size for 4-year-olds (20)

CHILD CARE REGULATIONS

LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Minimum education requirements for teachers (clock hours, credits, or an early childhood education credential below the level of a child development associate)



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

MICHIGAN'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
25TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
3.90

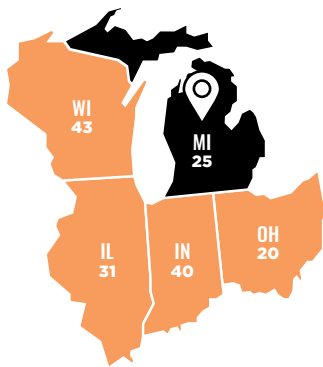
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	44
Group Size	15

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	2
Education Requirements	18

EAST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

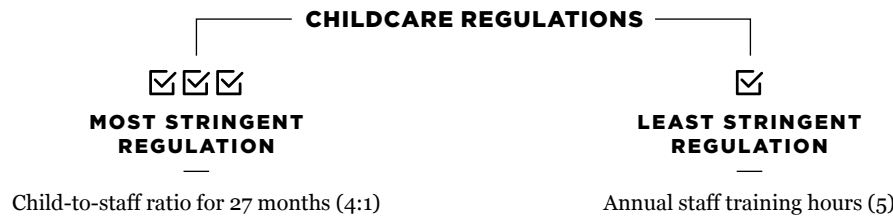
Michigan ranks 2nd in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 5=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Michigan ranks 25th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 23 Oklahoma
- 24 Virginia
- 25 Michigan**
- 26 Wyoming
- 27 New Hampshire



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan**
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

MINNESOTA’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
41ST

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
2.77

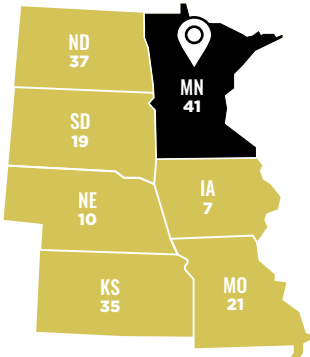
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	31
Group Size	41

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	37
Education Requirements	30

WEST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

Minnesota ranks 7th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 7=worst)

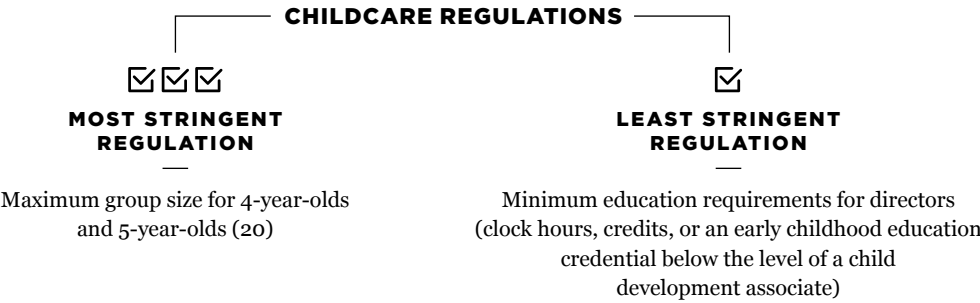


OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Minnesota ranks 41st in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 39 Oregon
- 40 Indiana
- 41 Minnesota**
- 42 West Virginia
- 43 Wisconsin

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota**
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

MISSISSIPPI’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
17TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
4.57

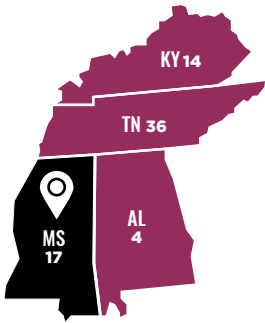
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
LOW

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	3
Group Size	47

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	18
Education Requirements	7

EAST SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Mississippi ranks 3rd in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 4=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Mississippi ranks 17th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 15 Arkansas
- 16 Nevada
- 17 Mississippi**
- 18 New Mexico
- 19 South Dakota

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi**
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

CHILD CARE REGULATIONS

MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Maximum group size for 3-year-olds (14), 4-year-olds (20), and 5-year-olds (20)

CHILD CARE REGULATIONS

LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Minimum education requirements for teachers (less than a high school diploma or equivalent) + Child-to-staff ratio for 18 months (9:1) and 27 months (12:1)



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

MISSOURI'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
21ST

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
4.34

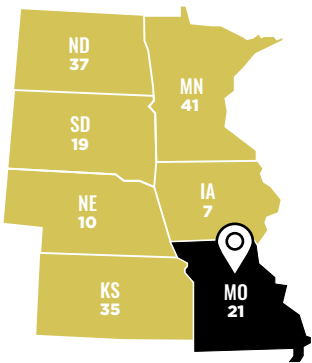
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
LOW

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	31
Group Size	12

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	8
Education Requirements	13

