

STRONG START FOR STRONG CITIES

A STRONG START FOR OUR LITTLEST RESIDENTS MEANS BUILDING A STRONG FUTURE FOR OUR CITIES



Supporting access to affordable, high-quality early learning is a win-win-win for our families, businesses, and our economy!



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NATIONAL LEAGUE of CITIES | INSTITUTE FOR YOUTH, EDUCATION & FAMILIES

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Today, more than two thirds of moms with kids under the age six are in the workforce. So it's no surprise that thousands of families across the nation have shared their personal stories with MomsRising that send one clear message: When kids have safe, enriching early learning care, they thrive and their parents are able to work.

This is why MomsRising, the National League of Cities, and School Readiness Consulting are partnering on the Strong Start for Strong Cities initiative to support access to affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities in cities across the country.

We know that city leaders are on the frontlines of increasing access to local high-quality early learning programs – and we want to help!

Together, we created this resource guide for mayors, city councilmembers, and local municipal leaders across the country. It includes proven best practices for advancing affordable, high-quality early learning at the city level, the latest data, and stories about childcare and pre-k from parents across the nation. This is important. Today, many households are led by single parents, and in many two-parent households, both parents need to be in the labor force just to make ends meet. Quality childcare programs are essential to allowing parents to work and to building the next generation of strong leaders.

Early learning programs help children develop social competence skills. And studies show that children who have high-quality early learning experiences are more likely to succeed in school, graduate from high school, gain stable employment, and are less likely to be arrested. Not to mention that early learning can also mean a BIG boost for our economy. For every \$1 invested in high-quality early learning there is a later return of \$8.

Supporting early learning programs, like pre-k and childcare, is a win-win-win!

Frankly, too often the stories and needs of families are ignored. But when we ignore them, we all lose out. As you read these best practices and testimonies from dedicated parents, we encourage you to explore how your city can move forward on early learning. If you'd like to know more about these best practices or want to connect to your local constituents, please contact us at StrongCities@MomsRising.org.

A strong start for our littlest learners means building a strong future for our cities and our economy. Listen to the voices of parents, advocates, and providers and let's work together to continue building strong communities for a bright future.

Sincerely,

Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner
Executive Director
MomsRising.org

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How Mayors and Other Municipal Leaders Can Support Early Learning

To raise public awareness on the importance of early learning, including preschool and childcare, mayors and other municipal leaders can...

- **Organize and attend town meetings and listening sessions.**



CITY OF: DAYTON, OH

Under the leadership of **Mayor Nan Whaley in Dayton**, the City of Learners Committee met with almost 450 parents, educators, community leaders, and early childhood specialists in 11 listening sessions to learn what the strengths and obstacles are to accessing high-quality services and early education in the community. (1)

- Use the “**bully pulpit**” to place a spotlight on **early literacy, math, and social emotional development**. City leaders can help promote the importance of early learning and development by reading to young children at the public library, establishing a mayor’s book club, or distributing free books to families in need.



CITY OF: DURHAM, NC

To help bring attention to the importance of early childhood education, **Durham Mayor Bill Bell** reads to children enrolled in high-quality childcare centers every year during the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s Week of the Young Child. (2)

- **Publicly recognize teachers and caregivers** who have made a difference in children’s literacy, math, or social emotional development. Ask directors, principals, and early learning leaders to identify those individuals at community events and ask them to share their successful early learning strategies.



Former Jacksonville **Mayor John Peyton** launched a city Book Club in September 2004 to educate families about the importance of reading with young children to prepare them for school.



CITY OF: JACKSONVILLE, FL

Currently, under the leadership of **Mayor Lenny Curry**, more than 8,000 four-year-old children are enrolled in the book club. Book Club members receive a free backpack filled with several reading tools and the first book in a series that are mailed to parents each month. (3)

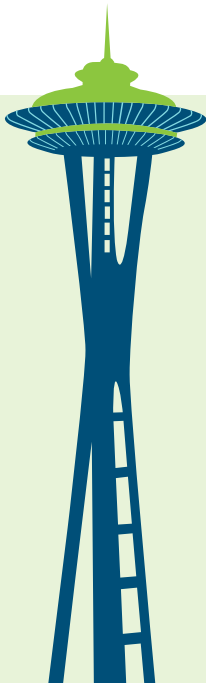
Enhance quality and access to early learning programs by...

- ➔ Aiding and cultivating high-quality childcare centers and Pre-K providers as businesses. Cities can **simplify the permitting process for potential childcare providers** by aggregating the state and local rules governing childcare facilities in one easy-to-read planning manual. (4)
- ➔ **Supporting family, friend and neighbor care** (FFN) with developmental resources that can help caregivers promote children's learning and literacy skills.
- ➔ Sponsoring **free, culturally enriching programs or playtimes at community centers**, local museums, or even malls. The public library system can sponsor a lending library for books, toys, puzzles, games, and videos that reflect the racial and cultural diversity of its residents. (5)



CITY OF: PROVIDENCE, RI

Under an effort started by **former Mayor Angel Taveras**, city staff and community partners in Providence take FFN trainings into neighborhoods, organizing peer-networking gatherings in familiar, easily accessible venues. A large number of young children are cared for by family members, neighbors, or other informal care (FFN) providers and these trainings help support developmental needs.



