



# Non-Traditional Child Care Demand

## Michigan Compared to Other States

By Nathan Burroughs (AIR)<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. child care system is largely based on the assumption that parents with young children work *regular* work hours—i.e. 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Most child care providers therefore focus on serving children between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. during the work week. But what about parents with non-standard work hours? Many employers require workers at night or on the weekend, especially in sectors like hospitality, retail, health care, or manufacturing. Child care is often difficult to find, particularly when parents need care outside of standard working hours. Many jobs with non-standard work hours are also lower paying, which puts additional pressure on families trying to find affordable child care (Lee & Henly, 2024). Staffing, setting, and licensing rules also restrict providers' ability to offer non-traditional hour (NTH) care (Henly & Adams, 2018). This is the challenge of NTH child care.

1. Dr. Burroughs is the co-principal investigator for the study.





While NTH care has received increased attention from researchers and policymakers in recent years, we still lack a clear idea of the real demand for child care outside of regular work hours, how demand differs across states, and the extent to which the need for NTH care is changing over time. As part of its study of license-exempt care in Michigan, the Public Policy Associates research team recently conducted an analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) data to address this gap in the research literature.

Looking across all 50 states, the research team found that a significant percentage of parents with young children (ages 0-5) work non-standard hours. Comparing 2014 to 2024, however, we see that the need for NTH care appears to be declining in Michigan and elsewhere. The data also suggests that families with low incomes are far more likely to need NTH care than families with higher incomes. Although using the most robust strategy possible given data limitations (i.e., exclusion of weekends), these results likely underestimate the true need for NTH care.

## METHODS

We analyzed data from the 2014 and 2024<sup>2</sup> ACS samples from IPUMS, focusing on households with children aged 0-5 in which all parents were in the labor force. We removed households where at least one parent was not working, assuming that parent would be available to care for children. We also excluded children in group quarters. Parent work hours were estimated following the approach of Henly and Adams (2018). Our approach adapted Henly and Adams's but examined different time periods and trends over time, and differs from theirs in two important ways: first, we examined the need for NTH care for all families with young children, as well as conducting a separate analysis for families in poverty; and second, we defined standard work hours as 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. (to match regulations in Michigan governing the state's child care system), in addition to Henly and Adams's narrower 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. definition.

The ACS includes a question on the time of arrival at work, which is used to identify the start of the work day. However, ACS does not include a question on the typical end of the work day, and so we took the average number of hours at work divided by five (assuming a five-day work week) to estimate the typical time that a parent left their job. Any time at work outside *typical* work hours was defined as non-standard work time. All parents were then linked to children, followed by calculations to determine whether any working parents were employed during non-standard hours. Standard work hours were calculated using both Michigan's definition (7 a.m. to 6 p.m.) and, for comparison purposes, a narrower definition (8 a.m. to 6 p.m.). We also estimated non-standard work hours for those families at or below 100% of the poverty line using the IPUMS household poverty indicator. We used standard balanced replicate weight techniques to estimate households' number of non-standard work hours for each state as well as for the United States for both the 2014 and 2024 samples.

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1. The most recent year for which ACS data is available.



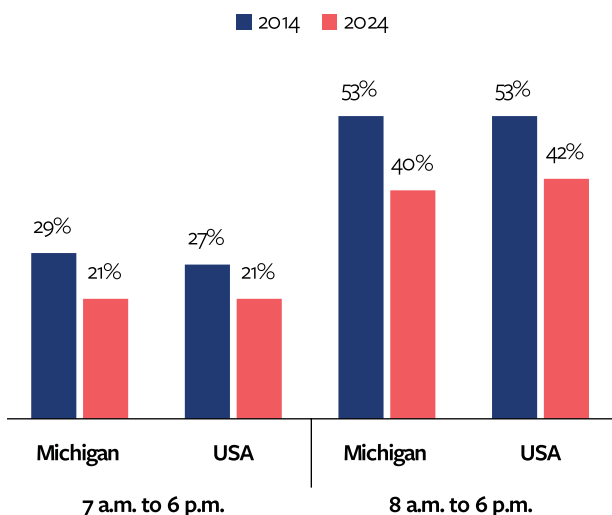
# Results

## Nationally, and in Michigan, a fifth of families with young children require some amount of care outside of standard hours