WEST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

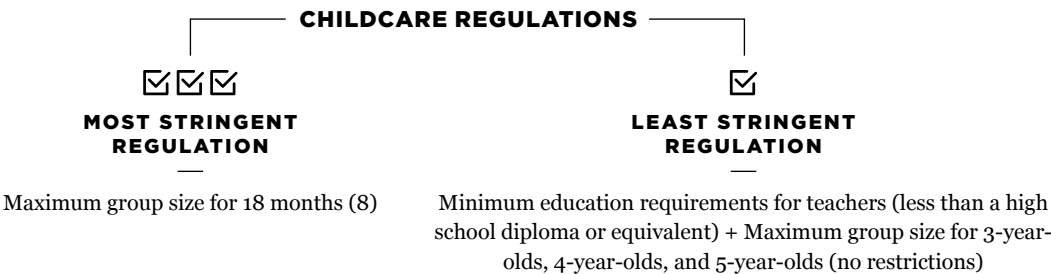
Missouri ranks 4th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 7=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Missouri ranks 21st in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 19 South Dakota
- 20 Ohio
- 21 Missouri
- 22 Utah
- 23 Oklahoma



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri**
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

MONTANA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
30TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
3.28

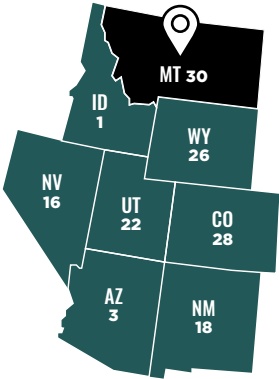
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	40
Group Size	29

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	4
Education Requirements	26

MOUNTAIN REGION

Montana ranks 8th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 8=worst)

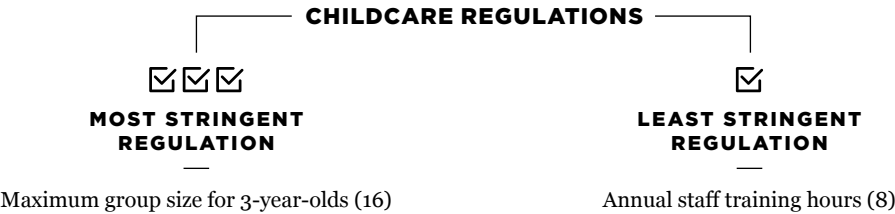


OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Montana ranks 30th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 28 Colorado
- 29 Alaska
- 30 Montana**
- 31 Illinois
- 32 Delaware

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana**
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

NEBRASKA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
10TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
5.48

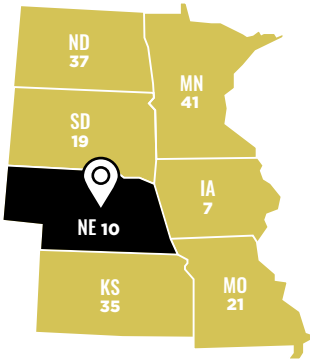
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
LOW

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	33
Group Size	7

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	8
Education Requirements	18

WEST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

Nebraska ranks 2nd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 7=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Nebraska ranks 10th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 8 Louisiana
- 9 Texas
- 10 Nebraska**
- 11 Hawaii
- 12 North Carolina

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska**
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

CHILD CARE REGULATIONS

MOST STRINGENT REGULATION
Child-to-staff ratio for 5-year-olds (12:1)

LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION
Maximum group size for 18 months to 5 years (no restrictions)



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

NEVADA’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
16TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
4.64

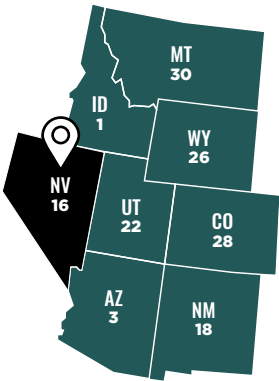
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	14
Group Size	21

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	37
Education Requirements	7

MOUNTAIN REGION

Nevada ranks 3rd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 8=worst)

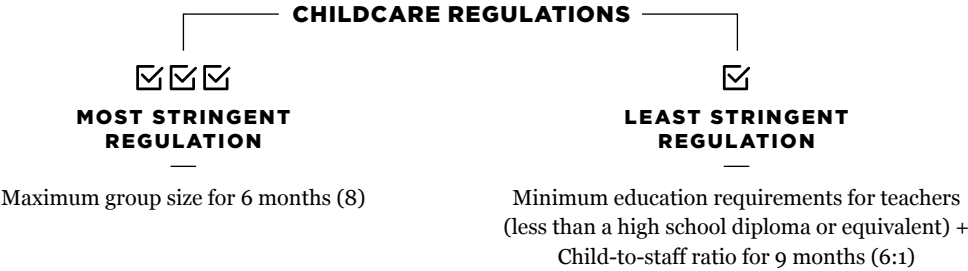


OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Nevada ranks 16th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 14 Kentucky
- 15 Arkansas
- 16 Nevada
- 17 Mississippi
- 18 New Mexico

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada**
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