CITY OF: SEATTLE, WA

The Seattle Preschool Program Levy was proposed by **Mayor Ed Murray** and the City Council, and was approved by voters in 2014 – an evidence-based pilot universal pre-k program that plans to serve 2,000 children in 100 classrooms by 2018.

Teachers will also receive on-site support and training including best practices in inclusion, bilingual education, cultural relevancy, and classroom management. Additionally, the city will be working with existing providers to maintain and increase an early learning workforce that reflects the diversity of children served.



CITY OF: SAN JOSE, CA

Under the leadership of **former Mayor Chuck Reed**, San Jose city and county leaders worked with local school districts to implement an early learning plan focused on closing the local academic achievement gap by 2020.

Early learning in San Jose continues to be a priority with current **Mayor Sam Liccardo**, who called for investments to expand early learning programs and celebrated EduCare Day at the opening the 21st Educare California school. (6)



CITY OF: IRVINE, CA

Under the leadership of **Mayor Steven Choi**, the city hosts an annual forum to help businesses develop family-friendly practices.

This forum highlights the role of quality childcare in stimulating the local economy and boosting the productivity of their workers.

Enlist community leaders and businesses to support early learning...

- ➔ With a series of **roundtables that bring together business, philanthropic, and community leaders** to discuss how well your community meets the needs of its youngest residents and suggest specific steps local businesses and foundations can take to advance early learning. (7)

Build the early learning infrastructure through...

- ➔ Incorporating early learning into **land use and economic development planning**, including, thinking strategically about childcare and preschool programs by creating economic development plans that can boost early learning opportunities.

- ➔ **Providing incentives for child care facility development** as part of new development projects.



CITY OF: SANTA MONICA, CA

Under a city ordinance in **Santa Monica**, developers must pay a per square footage allotment (based on type of building) to fund the construction of new child care facilities. Developers may avoid this fee if they agree to build a child care facility.

Promote racial equity and reduce the opportunity gap for children of color...

- ➔ Highlight the **importance of equal access to quality schools and resources** and work with existing providers to support quality and maintain and increase an early learning workforce that reflects the diversity of children served.
- ➔ **Promote professional development for educators and leaders** that encourages an examination of bias in early childhood environments.



CITY OF: PITTSBURGH, PA

Mayor Bill Peduto hosted an event at the University of Pittsburgh to discuss the findings of the report, "Understanding PRIDE in Pittsburgh: Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education," and to explore what the city can do to support building positive racial self-perceptions among underrepresented children. (8)

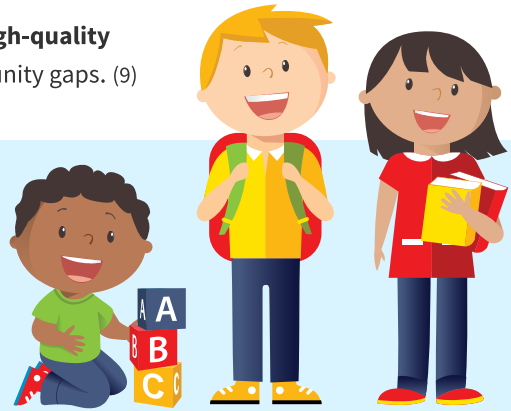
- Create and support **local policies that increase the number of high-quality early learning slots** in the areas of highest need to reduce opportunity gaps. (9)



CITY OF: SAN FRANCISCO, CA

San Francisco implemented one of the first city-funded universal preschool programs in 2004 and expanded access to early learning in high-need communities.

In 2015, current **Mayor Edwin Lee** announced a major expansion of the existing Preschool for All program for all four-year-olds in San Francisco to continue to meet the needs of local working families. (10)



Back up parents, guardians, and care providers by...

- Creating **family resource centers or early learning hubs**, particularly in high-need neighborhoods, where parents often lack inviting places where they can go to get information and support in rearing and educating their children.
- Working with health and human services staff to offer **brown-bag seminars and information sessions** for parents and caregivers at workplaces.
- Expanding parent education and home visitation programs (such as the evidence-based **Nurse-Family Partnership Program**) through supplemental city funding and in-kind assistance such as low- or no-cost leases on city-owned office and meeting space.



COUNTY OF: SALT LAKE, UT

In 2008, former **Mayor Peter Corroon** announced the launch of the Nurse-Family Partnership Program to enroll low-income women in **Salt Lake County, Utah** who are pregnant with their first child in a prenatal and postnatal home visitation program. (12)



CITY OF: FORT WORTH, TX

In 2006, former **Mayor Mike Moncrief** opened Family Resource Centers offering parent education programs, lending libraries of materials for parents and children to use at home, consultations with early childhood specialists, parent support groups, and other free activities that support children's healthy development.

Mayor Betsy Price continues to support these measures as the current mayor and in October 2015, also worked with the Fort Worth City Council to pass a resolution endorsing the Early Learning Alliance's strategic plan, and added early learning to the City Council's 2016 legislative priorities. (11)

CONTINUED: Back up parents, guardians, & care providers by...

- Supporting and promoting “**Welcome Baby**” programs at local hospitals to provide every mom with an in-hospital visit offering assistance with breastfeeding and information on becoming a new parent.



