The Child Care for Working Families Act: Parent and advocate toolkit

Across the country, many parents are struggling to find child care that is available when they need it and at an affordable price. What happens when you look around and the nearest child care center is an hour away on the bus; the price for a month of child care is your entire paycheck; or the child care you can afford, isn’t what you’d hoped for? The current child care system isn’t working for many parents and providers, and, increasingly, they are speaking up and demanding better child care solutions.

Child care isn’t just about having a safe place for children to go while their parents are at work. It’s about valuing children’s futures and the communities they live in. It’s about making a concrete decision to invest in the next generation of children and providing children in communities that have been marginalized in the past with the opportunity to succeed. A child’s potential should not be predetermined or held hostage by a set of systems, policies, and politics that ignore their needs.

We need a solution that works for everyone—one that makes child care more affordable and flexible for all families, provides a safe environment for learning, and supports the professionals who care for our children. That is why progressive advocates around the country have rallied to support the Child Care for Working Families Act. This legislation, introduced by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) in September 2017 would make an unprecedented investment to ensure all children have access to high-quality child care and early education.

Quick facts about child care in the United States

* More than 12 million children in the United States under age 5 attend child care each week and 65 percent of young children have all available parents in the workforce.
* A recent study found that nearly 2 million parents of children age 5 and younger have had to quit a job, not take a job, or have had to change jobs because of problems with child care.
* Currently, more than 10 million children participate in after-school programs and for every child enrolled, two more are waiting for a spot.
* The 2 million—mostly female—early childhood educators in the United States are critically underpaid, earning, on average, only $10 per hour.
* About one-half of people working in the child care sector rely on public benefit programs such as Medicaid and nutrition assistance.
This toolkit is designed to help parents and advocates who want to address our broken child care system. In this toolkit, you will find background and information on the current state of child care in America, resources for your use, and information on the the Child Care for Working Families Act.

In this toolkit you will find:

• Key facts: Child care in America
• Why the Child Care for Working Families Act?
• Where is the Child Care for Working Families Act now?
• Ideas on how to fight for quality and affordable child care in your community
  - For sharing: The Child Care for Working Families Act — what this means for you
  - Sample letters to the editor
    - Parent
    - Early childhood educator
    - Early childhood advocate
Key facts: Child care in America

Talking about child care publicly can be challenging. Everyone has a unique perspective based on their family’s experience. Discussing child care with family and friends can also mean having to address sensitive topics such as finances, lack of choices for care, or how many times you have had to rely on family and friends when schedules change. But making child care arrangements is hard for almost everyone, and despite the challenges, the desire for children to succeed and thrive in a nurturing environment is universal. Your unique perspective will help all parents feel that they can be part of the solution.

Here are a few key facts you can use when speaking about the importance of investing in the child care system:

### Key facts on child care in America

**Children**
- Research shows that the first five years of a child’s life 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.
- Families with children with disabilities struggle to find care that can address their child’s needs.
- More than 64.2 percent of women with children under age 6 and 58.1 percent of women with children under the age 1, are in the workforce.

**Providers**
- The average pay for child care teachers is barely more than $10 per hour, lower than for most other jobs. We should value the people who do the important work of caring for young children and raise wages and benefits.
- Currently, about one-half of people working in the child care sector rely on public benefit programs such as Medicaid and nutrition assistance.
- Forty-four percent of black single mothers and 54 percent of Latina single mothers who work in child care also find themselves living in poverty.

**Accessibility, affordability, and quality**
- More than one-half of families in America live in child care deserts, areas where licensed child care is scarce and does not meet the needs for the number of children in the area. Low-income communities, especially those in rural areas, are hit the hardest by this lack of infrastructure.
- Many families who do not work 9 to 5, or who must work on weekends, have even more limited options for care and often must rely on family and friends.
- Parents struggle to find and afford child care for after-school hours and during the summer months.
- The average fee for full-time child care ranges from $4,000 to $22,600 a year, depending on where a family lives and the age of the child.
- Two in 5 mothers are the sole or primary breadwinners for their families. The exorbitant cost of child care can compromise the financial security of these families who often rely on child care to work.
- Low pay contributes to higher turnover rates, which can threaten quality in early childhood programs during children's critical developmental period.
Why the Child Care for Working Families Act?

