



Strengthening Child Care Support for Working Families

BY JULIE KASHEN

Parents, no matter their income level, want the very best for their children, which includes having child care they can trust. In 2016, nearly 2 million parents of young children had to quit a job, turn down a new job, or change jobs because of problems with child care.¹ Ensuring that families can afford quality child care and early education now will make a huge difference in their economic security for years to come. That includes making sure that child care workers can also afford care for their own children, as they are some of the lowest-paid people working in the U.S. today.

In addition, studies have found that the first five years of children's lives are critical to their ability to learn social and emotional skills, as well as for setting them up to be good students and citizens later in life.² All children deserve the opportunity to succeed, which includes ensuring they are cared for in safe, nurturing, educational environments.

Even in the challenging environment of the current Congress, this issue has become a priority. Over the past year, advocates have achieved unprecedented progress on child care and early education. Last spring, Congress supported historic increases in federal child care and early education funding for 2018.³ This fall, the FY19 spending bill, which received bipartisan support, included a further increase of \$560 million for child care and early education programs.⁴ And new public opinion data released earlier this month showed that 77 percent of voters support congressional action to increase child care assistance and expand early education.⁵

As the next Congress sets its priorities, expanding support for parents and children should be high on the list. Fortunately, there are blueprints for doing just that in legislation that has already been introduced.

The Child Care for Working Families Act, introduced by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA) in fall 2017, offers a promising pathway to better child care policies. It would provide direct financial assistance for child care and early learning expenses on a sliding scale to working parents based on their income. It would also increase pay for child care teachers and caregivers, which will in turn improve the quality of care. Parents would be able to send their children to the high quality child care option of their choice, in a center, a family's home, or an after school program. Child care assistance would be available when parents need it—including evenings and weekends—to accommodate their work schedules, and where they need it—including an expansion of high quality options in areas that don't have them today. The bill also expands public preschool to three- and four-year-olds nationwide. It helps states and local communities build better preschool services for parents and makes them more accessible to children from low- and middle-income families.

Congress should continue to prioritize funding for child care and early education and put the Child Care for Working Families Act front and center on its 2019 agenda.

Notes

1 Leila Schochet and Rasheed Malik, "2 Million Parents Forced to Make Career Sacrifices Due to Problems with Child Care," Center for American Progress, September 13, 2017, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2017/09/13/438838/2-million-parents-forced-make-career-sacrifices-due-problems-child-care/>.

2 "InBrief: The Science of Early Childhood Development," Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2007, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-eed/>.

3 Julie Kashen, "Child Care and Early Education: Where Congress, Science, and the Public Agree," The Century Foundation, March 27, 2018, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/child-care-early-education-congress-science-public-agree/>.

4 H. R. 6157, 115th U.S. Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/6157/actions>.

5 Julie Kashen, "A Year of Momentum for Child Care and Early Education," The Century Foundation, September 14, 2018, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/year-momentum-child-care-early-education/>.