CITY OF: CAMBRIDGE, MA

With support from Mayor Denise Simmons in Cambridge, city libraries distribute a packet of baby books, a brochure with tips about how to share books with very young children, and other information to each family with a newborn living in the city. (13)

- Encouraging a family-friendly city and setting a positive example to the business community by supporting **paid parental leave policies for city employees**. Research shows that paid parental leave is not only good for employees, but also strengthens businesses and the economy. (14)



CITY OF: KANSAS CITY, MO

Mayor Sly James of Kansas City, Missouri co-hosted a screening of PBS’s Raising of America (a 5-part documentary series on supporting a strong start for children) with the Chamber of Commerce, United Way, and other sponsors.

At the event, the city announced that city employees would receive six weeks paid parental leave, which was championed by the Mayor after he watched the documentary. The event launched a discussion and call to action to promote family friendly workplace policies across the city.

Support the needs of our littlest learners by...

- **Providing resources for smooth transitions between preschool and kindergarten.**

Whether children have been in a formal pre-k center, at home with mom and dad, or at the neighborhood day care, kindergarten is a big change and resources during the transition can make all the difference.



CITY OF: BOSTON, MA

The City of Boston and Boston Public Schools partner to provide a Countdown to Kindergarten resource for parents that contains school registration materials, information on how to communicate with teachers, & lets parents know what will be expected of their child, both behaviorally & academically. (16)

- Collaborating with early learning leaders to offer professional development opportunities that bring together preschool teachers in public schools, Head Start programs, and childcare centers or other community-based providers to **foster collaboration** and share knowledge.

- Working with schools and health providers to **promote developmental screenings** to support early childhood medical, social, emotional, and behavioral health. (15)



CITY OF: ROCHESTER, NY

Under the leadership of Mayor Lovely A. Warren, the City of Rochester provided funding for a joint developmental screening initiative, which will help partners build capacity for entities already screening children and train child care center staff and teachers to conduct developmental screenings with accuracy and consistency. (17)

Promote dual-language access through...

- Supporting **connections between the early learning programs and trusted community-based partners**, including faith leaders and cultural institutions, which can increase access to early learning and language opportunities.
- Leveraging city-based capabilities, such as **data collection and geo-mapping, to identify assets and gaps in services and resources** among marginalized communities and using that information to inform place-based efforts to increase learning and development for young children living in under-resourced communities. (18)



CITY OF: SAN DIEGO, CA

San Diego's One Book, One San Diego program has been bringing the community together for 10 years to read one unique book each month to promote diverse conversations across the community. The book list is built in partnership with libraries across the city (from recommendations made by residents) with priority placed on books that resonate with local communities and that are also available to read in Spanish.

- Serving as champions of neighborhood efforts to **increase access to diverse language reading resources for families and children** by supporting city-wide efforts such as “one book, one city” initiatives (the city chooses a different book each month to read together) and neighborhood-based efforts such as the creation of “little libraries” on street corners or free-access vending machines offering children’s books in high use areas such as grocery stores, bus stations, or Laundromats.



CITY OF: DENVER, CO

Under the leadership of Mayor **Michael Hancock**, Denver's *Five By Five Program* works to strengthen families and support school readiness by providing local children with at least five cultural experiences by the age of five to spark their imagination and learning. (19)

- Promoting early learning programming that supports development of children’s home language. For young children who are dual language learners, the home language is the language in which their earliest relationships are formed, and they begin creating a sense of self and identity. City leaders can work to **strengthen programs and policies to ensure that children’s home language and culture are valued**. (20)



CITY OF: NEW YORK, NY

In September 2014, Mayor **Bill de Blasio** and city leaders launched **New York City's Pre-K for All** program, and in just two years, built out the city's program to offer full-day Pre-K to more than 68,000 children. *Pre-K for All* now includes 40 new dual language programs, improvement in compensation, and additional professional development opportunities for teachers. (21)

And so much more!

If you are a mayor or municipal leader who is working to advance early learning in your community, let us know! We are collecting examples to share with parents and municipal leaders across the country. To share your local work on early learning, contact Campaign Director **Nina Perez** at **StrongCities@MomsRising.org**.

Stories From MomsRising Members

ALABAMA

Sonya, Mobile

Thank god I received child care assistance through the state!! Because of them, I was able to go to school and graduate. Otherwise, child care would have been a huge hardship due to the fact that I didn't have too much of a support group when my children were really young.

Felicia, Phenix City

My husband and I have 6 kids ages 16 - 2. We can't afford not to work. Even with each of us working full time, we can't afford childcare. We are also taking care of our 17 year old nephew. All children deserve an education as early as possible. It is just so expensive...please help.

Nancy, Birmingham

I am a single mother with one child. I currently don't get childcare assistance, but I do have family members that do. I know for a fact that this helps them pay for adequate childcare while they are working / going to school. In order to provide a better life for themselves in the future they depend on childcare financial assistance.

ALASKA

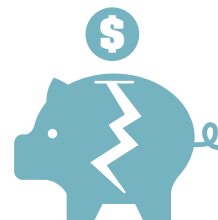
Patti, Anchorage

The need for affordable daycare is desperate, and must be addressed and NOW. These children are brought into the world and deserve all the amenities humans receive, and good daycare, food and loving care is part of that. If you want a world of good people doing good things for others, you MUST start with affordable daycare for all.