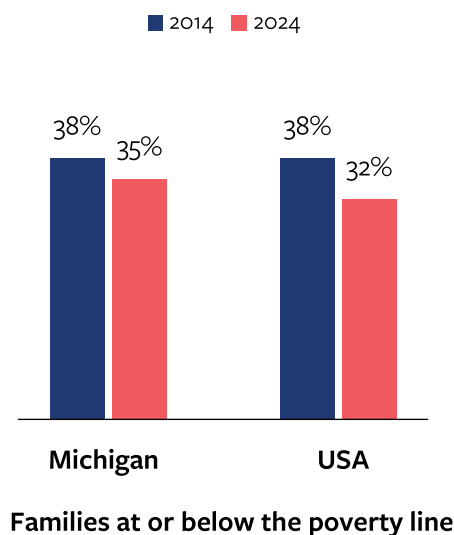
According to 2024 ACS data, 21% of households with young children have adults working at least some time outside of 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. The average in Michigan (21%) is in line with the nation. The percentage is considerably greater if we define the standard workday to begin at 8 a.m., in which case more than two-fifths (42%) of households with young children in 2024

require some amount of NTH care. These estimates are for *any* amount of care outside of standard working hours; there is considerable variation in the demand for NHT care. For example, very few households with young children (4%) had adults who worked mostly late in the evening (after 6 p.m.), overnight, or early in the morning (before 7 a.m.) (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1. FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN NEEDING SOME NTH CARE, COMPARING 2014 AND 2024**



**FIGURE 2. FAMILIES AT OR BELOW THE POVERTY LINE WITH CHILDREN NEEDING SOME NTH CARE, COMPARING 2014 AND 2024**





**Households with low incomes are more likely to need non-traditional hour care**

Families at or below the poverty line are much more likely to need NTH care than more affluent families. Across the nation in 2024, nearly a third (32%) of all households with young children had parents with at least some non-standard hours, although this figure has declined over the last 10 years (from 38% in 2014). The share of families with low incomes in Michigan who need NTH care is somewhat higher than the national average (35%, Figure 2).

**The need for non-traditional hour care has declined over the last decade**

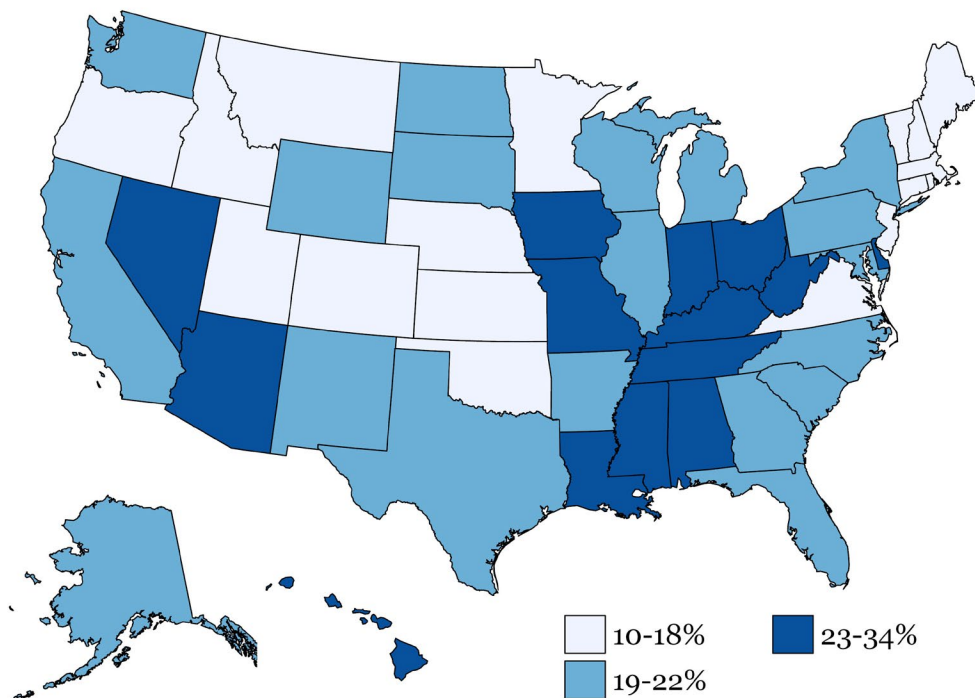
The share of households with young children needing care outside of traditional work hours has declined substantially over the last decade. In 2014, 27% of these families had adults