NEW HAMPSHIRE

RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

NEW HAMPSHIRE’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
27TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
3.76

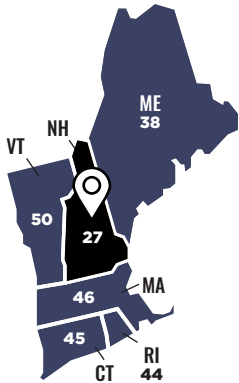
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	27
Group Size	19

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	31
Education Requirements	32

NEW ENGLAND REGION

New Hampshire ranks 1st in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 6=worst)

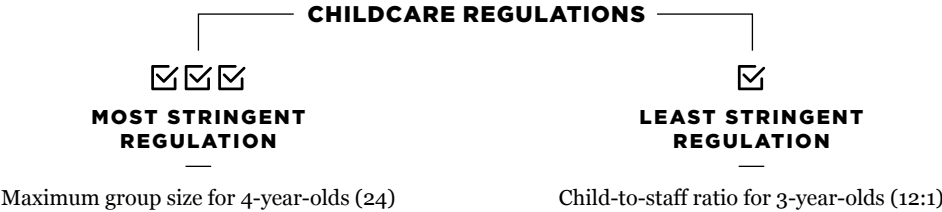


OVERALL U.S. RANKING

New Hampshire ranks 27th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 25 Michigan
- 26 Wyoming
- 27 New Hampshire**
- 28 Colorado
- 29 Alaska

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire**
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

NEW JERSEY’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
34TH

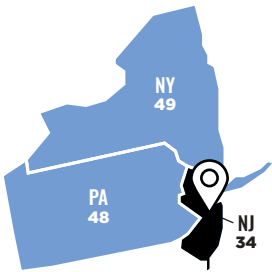
CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
3.15

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	28	Training Hours	41
Group Size	24	Education Requirements	48

MIDDLE ATLANTIC REGION

New Jersey ranks 1st in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 3=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

New Jersey ranks 34th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 32 Delaware
- 33 Washington
- 34 New Jersey
- 35 Kansas
- 36 Tennessee

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey**
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





NEW MEXICO

RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

NEW MEXICO’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS



U.S. RANK

18TH





CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE



4.42



REGULATORY CONSISTENCY

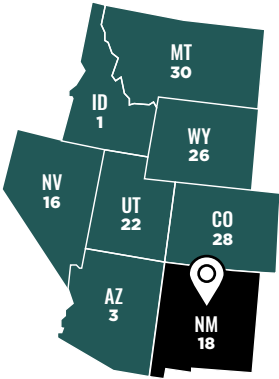
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
 Child-to-Staff Ratio	8
 Group Size	20

AREA	RANK
 Training Hours	50
 Education Requirements	26

MOUNTAIN REGION

New Mexico ranks 4th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

New Mexico ranks 18th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 16 Nevada
- 17 Mississippi
- 18 New Mexico
- 19 South Dakota
- 20 Ohio

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico**
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

NEW YORK’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
49TH

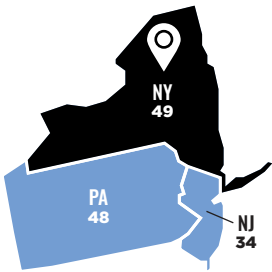
CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
1.87

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	47	Training Hours	42
Group Size	42	Education Requirements	39

MIDDLE ATLANTIC REGION

New York ranks 3rd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 3=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

New York ranks 49th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 46 Massachusetts
- 47 Maryland
- 48 Pennsylvania
- 49 New York**
- 50 Vermont

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York**
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Child-to-staff ratio for 4-year-olds (8:1) and 5-year-olds (9:1)

LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Minimum education requirements for directors (clock hours, credits, or an early childhood education credential above the level of a child development associate)



NORTH CAROLINA

RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

NORTH CAROLINA’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS



U.S. RANK

12TH





CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE



5.22



REGULATORY CONSISTENCY

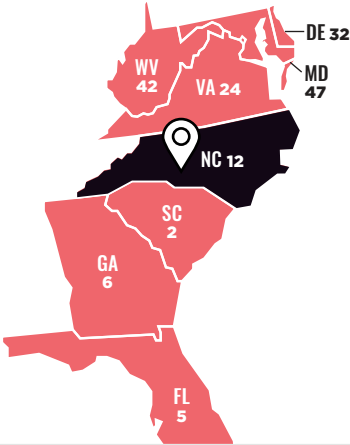
LOW

AREA	RANK
 Child-to-Staff Ratio	2
 Group Size	26

AREA	RANK
 Training Hours	5
 Education Requirements	21

SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

North Carolina ranks 4th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

North Carolina ranks 12th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 10

Nebraska
- 11

Hawaii
- 12

North Carolina
- 13

California
- 14

Kentucky

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina**
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Maximum group size for 5-year-olds (25)

CHILDCARE REGULATIONS



LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Child-to-staff ratio for 3-year-olds (15:1), 4-year-olds (20:1), and 5-year-olds (25:1)