Paige, Anchorage

Years ago, I was forced to leave my marriage due to abuse. I had a baby

IN THE PAST 30 YEARS CHILDCARE COSTS FOR WORKING FAMILIES HAVE INCREASED 70%



https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/the-surprising-number-of-moms-and-dads-scaling-back-at-work-to-care-for-their-kids/2015/08/06/c7134c50-3ab7-11e5-b3ac-8a79bc44e5e2_story.html?postshare=9901438953161036

and a 1st grader at the time. My ex subsequently put me through 7 years of custody litigation trying to convince the courts that I was an unfit mother. I was the owner of a small business which required my concentration and participation, and I struggled under the weight of the financial burdens of being a single parent, but also from the relentless legal suit. Not once did I ask for government assistance, and I cut every expense to the bone, but never when it came to my children. I was fortunate to be able to take my baby to work and to have family to help me out at other times, but so few women do.

As my youngest got older, pre-school was vital to help me get back on my feet at work, and to provide him additional nurturing and safety in his now tumultuous world. Both my children were tested in the gifted programs when they reached elementary school and their quality early learning experiences helped them be the best they could be both emotionally and intellectually. To this day, my children remark as they drive past their pre-school,

"I just love that place!". Please protect preschool and daycare programs. It is many women and children's lifelines to full employment and stability when they need it most.

Denise, Juneau

When both my daughters were in a high quality day care center, the tuition was more than my mortgage. Finding affordable daycare is a critical issue for working families.

ARIZONA

Fran, Tucson

I have worked in K-12 education for over forty years and recognize the inherent value of early learning programs. Children who participate in well-rounded early learning programs benefit from them throughout their school careers. These programs serve to create lifelong learners who are successful in future endeavors no matter their socio-economic situation.

Sheryl, Tucson

Child care is difficult for people to afford. The flip side of the coin is that child care providers such as myself are dismayed at the low wages that are available. I work in an after school program for \$8.45 cents an hour in Tucson. I enjoy working with kids but at this rate of employment I can't stay in this job. It does take a mature mind to care for children. We constantly adjust their behavior and assist them in learning how to be adjusted people. If children don't have educated people to help them before and after school they will not have a strong foundation. We need to invest in the future by investing in the systems that really help raise children up to a higher level of understanding. Parents rely on US to be great. The system is failing both sides of the equation right now.

Sharon, Phoenix

I am a mother of 4-year-old twin boys and have worked outside the home since my sons were 10 weeks old. My husband and I have been fortunate enough to be able to afford high quality child care for our sons since they were five-and-a-half months old that has permitted us both to maintain the full-time employment we have both held throughout our adulthood. However, I know that child care is expensive – ours has cost us as much as \$25,000 per year-- and that many other parents do not earn enough money to make this kind of high quality child care available to them. Parents are then forced to make difficult choices, such as quitting or changing jobs when they would not otherwise choose to do so, or worse, settling for substandard child care arrangements. It helps children and their parents to make quality child care accessible and affordable for all working parents. I urge you to make this a priority.

Denise, New River

It is difficult enough to have to leave our children for 8+ hours a day, but to have to worry about 1) whether it is a safe environment and 2) whether I can afford this care makes it very difficult emotionally. When the child gets sick, you worry too about whether to stay home

“Parents are then forced to make difficult choices, such as quitting or changing jobs when they would not otherwise choose to do so, or worse, settling for substandard child care arrangements.”

Sharon, Phoenix

to care for the child (often having no choice since the daycare provider won't take a sick child) and risk losing the job.

Emilie, Tucson

My husband and I are blessed to have secured high quality child care for our 2 year old daughter with a licensed home care provider. Because I work as an early childhood teacher in a public school district that provides affordable preschool for employees' children ages 3-5, I am also blessed to know that she will receive high quality care and education for the next two years in preschool. Unfortunately, in my work with young families, I meet many who are not as fortunate as we are in the availability of high quality infant, toddler, and preschool aged care. I hear very sad stories about children being overlooked by negligent child care workers, allowed to “run wild” in poorly supervised day cares, and placed in classrooms where one adult with very limited training and education is solely responsible for fifteen four-year-olds. During these early years, the architecture of a child's brain is being shaped more rapidly than any other stage of life. Investing in quality child care for our youngest citizens is the single most

important investment our leaders can make in our collective future.

Rabia, Prescott

I've been an early childhood educator for the past 35 years and a parent for the past 32 years. Currently, I'm working in an Infant Room at the Family Enrichment Center, an early childhood lab school (the only one of its kind) in northern Arizona. (Our county has the same square footage as the state of Massachusetts).

Every day the smiles and milestones of the nine infants in our care (there are three adults) warms my heart. Yet what we do is not enough. Some of these three month olds spend more time with us (from 8-5:15 every day of the work week) then they do with their parents.

ARKANSAS

Kathleen, Santa Cruz

Pre School ought to be affordable for all families. Our government claims to support family values, yet they spend money (our tax dollars) on their special interests & favors. All three of my adult children attended pre-school which prepared them for their public education advancing their reading skills arts and craft as well as the skill to work things out, like fighting “bully behavior.” Affordable pre-school and early education in the first five years matter for the middle class.

Holly, El Dorado

Having been a Nurse in a “Pre-school” (daycare for children ages 6 wks - 5 yrs), many of whom had handicaps both physical/psychological I had a 1st hand view of how badly we need quality care for our young children. Many kids go to “school” from 8 AM to 3:30 PM and the nutrition they receive there – for many of them – constitutes the majority of their daily sustenance. Many receive nothing but sugary “fruit” drinks and either “fast food” or “junk food” after they leave to go home. Many come in in the morning so

hungry they are grabbing at the food and some even take food off others plates! If these children don't have a place like a daycare or "Pre-school" to attend they will basically go hungry, because there is no one at home who cares enough to make sure that they are fed. These children are also sick more often than the others, especially during the winter months.