The Child Care for Working Families Act takes important steps to improve child care for parents, children, and child care providers. Specifically, the bill would:

**Lower the cost of living for working families:** This bold, new bill would provide direct financial assistance to low-income and middle-class parents for child care and early learning expenses on a sliding scale based on their income. Parents will be able to send their children to the high-quality child care option of their choice, whether it’s in a center or a family’s home. The bill lowers child care expenses for families by limiting what parents pay to 7 percent of their income, regardless of the age or number of children in their home—essentially allowing people to keep more of their money to pay for child care.

*This means that a family earning $6,000 per month won’t pay more than $120 per month for child care.*

**Support quality child care that works for families’ schedules:** The Child Care for Working Families Act supports a continuum of care by expanding public preschool for 3- and 4-year olds; addressing care needs from infants through school-age kids; and including an expansion of high-quality options in areas that don’t have them today. The bill supports after-school and summer care programs, child care centers, family homes, and home-based care as an integral part of child care, and addresses concerns for families with various schedules. All child care providers will need to follow health and safety protections appropriate to their setting, including background checks; health and safety trainings; first aid and emergency medical training; and safe and healthy physical learning environments. Child care programs will also need appropriate staffing levels and curricula so that children get the age-appropriate early learning they need. The bill also provides child care assistance up to age 18 for children with disabilities and expands child care options for children with special needs.

**Create good-paying jobs:** Child care can’t be outsourced. The bill creates care jobs and improves these jobs by guaranteeing a living wage. Expanding good-paying care jobs and lowering the cost of child care are central to an economy that works for everyone. The Child Care for Working Families Act invests in higher compensation and paid training opportunities for currently underpaid teachers and caregivers, which will help attract and retain a talented, dedicated, and well-trained workforce, leading to higher-quality care.

**Invest in the next generation:** Every parent wants their child to do better than they did, and research shows that the first five years are critical to setting children up with a strong foundation. Yet, quality care is not always available. Parents need safe, nurturing places for their school-age children to be after school as well as during the summers. In recognition of this, the bill invests in quality child care programs by setting standards that provide an enriching care environment and giving child care providers the resources to improve. For many parents, even finding child care near work or home is difficult. The Child Care for Working Families Act addresses child care deserts by investing in supply, creating more options for parents.
Where is the Child Care for Working Families Act now?

There are a lot of important issues facing parents today, many of which will be directly affected by actions taken in Congress. Despite child care being a daily concern for parents across the country, it may not be at the top of the priority list for members of Congress. This reality makes it that much more important to raise the issue at every level of government to ensure that the concerns and needs of families are truly addressed and not just a political talking point.

Identical versions of the bill were introduced in the House of Representatives and Senate and now each must follow an often long and winding track to becoming legislation. You can track the Child Care for Working Families Act by logging onto Govtrack.us.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) designed the graphic below that explains the bill process. You can visit www.naeyc.org to learn more about the NAEYC and view their resources.
Ideas on how to fight for quality and affordable child care in your community

There are many ways to get involved in the fight for child care. What works best for you?

- Call your representative or senator and ask them to support the Child Care for Working Families Act today! You can find out who your elected officials are by visiting https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials.
- Speak to your local elected officials to discuss the state of child care in your area and ask what they are doing to address concerns locally.
- Speak to your child care teacher or provider about their day and what they need to be successful.
- Host a discussion with parents and child care providers you know to discuss the issues facing your community and brainstorm ideas on how to tackle this issue together.
- Write an op-ed or a letter to the editor—see samples below—to your local paper highlighting some of the talking points in this toolkit and expressing your passion to provide children with a greater start in life.
- Volunteer for an organization that is working on this issue now and see how you can lend your talents.