NORTH DAKOTA

RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

NORTH DAKOTA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS



U.S. RANK

37TH





CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE



2.99



REGULATORY CONSISTENCY

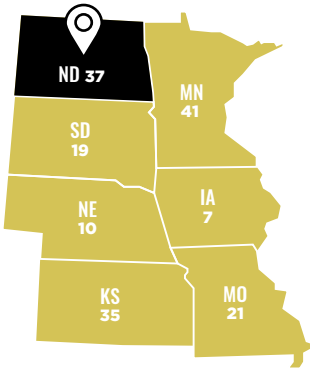
HIGH

AREA	RANK
 Child-to-Staff Ratio	46
 Group Size	28

AREA	RANK
 Training Hours	18
 Education Requirements	26

WEST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

North Dakota ranks 6th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 7=worst)

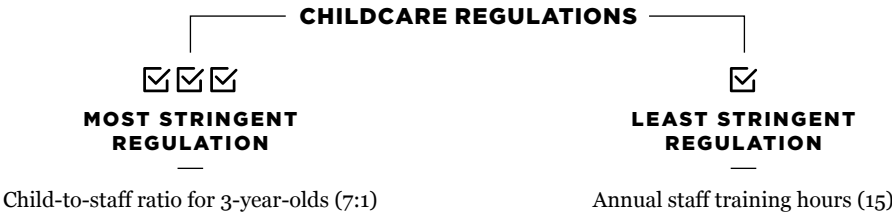


OVERALL U.S. RANKING

North Dakota ranks 37th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 35 Kansas
- 36 Tennessee
- 37 North Dakota
- 38 Maine
- 39 Oregon

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

OHIO'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
20TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
4.36

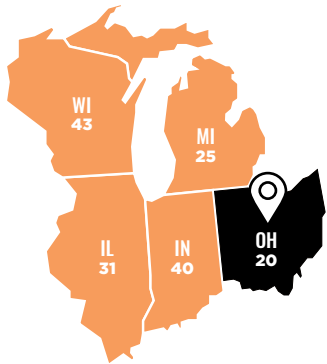
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	14
Group Size	17

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	3
Education Requirements	49

EAST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

Ohio ranks 1st in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 5=worst)

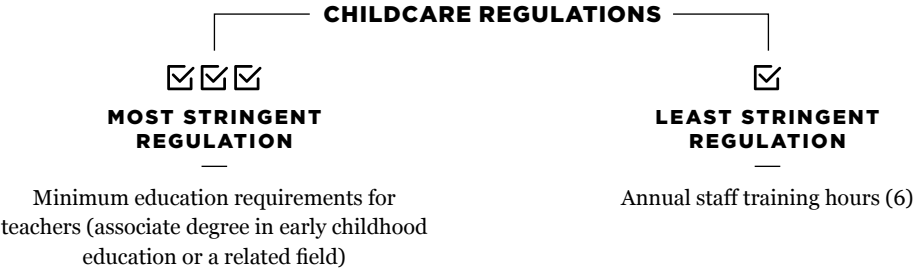


OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Ohio ranks 20th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 18 New Mexico
- 19 South Dakota
- 20 **Ohio**
- 21 Missouri
- 22 Utah

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio**
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

OKLAHOMA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
23RD

CHILD CARE FREEDOM SCORE
4.01

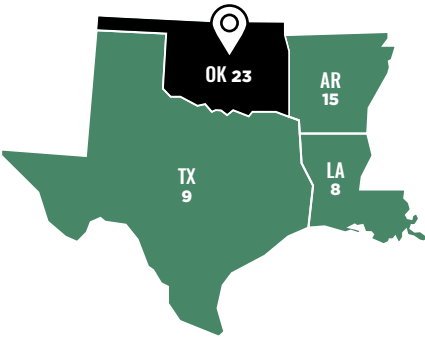
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	18
Group Size	27

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	8
Education Requirements	21

WEST SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Oklahoma ranks 4th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 4=worst)

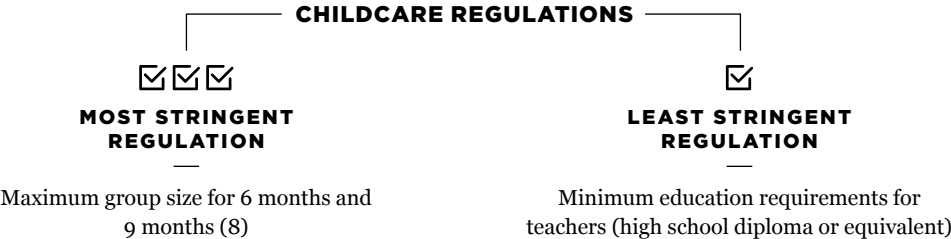


OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Oklahoma ranks 23rd in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 21 Missouri
- 22 Utah
- 23 Oklahoma**
- 24 Virginia
- 25 Michigan

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma**
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