CALIFORNIA

Dierdre, Los Angeles

As a city, we should be leading by example. That begins with our smallest citizens. Providing high quality Pre-K in our area is a great investment in the future. I know you will do the right thing. Add this to your priority list. The children are our future.

Jennifer, Paso Robles

I am a single mother of two. As a full-time student, affordable child care is a necessity if I am to continue my education to better myself and my family. Even once I achieve my goals of becoming an elementary school teacher, my income will still be limited. High quality, affordable child care is so important!

Monique, Sylmar

School Readiness is so important! As a Special Education teacher and mother of 2, I understand the necessity of affordable programs for our young. Make this happen now.

Deborah, San Francisco

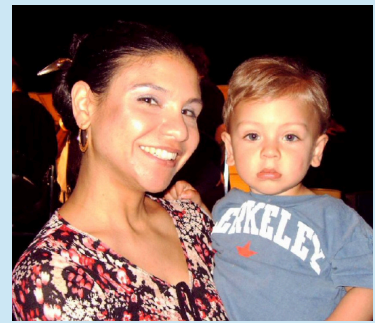
We need access to full-time, quality, bilingual early childhood education in every neighborhood!!!

Joyce, Buena Park

My children and grandchildren all were lucky enough to attend pre school. I think it is important for all children to socialize as early as possible with all races and cultures then they learn about how we are all the same even though we may look different. They also start to learn the basics of learning

Elisa, Berkely, CA

I have no idea how a middle class family with small children makes it in the Bay Area. I'm in the clear now as my kids are 12 and 9, but when they were babies, I could not afford to work full-time: childcare for the number of hours I would have needed started at \$1,500, the same as our rent! Now it costs even more and the subsidies and slots available don't even begin to cover demand. We absolutely need a bigger investment in this area!



so that by the time they attend kindergarten they usually can write their own name. Children need some structure in their lives and this is the beginning of learning that.

Marlena, Rosemead

My children had to go out of the city for their pre-k which was really hard on our family.

Signe, Oakland

I work full time in San Francisco and so does my husband. We have a 9 year old, and we pay for his aftercare. But our 4 year old is in preschool and we pay 3x's as much! We struggle financially and have to balance to afford preschool which is a shame.

Alison, El Cerrito

Affordable childcare is extremely hard to find. When we lived in Santa Rosa, we were part of the income-based VIP preschool program, which subsidized our monthly preschool costs (we paid \$50/month). It was a fantastic program, did wonders for our now-5 year old. This year the only way we could afford preschool for our 5 (not in time for Kindergarten) & 3 year old was to use the small

profit we got from selling our home in Santa Rosa to cover it. City-subsidized childcare would make a HUGE difference in our ability to work and attend graduate school.

Verona Alford, Oceanside

I grew up in a rural county in N. California where opportunity for higher education was based on the poverty of that area, i.e., no opportunity. Survival was the key/hinge to life. Education was based on 1-8th grades; some kids went to high school. As an above average girl-student, I was held back due to these circumstances. My life changed when I moved to Idaho to live with my mother. There, opportunities were more available. I discovered I had the wherewithal to attend College, Universities, etc., which I did years later. I have a Master's Degree in Education.

Save the children now, educate them while they are young and impressionable. Kids need the opportunity to a worthy education and lifestyle that will benefit them and their families. To know they are important and cared about by our communities is primary to their success as individuals. Please help the children by providing early education. Realize that some families live in

poverty and they also want their children to succeed; to escape poverty and so they can give back to their community, their state, their nation and their families.

To-wen, San Diego

Last year I was hired to translate Dr. Glenn Doman's Fit Baby, Smart Baby, Your Baby to Mandarin Chinese. At the beginning of the book, Dr. Doman wrote, "The early development of mobility in newborns is a vital part of their future ability to learn and grow to full potential." When translating this sentence, I looked at my then 20-month-old. Surely we all know that learning begins at birth and the brain develops faster between birth to age 3 than any other period of life. This is why early care and education is an important and critical development phase.

Actually, my husband and I are currently paying \$16,000 per year for our little one's daycare. This is the biggest expense of our family, even bigger than our house mortgage. I hold a Master's degree in Broadcast Journalism from Boston University. That's a private school and the tuition was \$45,000 per year. With my scholarship, I still need three part time jobs to pay that tuition. I have done the coach tape for the university hockey team, worked the midnight shift at a convenience store, and as an assistant in a production company. My husband holds a Doctorate degree in Computer Engineering from North Carolina State University. That's a public school. Even though the rate for an engineering major is higher than other majors, the tuition was only \$7,000 per year for residents and \$21,000 per year for nonresidents. My husband was a teaching assistant, and it was fairly easy for him to afford that tuition. Then we graduated, got good jobs.

We never thought we'd ever have to work our butts off for tuition again. But now we are. As a computer engineer and a journalist, we are literally working our butt off for our 2-year-old's day care tuition. We are both the first generation immigrants in America, and we have no family members here to help

out. We both work more than 50 hours per week, my husband often brings work home, and I travel to Asia a lot for work. We live in a smaller house so that we can pay for a decent day care. But, still, we are grateful, because many of our friends cannot afford early education.