working non-standard hours, a 6% decline in 10 years. The proportion has fallen even more sharply if one considers the workday as beginning at 8 a.m.—from a majority of 53% of households with young children in 2014, to 42% in 2024. The trends in Michigan mirror those of the nation.

**There are dramatic differences across states in the need for non-traditional hour care**

In most respects, Michigan resembles the national average. Considerable variation exists in the potential demand for NTH care across the country. As presented in Figure 3 and Table 1, states such as Hawaii (34%) and Nevada (33%) have a much higher percentage of parents with young children working non-standard hours, as compared with states with low demand for NTH care like Vermont (10%).

**FIGURE 3. MAP OF DEMAND FOR NON-TRADITIONAL HOUR CARE, 2024**





**TABLE 1. DEMAND FOR NON-TRADITIONAL HOUR (NTH) CHILD CARE IN 2024 BY STATE**

STATE	PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES NEEDING SOME NTH CARE
<b>Michigan</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>USA</b>	<b>21%</b>
Hawaii	34%
Nevada	33%
West Virginia	32%
Mississippi	30%
Arizona	28%
Kentucky	26%
Alabama	25%
Delaware	25%
Indiana	25%
Louisiana	24%
Tennessee	24%
Iowa	23%
Missouri	23%
Ohio	23%
Alaska	22%
Arkansas	22%
Georgia	22%
New Mexico	22%
Pennsylvania	22%
Texas	22%
Wyoming	22%
South Carolina	21%
California	20%
District of Columbia	20%
Florida	20%
Maryland	20%
North Dakota	20%
Washington	20%
Wisconsin	20%

STATE	PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES NEEDING SOME NTH CARE
Illinois	19%
New York	19%
North Carolina	19%
South Dakota	19%
Maine	18%
Montana	18%
Oklahoma	18%
Oregon	18%
Colorado	17%
Connecticut	17%
Idaho	17%
Kansas	17%
New Hampshire	17%
Utah	17%
Massachusetts	16%
New Jersey	16%
Rhode Island	16%
Virginia	16%
Minnesota	14%
Nebraska	13%
Vermont	10%



## Discussion

This analysis indicates that many families have needs for NTH child care. This can pose a significant challenge for many families, especially those with lower incomes. A lack of access to quality child care at the times needed can have negative impacts both on children's development and the long-term economic prospects of parents, while also contributing to family stress and anxiety.

The research team could not account for weekend care in its estimates, so these estimates likely underrepresent the true need for NTH care. National surveys like the ACS should consider adding questions that would help researchers to develop more accurate measures of NTH care, including gathering specific information on days worked and departure time from work.

The variation in demand for NTH care by states also points to a potential interaction between parental employment in industries that require non-traditional hours and the demand for child care by families. For instance, states where hospitality, tourism, and manufacturing are major contributors to the economy (such as Nevada and Hawaii) also appear to have greater need for NTH child care. Further analysis would be needed to test the relationship between

prevalent industries, prevalence of non-standard working hours, and need for NTH child care, but this suggests that high-need states may need to pay particular attention to NTH care access through targeted strategies. Policymakers should continue their efforts to expand access to care during non-standard hours (especially home-based care) to ensure families have sufficient and quality care options.




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## References

- Henly, J. & Adams, G. (2018). Insights on Access to Quality Child Care for Families with Nontraditional Work Schedules. Urban Institute. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99148/insights\\_on\\_access\\_to\\_quality\\_child\\_care\\_for\\_families\\_with\\_nontraditional\\_work\\_schedules\\_0.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99148/insights_on_access_to_quality_child_care_for_families_with_nontraditional_work_schedules_0.pdf)
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