OREGON'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
39TH

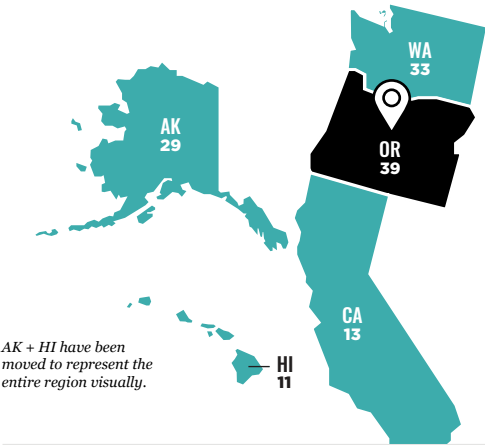
CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
2.95

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
LOW

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	42	Training Hours	18
Group Size	45	Education Requirements	1

PACIFIC REGION

Oregon ranks 5th in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 5=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Oregon ranks 39th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 37 North Dakota
- 38 Maine
- 39 Oregon
- 40 Indiana
- 41 Minnesota

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon**
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

CHILDCARE REGULATIONS

MOST STRINGENT REGULATION
Maximum group size for 18 months (8), 27 months (10), and 4-year-olds (20)

LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION
Minimum education requirements for teachers and directors (less than a high school diploma or equivalent)



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

PENNSYLVANIA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
48TH

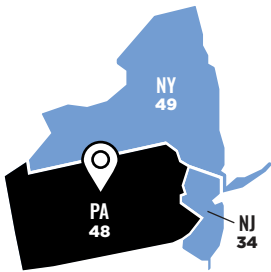
CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
1.88

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	43	Training Hours	8
Group Size	48	Education Requirements	50

MIDDLE ATLANTIC REGION

Pennsylvania ranks 2nd in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 3=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Pennsylvania ranks 48th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 46 Massachusetts
- 47 Maryland
- 48 Pennsylvania**
- 49 New York
- 50 Vermont

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania**
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

CHILD CARE REGULATIONS

MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Minimum education requirements for teachers (associate degree in early childhood education or a related field) + Minimum education requirements for directors (bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field) + Maximum group size for 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds (20)

LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Annual staff training hours (12)



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

RHODE ISLAND’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
44TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
2.53

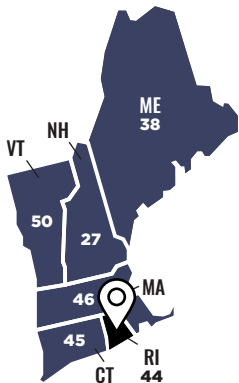
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	39
Group Size	43

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	33
Education Requirements	36

NEW ENGLAND REGION

Rhode Island ranks 3rd in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 6=worst)

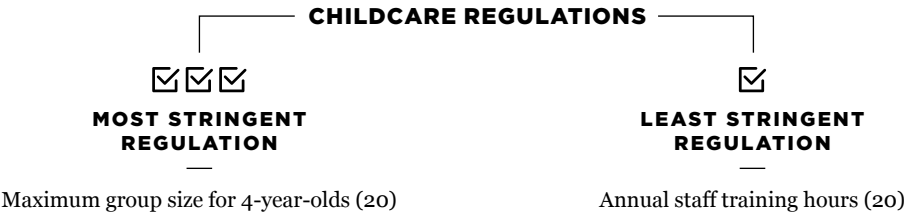


OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Rhode Island ranks 44th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 42 West Virginia
- 43 Wisconsin
- 44 Rhode Island**
- 45 Connecticut
- 46 Massachusetts

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island**
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

SOUTH CAROLINA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
2ND

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
7.56

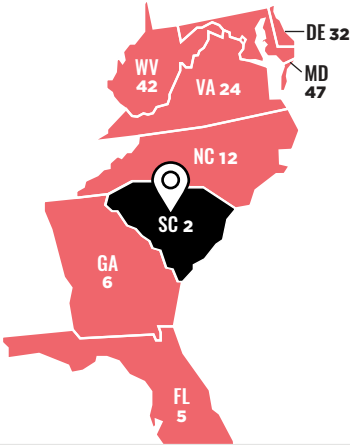
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	10
Group Size	1

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	18
Education Requirements	14

SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

South Carolina ranks 1st in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 8=worst)

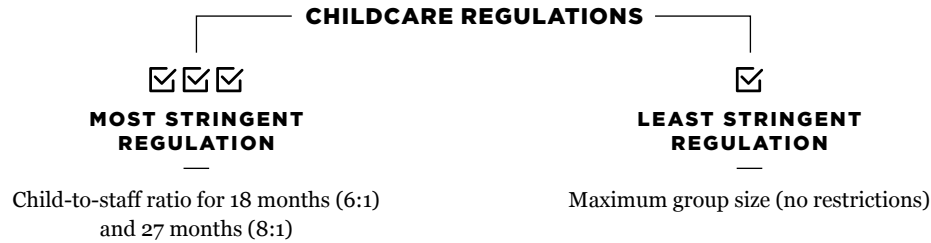


OVERALL U.S. RANKING

South Carolina ranks 2nd in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 1 Idaho
- 2 South Carolina**
- 3 Arizona
- 4 Alabama
- 5 Florida