Many of my girlfriends quit their job and become stay-at-home mom, because their salary doesn't pay for the day care, especially when they become mothers of more than two children. As for us, to be honest, with this daycare expense, we really can't see the possibility for us to have a second child. It doesn't take a math major to see there is something really wrong here—the early education now cost even more than higher education! Day care is even more expensive than college!

"Actually, my husband and I are currently paying \$16,000 per year for our little one's daycare. This is the biggest expense of our family, even bigger than our house mortgage."

To-wen, San Diego

I am a believer that all families should have access to high-quality, affordable options for their children's early care and education, whether they choose to have their children to spend time at home, in childcare, or preschool. White House actually promotes early learning, because it is a good invest-

ment which boost our children and our economy. It makes the ridiculous high-price of childcare even seem to be more ironic. Sometimes I wonder if the leaders of the nation know that how much childcare costs these days.

Kathy, Los Angeles

I'm a parent of 5 children the majority of my children attend a early headstart. I believe that in the long run it benefits the children as well as parents. They get to learn different cultures (the majority of parents are from all parts of the world) and thanks to the schools, we as parents learn new things that we as parents don't know.

We also need to remember that these teachers and teacher's assistants supervise, accompany, assist, teach, listen and keep our children safe, not one child, but up to 10 to 20 at once. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all teachers and adults who work with our children.

Dana, Santa Monica

Three years ago, after my daughter turned one year old, I found myself having to start the daunting task of trying to navigate the child care system here in Santa Monica. As a single mom and a graduate student, I knew I couldn't afford to pay a lot of money for full-time care, but I also realized that without child care, I wouldn't be able to finish school and find a job. So after doing some research, I applied for Early Headstart, but there was a year-long waiting list. In addition, I looked for subsidy programs to help pay for child care, but soon learned that it would be nearly impossible to get state assistance unless I qualified for CalWorks, which I did not. Eventually, I got on the waiting list for Santa Monica's subsidy program through the local child care agency. After six months, I finally got a call that a spot in the program was available! But then, once I qualified for the subsidy, I had to scramble to find a child care program that took the city's subsidy, and had an immediate opening.

After going on more tours than I care to

remember, I ended up getting waitlisted for the programs I really wanted. After a few weeks, I did find a family home provider I thought I liked, but after my child started attending there, I realized it wasn't a good fit. Fortunately, after frantically calling around to even more providers, including a couple not on the referral list, I found a child care center that had one spot in the toddler room. This time, it worked out, and I really loved my daughter's caregivers. But after my daughter had been at the center for several months, I learned that the child care agency hadn't been paying the provider.

Over the ensuing months, even though I had turned in my timesheets to the provider on time, and had asked the agency to pay the provider, the situation just got worse. Finally, after the agency had failed to pay the provider for months, the director told me, without any notice, that I couldn't bring my daughter in until the center had been paid in full! I couldn't believe it!!! Suddenly, I had no child care, even though I had done nothing wrong! When I went down to speak with the child care agency, they claimed that the provider had not turned in my timesheets for payment; but the provider claimed that she had turned in the timesheets, and that the agency just hadn't paid up. Well, long story short, in order to get my daughter back into the daycare center, I had to re-submit my timesheets going back several months, wait for them timesheets to be processed, and then wait for the agency to issue a check. This process took over two weeks; in the meantime, I had no child care, and ended up having to take incompletes in both my courses for that semester. Eventually, I was able to finish my coursework, but the whole experience left me exasperated!

What if I had been working, and couldn't stay home with my daughter for two weeks? What if I had lost a job because of a dispute between the provider and the child care agency? What then? And what was really hard is that throughout this ordeal, there was no one to advocate for me and my daughter! Today, my daughter is enrolled at a wonderful preschool, and I am so thankful for



91 PERCENT OF VOTERS AGREE THAT QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR ALL THE YEARS OF EDUCATION THAT FOLLOW

<http://ffyf.org/2015-poll/>

the subsidy I receive from the city of Santa Monica. Without the help, I could never afford to pay the mortgage-sized monthly tuition payment, and I certainly would not be able to work to support my family. Moreover, I can take comfort in knowing that my daughter will be kindergarten-ready, both academically and in terms of her social-emotional development, by the time she turns five. Additionally, I know she won't become yet another statistic, i.e. another biracial child living in a low-income household who never got the chance to attend a great preschool, and has fallen behind her white peers academically before she even starts kindergarten.

I share my story in such detail because I want my city leaders to understand the difference THEY can make for so many children by making early learning programs a priority. I also want my story to serve as a cautionary tale about the need for increased funding for high quality child care services and preschool programs. In addition, I think the city should take steps to ensure dissemination of information to the public about (1) how to access Santa Monica's early learning system, (2) what pro-

gram options and financial assistance are available to families, and (3) where parents can go for help when they have questions or concerns. I also suggest that the city make available information on how parents and other community members can influence key decision makers.

While I commend the city for its commitment to child care and early education to date, I think there's still a lot more work to do, and even though families are busy, we still would like to have their voices heard on how we move forward as a community to give all of our kids the best start possible!

Donald, Sebastopol

Thanks to early childhood programs like Head Start, my daughter got a great start in life despite our very low income at the time. She went on to become a child psychiatrist treating most victims of parental abuse or neglect.

