



SINCE 1990

# TULSA CITY COUNCIL

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## Council Approves Ordinance to Ease Burdens on Home-Based Day Cares and Improve Access to Childcare

**(Tulsa, OK)** – During its 5 p.m. regular meeting, the Tulsa City Council voted 8-0 to approve an ordinance amending fire suppression requirements for home-based day cares that care for up to 12 children. Previously, the City’s building code required these day cares to install costly commercial-grade automatic sprinkler systems in the home before they could receive a Certificate of Occupancy, leading to numerous existing home-based childcare facilities being out of compliance while preventing new ones from operating.

This action follows three years of work by city and state officials to address childcare deserts in Oklahoma by removing barriers and restrictions, simplifying the process for new home-based day cares to open and ensuring current homes remain in compliance. Today’s amendment allows about 250 residential day cares to remain in operation in Tulsa. Residential day cares often provide lower-cost options for childcare in a community or neighborhood setting.

In 2023, the City Council adopted two rounds of zoning code amendments to remove larger lot requirements for in-home day cares, increase the number of children allowed from seven to 12, and remove 300-foot spacing requirements between residential day cares. In 2024, the City Council passed a third zoning code amendment extending the deadline for pre-existing childcare homes to come into compliance with the fire code by one year. This allowed time to explore fire safety equivalencies to protect life without adding unnecessary requirements.

"Childcare access is essential for ensuring families and our economy thrive," said District 4 City Councilor Laura Bellis. "It's been a privilege to work alongside childcare workers, state legislators and my council colleagues over the past three years to make sure children are safe and these essential businesses can stay open. As childcare centers shutter across Oklahoma due to state funding cuts, it's never been more important to do all we can to support childcare operators."

At a December 2024 meeting between state and local legislators, the City Council presented the need for state legislation to re-evaluate fire suppression requirements in childcare homes to ease financial burdens, remove unnecessary requirements and address the growing childcare desert in Oklahoma. In February 2025, [Oklahoma House Bill 1847](#) was introduced, authored by State Representatives Suzanne Schreiber (HD 70), a childcare advocate, and Ron Stewart (HD 73), a firefighter with the Tulsa Fire Department for 18 years. The law prohibits municipalities from imposing stricter fire and

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life safety requirements on family childcare homes that care for up to 12 children, except those outlined in the [2018 International Residential Code](#), essentially removing the requirement for installation of sprinkler systems for in-home day cares. HB 1847 was adopted in May 2025 and went into effect as state law on November 1, 2025.

"When regulation doesn't improve safety or quality, it's time to get rid of it," said State House Representative Suzanne Schreiber. "I'm proud to have authored this bill, which directly impacts the cost of childcare. I'm proud to have worked with the childcare industry and local government leaders to get this right for families and those providing the critical service of taking care of our kids."

The ordinance passed by the Tulsa City Council aligns with this new state law to maintain consistency and compliance.

"For working families, especially in North Tulsa, access to safe, affordable childcare isn't a luxury—it's a necessity," said State House Representative Ron Stewart. "Too many small, home-based providers who have served our neighborhoods for years, and in some cases decades, were being pushed out by costly and unnecessary requirements that had no documented correlation with child safety in childcare. This ordinance, in alignment with state law, removes those barriers, protects trusted providers, and helps keep childcare close to home for parents who are working hard to provide for their families. When we support providers, we strengthen families, stabilize our workforce, and invest directly in the economic health of our communities."

The [2025 Annual Report](#) from the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness indicated that 55% of Oklahomans live in a childcare desert. From June 2024 to July 2025, the state saw a net loss of 36 childcare centers and 119 family childcare homes.

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) [announced](#) earlier this month that the COVID-era \$5 per child, per day, add-on will end for day cares on April 6, 2026. OKDHS also announced that income eligibility for day care subsidies for families will drop from 85% to 55% of the State Median Income on July 1, 2026.

Cindy Decker, Executive Director of Tulsa Educare, said that amid increasing financial pressure on childcare providers due to recent and forthcoming Oklahoma Department of Human Services changes, the Council's vote sends an important signal of local support.

"Family childcare homes are a critical part of Tulsa's childcare infrastructure," Decker said. "This ordinance reflects more than three years of collaboration between providers, city staff, and elected leaders who were willing to listen and problem-solve together to improve access to childcare across Tulsa."

The ordinance will go into effect as soon as it is signed by the Mayor.

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