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina**
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





SOUTH DAKOTA

RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

SOUTH DAKOTA’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS



U.S. RANK

19TH





CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE



4.39



REGULATORY CONSISTENCY

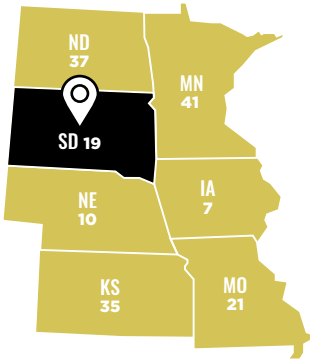
LOW

AREA	RANK
 Child-to-Staff Ratio	23
 Group Size	16

AREA	RANK
 Training Hours	5
 Education Requirements	7

WEST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

South Dakota ranks 3rd in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 7=worst)




OVERALL U.S. RANKING

South Dakota ranks 19th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)


- 17 Mississippi
- 18 New Mexico
- 19 South Dakota
- 20 Ohio
- 21 Missouri

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Maximum group size for 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds (20)



LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Minimum education requirements for teachers (less than a high school diploma or equivalent)



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

TENNESSEE’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
36TH

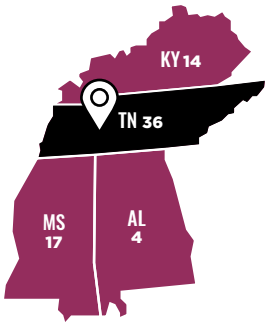
CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
3.06

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK	AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	24	Training Hours	8
Group Size	44	Education Requirements	21

EAST SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Tennessee ranks 4th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 4=worst)

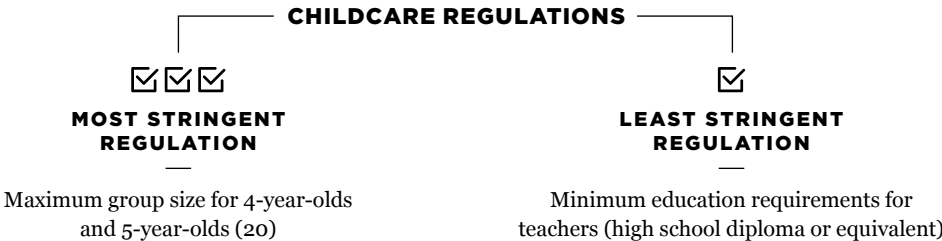


OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Tennessee ranks 36th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 34 New Jersey
- 35 Kansas
- 36 Tennessee
- 37 North Dakota
- 38 Maine

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee**
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming





RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

TEXAS'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
9TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
5.65

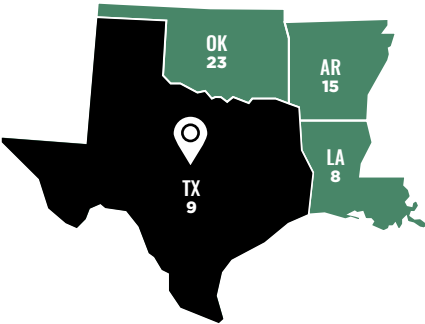
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	4
Group Size	13

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	37
Education Requirements	21

WEST SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Texas ranks 2nd in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 4=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Texas ranks 9th in the nation for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 50=worst)

- 7 Iowa
- 8 Louisiana
- 9 Texas**
- 10 Nebraska
- 11 Hawaii



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas**
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

UTAH'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
22ND

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
4.13

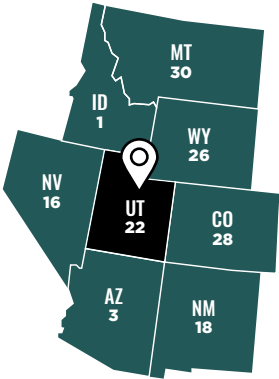
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	17
Group Size	25

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	33
Education Requirements	7

MOUNTAIN REGION

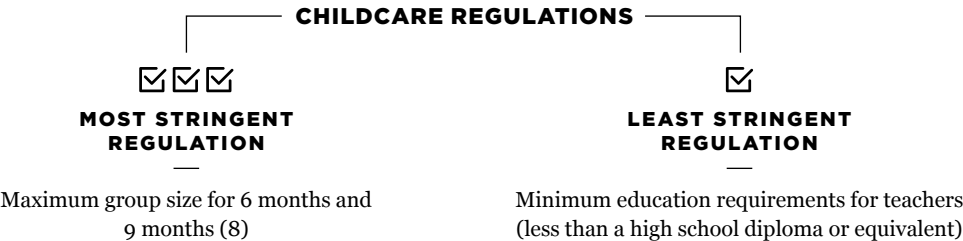
Utah ranks 5th in the region for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Utah ranks 22nd in the nation for childcare freedom.
(1=best; 50=worst)