Jennifer, Fremont

I have worked as a Teacher and Administrator for a state funded program for

more than 15 years. I am proud of the the services my agency has provided to low income children and families and I know that there are thousands of families still in need, that we cannot help due to our abysmal reimbursement rates.

Our teachers are subsidizing the cost of care and early education by working for low wages. Quality costs. Our teachers deserve to make a living wage, parents and children need quality early learning programs! We would LOVE to serve more children, but we can't expand our programming (in fact we'll be lucky to maintain what we have with the ever rising costs of doing business) without a significant increase to our reimbursement rates!

Jeanette, San Carlos

As a Board member for Early Head Start and Head Start in a wealthy county, I am saddened that thousands of children cannot receive the schooling that will affect the rest of their lives. Poverty and immigration status at early ages result in high drop-out and incarceration rates.

With so much wealth, it is appalling that our agency has more than 2,000 eligible youngsters we lack the funds to serve. What happens to those children and our state rests on your decision to fund preschool education in California.

Trevin, Rancho Cucamonga

Both our kids are now over thirty with no children of their own. That does not mean that child care is unimportant to us. Affordable child care will help keep our state a top place to live.

Simone, Helendale

We took our grandchild in at 18 months. He was autistic, abused, neglected and abandoned. My husband took early retirement because I have been disabled with ME/CFIDS since 1991 and couldn't do full-time child care. We couldn't afford full time day care. As a result of our taking this child with his medical expenses and

subsequent legal expenses, we could no longer afford our home in Arkansas and lost it. This was 2008 and there was no help. We decided he was more important than our home.

My mother-in-law from a previous marriage (my first husband died) went to a nursing home and her California home was empty, so we moved there. It was small but got the job done for awhile. Believe it or not, day care was less expensive in Helendale, CA. than in Rogers, AR! And much better. We enrolled Matthew in Carousel of Kids Daycare and he had wonderful care. Thanks to good communication, his problems which were initially very disruptive for the daycare slowly resolved with a lot of love from us and the staff working together consistently and using the same language. Today he's also being treated for ADHD but is moving out of Special ED and doing very well in school. Helendale Schools don't have much money but the school is excellent and everyone works together to get the teachers what they need. They are wonderful.

Elham, Lompoc

I am a physician and mother of three boys under the age of five. I found one of the greatest challenges I had was finding quality childcare and preschool for my boys. The city we live in offers few options for childcare for children under the age of two. I found that the only things available were in home day care, or for me hire a private nanny. In regards to both options, I found it very difficult to find a stable childcare situation

After trying in home day care and a slew of babysitters I finally found stable childcare through a wonderful nanny. Both options were costly, and there were pros and cons to both. The biggest obstacles was the lack of options. There are no big daycare centers in our area and the city we live in is with a population of 45 thousand, and despite the population size I had trouble finding a good preschool as well. There are two private preschools, one state

run preschool for low income children, and several in home preschools.

Again, the options were limited. I would like to see a state run option for all, early learning will help our children and provide for a stable economic future for all.

Tanya, Manhattan

I was a single mom in the 70's, with a small income, but the ratio of child care costs to earnings allowed me to pay for it even though I had relatively meager earnings as a Group Health Claims Adjuster. That same job today would not pay for the high cost of child care relative to income. Parents need help both in finding high quality care and being able to afford it.

Wendy, Sunnyvale

Childcare is our third mortgage. When we shopped for quality child care, we realized in advance that it was easily as much as a mortgage payment. So we thought, why not kill two birds with one stone? And we moved my elderly, beloved parents close enough to watch our child. They could not afford to move into the Bay Area by themselves, so we helped them with a small condo.

When our child was one year old, my mother came down with cancer. She died a year and a half later. Now we pay our own mortgage, my dad's, and still need to pay childcare because he can't handle it all by himself. I am so glad they were local during her illness, and I cherish the time they've had with our son, but even on two Silicon Valley salaries, another \$1200 a month for childcare is stretching it very thin! But what choice do we have?

Pam, Los Altos Hills

I worked in a kindergarten for 5 years and was astonished to find that some children enter kindergarten without knowing the alphabet, the colors, how to count to 20, the names of various objects and animals in our world.

They start behind and - now that I've

worked in a fourth grade class for 3 years -I observe that they don't catch up. Pre-K. Education is crucial for under-enriched families. It's in our countries' best interest to provide it.

Norma, Sacramento

I was a working mother for most of my child raising days. I struggled constantly for good child care. I realize how important it is when parents need to work to maintain the needs of their family while working five days a week.

This is a major issue for most families with both or the only provider to be able to go to work and know their children are being properly cared for and the cost of child care affordable, and not outrageous because caregivers cash in on parents vulnerability and need for child care in order to keep their job. The need for affordable responsible child care is a number one issue for working families.

Carol, Fort Bragg

I have worked for a domestic violence/sexual assault crisis center in Fort Bragg (Mendocino coast) for almost 23 years. I am speaking on behalf of all my clients that struggled horribly because they couldn't better their situation due to the fact that child care was too expensive.

And speaking in regards to my daughter, who is a single mom with two young boys who does not receive child support. She is in school full time getting her BA, and works but it only covers her child care so she isn't getting ahead. She is one of the lucky ones as we have a cottage on our property that she can live in for free. She would love to be able to rent her own place and we now don't get enough income. Please make this issue a priority.

