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Marin Voice: Support for child care an investment in our values, future



California Assembly Majority Leader Eloise Gomez Reyes, left, and Democratic Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, right, march with parents and others who support the state's subsidized child care programs on Wednesday, May 10, 2023, in Sacramento. Gov. Gavin Newsom has proposed delaying funding for about 20,000 subsidized child care slots. (AP Photo/Adam Beam).



By **BLAKE HOFSTAD**

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Ask anyone who has had to find child care in Marin County. They'll tell you that it's extremely difficult and expensive. There are not enough providers, and not nearly enough publicly funded spaces to meet the demand.

The child-care crisis isn't unique to Marin County. Across California, there are [over 2 million](#) children who are eligible for publicly funded child care based on their income, but only 11% of them are actually enrolled. And the problem hits harder in Marin than in many other counties across our state.

According to [a 2021 study](#) by the United Way of California, child care in Marin County was more expensive than anywhere else in the Bay Area, with the average cost of care exceeding \$20,000 per year, per child.

The study also showed that 70% of Latino families and 65% of African-American families in Marin County were unable to afford child care. The failure to invest in a robust child-care ecosystem further exacerbates the racial equity gap – for the children and for their working parents.

Furthermore, providers are some of the lowest-paid workers in our society. According to the University of California at Berkeley Center for the Study on Child Care Employment, the median wage for a worker in 2019 was under \$14 per hour. Because the vast majority are women of color, these wages further entrench institutionalized racism and sexism.

Now imagine a world in which all 2 million of those children have access to the type of child care that meets their families' needs. And imagine a world where child-care workers are paid a dignified wage – one that reflects the true value of their labor, and that allows them to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty that currently entraps so many providers.

As parent organizing director at Parent Voices, a nonprofit organization focused on advocating for accessible and quality child care through grassroots organizing and parent leadership development, I can say that's the world we're fighting for, and over the last several years, we've made important progress towards that goal in several ways:

- **New law:** After three years of advocacy, a parent-led campaign to reduce family fees linked to publicly funded child care was signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom. This new policy eliminated fees for hundreds of thousands of families across the state, saving them over \$100 million annually.
- **Community advocacy:** Last year, we fought alongside the parents and teachers at the Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center to protect the only affordable care option for many families. FSACC, a 50 year-old institution and beacon of the community, will keep their doors open thanks to exercising the political power of parents and early educators through coordinated community advocacy.
- **Legislative advocacy:** At the annual "Stand for Children Advocacy Day" in the state Capitol, parents and children from Marin filled two buses and made the trip to ensure that our voices were heard. Leaders from Parent Voices Marin helped secure the support of California Senate President pro-Tempore Mike McGuire for child-care funding in the final budget. Our members also traveled to Washington, D.C. to lift up the need for child care at the federal level.
- **Community outreach:** Parent leaders from Marin made over 1,000 phone calls to voters leading up to the November elections.

This year, we will build on that advocacy and continue to strengthen relationships with our elected officials at the county and state level. We will not stop fighting until every family in California has access to the affordable child care they need and child-care providers earn the living wages they deserve.

Parent Voices Marin hosts monthly in-person meetings to build parent political power and ensure parents are plugged into opportunities to advocate for their families at the local, state and federal level. Contact Amarantha Silva at amarantha@parentvoices.org or 415-747-0002.

A free community forum, "Child Care Means Business in Marin," is set for Friday from 8:30 a.m. to noon at the Embassy Suites Hotel in San Rafael. This event is for child-care providers, parents, advocates and the business community. It is co-hosted by the North Bay Leadership Council and First 5 Marin Children and Families Commission. Email Michelle@First5Marin.org.

Blake Hofstad is the parent organizing director for [Parent Voices](#), a California-based nonprofit organization.

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