- 20 Ohio
- 21 Missouri
- 22 Utah
- 23 Oklahoma
- 24 Virginia



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah**
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

VERMONT’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
50TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
1.31

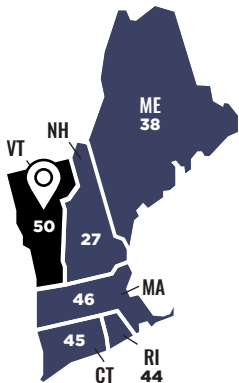
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	49
Group Size	50

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	45
Education Requirements	47

NEW ENGLAND REGION

Vermont ranks 6th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 6=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Vermont ranks 50th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 46 Massachusetts
- 47 Maryland
- 48 Pennsylvania
- 49 New York
- 50 Vermont

CHILDCARE REGULATIONS



MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Child-to-staff ratio for 3-year-olds (6:1) + Maximum group size for 27 months (10), 4-year-olds (20), and 5-year-olds (20)



LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Minimum education requirements for directors (clock hours, credits, or an early childhood education credential above the level of a child development associate)

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont**
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

VIRGINIA’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
24TH

CHILD CARE FREEDOM SCORE
3.91

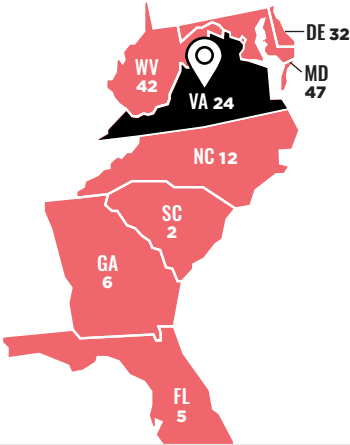
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	38
Group Size	14

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	27
Education Requirements	36

SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

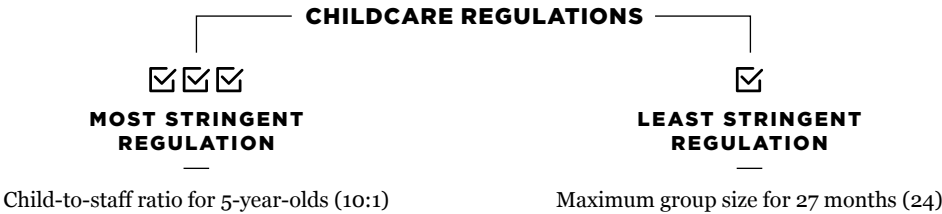
Virginia ranks 5th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Virginia ranks 24th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 22 Utah
- 23 Oklahoma
- 24 Virginia**
- 25 Michigan
- 26 Wyoming



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia**
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



WASHINGTON

RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

WASHINGTON’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS



U.S. RANK

33RD





CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE



3.16



REGULATORY CONSISTENCY

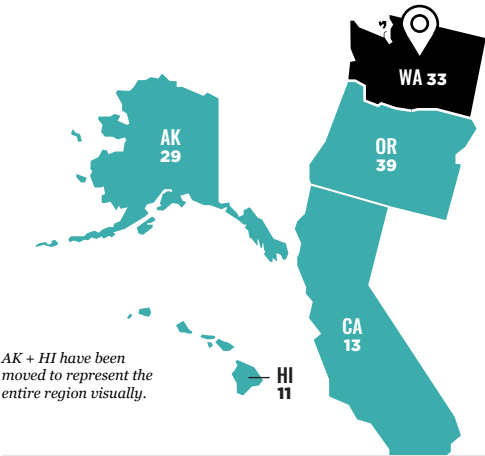
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
 Child-to-Staff Ratio	26
 Group Size	30

AREA	RANK
 Training Hours	45
 Education Requirements	21

PACIFIC REGION

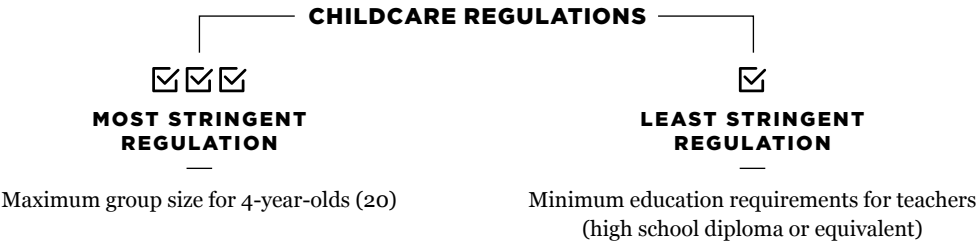
Washington ranks 4th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 5=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Washington ranks 33rd in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 31 Illinois
- 32 Delaware
- 33 Washington
- 34 New Jersey
- 35 Kansas