Social media guidance

If you have a social media presence this can be a great avenue to begin and continue the conversation on this important issue. Here are a few tips to remember:

- Use the hashtag #ChildCare4All in all your social media posts and promotions, including graphics.
- Don’t forget to tag local and national organizations, elected officials, and key community members. This will help raise this issue beyond your specific handle and reach a larger audience.

Here are some examples:

Twitter:
- I support #ChildCare4All! The Child Care for Working Families Act ensures that parents spend no more than 7% of their income on child care and guarantees a living wage for ECE teachers
- #ChildCare4All The Child Care for Working Families Act is the bold, holistic public investment in #childcare that is long overdue for American families and our economy! #ChildCare4All
- Our children deserve better! The Child Care for Working Families act calls for a true public investment in #childcare and our future. #ChildCare4All

Facebook:
- Our children deserve better. I support The Child Care for Working Families Act! This visionary bill will ensure that parents spend no more than 7% of their income on child care, guarantees a living wage for child care teachers, supports families’ hectic schedules, and calls for higher-quality care. #ChildCare4All
The Child Care for Working Families Act: What this means for you

As every parent knows, the first few years of a child’s life are critical for their social and emotional skills and lay the foundation for them to be good students and citizens later in life. All children deserve the opportunity to succeed, which means ensuring they are cared for in safe, nurturing, and enriching environments.

That’s why it’s important to support the Child Care for Working Families Act, which will make child care affordable so working parents can access quality child care that doesn’t break the bank. We need child care and early learning that’s affordable and flexible for families; ensures a safe and high-quality environment for learning; and supports the professionals who care for our children. The Child Care for Working Families Act does just that.

**Affordability:** Low- and middle-income families will pay no more than 7 percent of their income for child care. The rest will be covered by this new public investment. Families earning up to about $100,000, depending on the average income in your state, will pay on a sliding scale based on their income. For example, if your family income is $50,000, your child care costs will be no more than $3,500 a year. If it’s $100,000, your costs will be no more than $7,000 a year, regardless of how many children you have.

**Flexibility:** Parents can choose the care that works best for their family for newborns up to age 13, including center-based; home-based; family, friend, and neighbor care; and after-school and summer care. Providers will be required to meet a tiered range of safety, health, and quality standards to be sure children are safe and engaged in developmentally appropriate activities. The bill also expands care options by providing grants to increase the supply of child care where it is not currently readily available and expand night and weekend care options.

**Safe, nurturing learning environments:** All child care providers will need to follow health and safety protections appropriate to their setting, including background checks; health and safety trainings; first aid and emergency medical training; and safe and healthy physical learning environments. Child care programs will also need appropriate staffing levels and curricula so that children get the age-appropriate early learning they need.

**Caregivers and teachers:** The Child Care for Working Families Act invests in higher compensation and paid training opportunities for currently underpaid teachers and caregivers, which will help attract and retain a talented, dedicated and well-trained workforce, leading to higher-quality care.

**Children with disabilities:** For children with disabilities, this bill provides child care assistance up to age 18 and expands child care options for children with special needs.

**Preschool:** Helps states expand their preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds.
Sample letters to the editor

Most local and regional newspapers will accept letters to the editor on timely and relevant topics. You should decide who the right audience is for your story and reach out to that outlet for their submission guidelines. Many now provide relevant information on their website. Be sure to insert your personal story to make these letters unique and resonate with readers.

For a parent #1:

To the editor:
I live in [STATE/COUNTY/TOWN] and am the mother/father of [NUMBER OF CHILDREN] children. For my family, having access to child care is not a luxury—it is an economic necessity. When I go to work each day, I need to know that my CHILD/CHILDREN will be in a safe and enriching environment, but finding that kind of quality care at the price tag that I can afford has been a constant struggle. [insert personal experience with child care and early education]

I know that my family is not alone. In [STATE], the average cost of child care is [COST], which is more than hardworking families like mine can afford. For some families, child care is so expensive that it is cheaper to leave the workforce than to pay for child care. In 2016 alone, at least 2 million parents were forced to make career sacrifices because of problems with child care. It’s time for our nation’s policies to reflect the reality of [STATE]’s working families.