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

WEST VIRGINIA'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
42ND

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
2.77

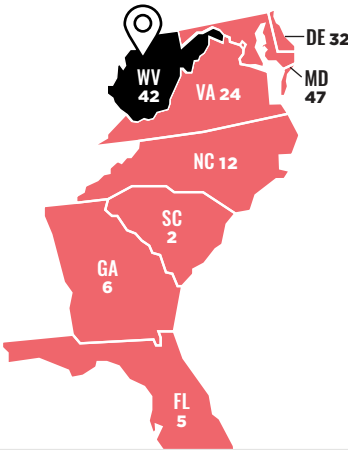
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	36
Group Size	36

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	45
Education Requirements	20

SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

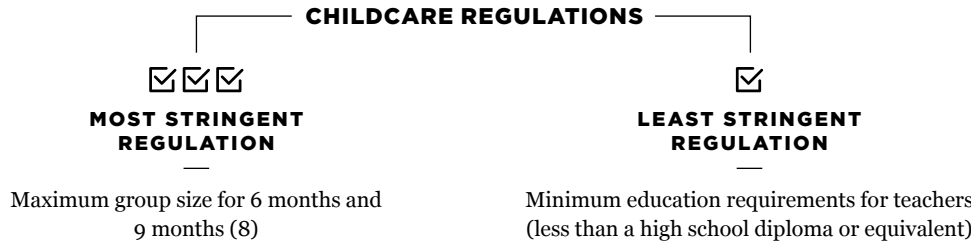
West Virginia ranks 7th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

West Virginia ranks 42nd in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 40 Indiana
- 41 Minnesota
- 42 West Virginia**
- 43 Wisconsin
- 44 Rhode Island



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia**
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

WISCONSIN'S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK

43RD

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE

2.64

REGULATORY CONSISTENCY

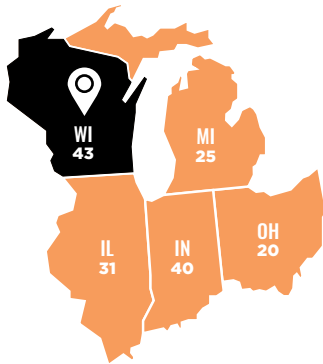
HIGH

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	30
Group Size	37

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	45
Education Requirements	39

EAST NORTH CENTRAL REGION

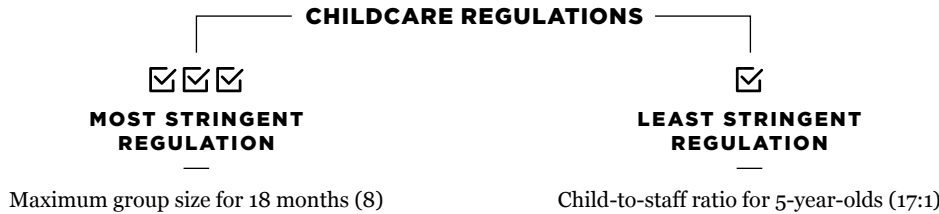
Wisconsin ranks 5th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 5=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Wisconsin ranks 43rd in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 41 Minnesota
- 42 West Virginia
- 43 Wisconsin
- 44 Rhode Island
- 45 Connecticut



- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming



RANK: 1=best; 50=worst | SCORE: 10=best; 0=worst

WYOMING’S 2026 CHILDCARE REGULATION RANKINGS

U.S. RANK
26TH

CHILDCARE FREEDOM SCORE
3.82

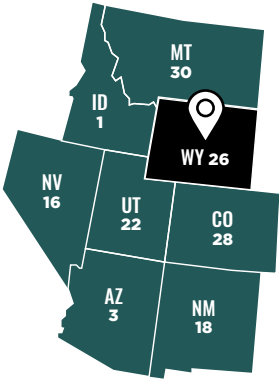
REGULATORY CONSISTENCY
MEDIUM

AREA	RANK
Child-to-Staff Ratio	29
Group Size	23

AREA	RANK
Training Hours	42
Education Requirements	3

MOUNTAIN REGION

Wyoming ranks 6th in the region for childcare freedom. (1=best; 8=worst)



OVERALL U.S. RANKING

Wyoming ranks 26th in the nation for childcare freedom. (1=best; 50=worst)

- 24 Virginia
- 25 Michigan
- 26 Wyoming**
- 27 New Hampshire
- 28 Colorado

CHILDCARE REGULATIONS



MOST STRINGENT REGULATION

Child-to-staff ratio for 5-year-olds (12:1)



LEAST STRINGENT REGULATION

Minimum education requirements for teachers (less than a high school diploma or equivalent)

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming**

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JANUARY 2026

Increasing opportunities for social mobility and human flourishing is the defining challenge of our time. Through rigorous academic research, sound public policy solutions, and reviving the spirit of entrepreneurship, the Archbridge Institute works to empower individuals to achieve better, richer, and fuller lives by identifying and removing the barriers that constrain their potential. The Archbridge Institute is a non-partisan, independent, 501(c)(3) public policy think tank.



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