That’s why I was heartened to learn about the Child Care for Working Families Act, the bold investment in child care that I’ve been waiting for. This bill would ensure that families like mine spend no more than 7 percent of our income on child care and would help me cover the cost of care after school and during the summer. It is important to me that the caregivers who spend time with my children each day can afford to provide for themselves, and the Child Care for Working Families Act would guarantee a living wage for early educators. As a parent, there is nothing more important to me than setting my children and my family on the path to success. I urge [REPRESENTATIVE] to support this bill, so that parents can work, children can thrive, and our economy can continue to prosper.
For a parent #2:

When I look at my CHILD/CHILDREN, all I want is the best for HIM/HER/THEM. The more I work, the more money I can make to pay for good care, but the less I get to see HIM/HER/THEM. It shouldn’t be so hard to work and have a family. Our nation values equal education for all, and that should start when our kids are little, and most impressionable.

Promoting access to high-quality child care isn’t just about having a safe place for a child to go while their parents are at work—it’s also about ensuring that every child can grow and thrive. Research shows that the first five years of a child’s life 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.

[insert anecdote of how proud you are of your child/children learned something new and what that moment meant to you.] These are the moments that bring parents and their children so much joy, and they shouldn’t be rare. Children should be learning and exploring every day and looking forward to tomorrows.

It’s time for policy to catch up with the real needs of today’s working families. The Child Care for Working Families Act would do just that. This legislation, introduced by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) would make an unprecedented investment in young children and the early childhood workforce to ensure all children have access to high-quality child care and early education. At a time when children, families, and our economy depend on affordable, quality child care, this investment is a no-brainer.

For an early educator

To the editor:

[insert anecdote about why being an early educator is special/important to you]. Each day I nurture and educate [STATE/COUNTY/TOWN]’s youngest learners. As an early childhood educator, I know how important the work I do is for promoting healthy child development, and for supporting families so that they can go to work with the peace of mind that their child is in safe and loving hands.

Children, families, and employers depend on me every day, but caring for other people’s family has left my own family struggling to make ends meet. The average pay for child care workers is just over $10 per hour, lower than most other industries, and very few early educators receive benefits. The stress of being underpaid and overworked makes it hard for me to give the children in my care the energy and attention I know they need to thrive.

The time is overdue to start valuing early educators for the critical work that we do. The Child Care for Working Families Act would guarantee a living wage for child care providers like me, boosting wages for the early childhood workforce by an estimated 26 percent. I urge [insert senator/representative] to support this innovative bill, so that I can both provide high-quality care to our youngest learners and raise my own family with dignity.
To the editor:

Child care is expensive. In [STATE], the average fee for a full-time child care center is [COST] a year. Unfortunately, cost is just one hurdle parents must face when it comes to finding quality child care. For many parents, the nearest child care center is an hour away on the bus, the price for a month of child care is their entire paycheck, or the child care they can afford, isn’t the quality they want for their child. Many parents don’t work a 9-to-5 schedule. For those who work late nights or evening shifts, the hustle and desperation to find child care is even greater.

Promoting access to high-quality child care isn’t just about having a safe place for a child to go while their parents are at work—it’s also about ensuring that every child can grow and thrive. Research shows that the first five years of a child’s life 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. Without access to enriching early learning environments, low-income children enter kindergarten already behind.

It’s time for policy to catch up with the real needs of today’s working families. The Child Care for Working Families Act would do just that. This legislation, introduced by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) would make an unprecedented investment in young children and the early childhood workforce to ensure all children have access to high-quality child care and early education. At a time when children, families, and our economy depend on affordable, quality child care, this investment is a no-brainer.