Coleen, Visalia

Twenty four years ago my husband and I decided to start our family. I had no idea how challenging it would be to find affordable, quality child care. We were both veterans newly starting

CHILDREN

WHO HAVE HIGH-QUALITY
EARLY LEARNING
EXPERIENCES ARE:



**MORE LIKELY TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL,
GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL,
GAIN STABLE EMPLOYMENT &
ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE ARRESTED**

<http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=219>

our civilian professional careers and our combined annual earnings were just above the national poverty level. We lived in a modest apartment, shared a car and dreamt of completing our college studies while raising our child.

The first year of his life our son had two child care providers. My recollection was that both were loving and dependable. When he was 13 months old a job change to another city resulted in our first search for a licensed care provider with no personal references just the referral of my employee assistance program. I interviewed and observed multiple licensed small home day care providers. I called references and chose one who had been in business 12 years and had no complaints filed on her business.

The first month seemed to go well; however, I had concerns about the frequency of diaper changes and the outside play supervision. The second month my husband made an unannounced visit mid-day and discovered our son tethered to the crib by a velcro strap to his leg. His observation was that our son could not roll over comfortably with the strap attached to his leg. The care provider explained she did that to ensure

the children stay in their cribs during nap time. We reported this incident to the licensing board who after an announced visit found our complaint unsubstantiated. We removed him from this facility and began a desperate search for another care provider. N

o parent should have to endure a day care situation that risks the emotional and physical health of their child. Quality childcare needs to be the standard of care and licensing of those facilities should require more than announced visit annually. Affordable childcare should be the standard in the U.S., not the exception! Please support funding for affordable early childhood education. Families need healthy options, our children are depending on us; the emotional, physical and economical impact this has on our generation and generations to come should not be considered acceptable!

Rose, Desert Hot Springs

I was so happy that my son qualified for the low income preschool at our school. Knowing he is safe and happy gave me a huge amount of relief. I want that for all families.

Sundina, Long Beach

I'm a teacher who's also a single mom with a 12 week old baby. I can't afford to take more than what's given of me in the family medical leave act and at the same time, I can't afford childcare for my son. I have to resort to asking my mom to watch him almost 10 hours a day. Please help our state have affordable care for our future!

Rachel, Hopland

I have a 2 year old son who I stay at home with. Things are super-tight on only one income, & we are barely scraping by. If I had someone to take care of him, I could also be working. But my family is too far away, and my friends have kids of their own to deal with. My son should have a safe, reliable place I can leave him, so I can help with the bills. But childcare is so expensive, I'd be working all day just to cover the cost of someone else watching him. Doesn't make sense. So I stay home with him, & we struggle to make ends meet.

Joann, San Diego

I took a year off from work to be at home with my daughter and much to our surprise I was pregnant within that year and returned to work trying to figure out how we would be able to afford quality childcare for two small children and continue living in California. As a result of PPD, an infant who would not take a bottle, I ended up staying home with my babies and subsequently lost our home. Had I been able to find affordable quality childcare I believe our family situation would be very different today. I wanted our kids to have a good start and enrolled them in preschool. It is one of the things we learn as parents that is important, but the cost is prohibitive for many and then for others the costs weigh heavily on the family budget to the point that it becomes a huge stress. We considered moving out of state 3 separate times over the course of 5 years in part due to this incredible burden. Somehow we found a way to make it work. But we've never been able to get ahead.

COLORADO

Bridget, Denver

I have a 4 year old daughter who is attending a private Montessori pre-K. While I am appreciative that Denver provides ECE programs for 3 and 4 year olds, these programs are usually half day or do not offer after school care, thus making this option not viable for full-time working parents. The cost of pre-k in Denver is one of the highest in the nation. Our monthly childcare payment is higher than our mortgage payment and is more than half of my salary! I believe all of our children should have this educational opportunity at such a critical time of their lives and not just the wealthy few.

Ambrey Nichols, Lakewood

I know this is something we all have to face - taking care of our children while we work. However, I don't think it is right that child care cost more than your Mortgage or the same as. I get that we all need to provide for our children, but why can't it be affordable. If you want to charge that much for childcare or preschool then give us all raises so we can afford it or make it more affordable for all people.

I want my son to have the best education with the best staff, but I currently am negative in my account every month so I can provide childcare and preschool. And I think I make decent money. Now if I am struggling, what about people that make minimum wage? This needs to change now. Not tomorrow or in a year, but right now.

Jennifer, Colorado Springs

As a Kindergarten teacher, I can tell if an incoming student has had access to preschool. They are the ones ready to learn the curriculum and vast amount of standards set before them. Furthermore, Preschool-experienced children need less additional support from other education professionals.

Chelsea, Loveland

My husband and I had our first child a year ago. We both were working full-

time in the education and mental health fields and have our Master's Degree. We struggled from the time we had him and are still struggling with paid family leave and finding affordable and quality child care. I had to take 7 weeks without pay in order to bond with, and take care of my new child.

I decided to go back to work part-time in order to make work/life balance work for our family which was a huge financial endeavor. I had began looking for part-time (30hrs per week/3days per week) childcare when I was 4 months pregnant. I have called over 100 licensed, non-licensed, and day care center providers and we have attended more than 30 interviews. We looked for providers in all surrounding area's which included 5 different cities and had a very difficult time finding providers that even offered part-time childcare and had openings for an infant under the age of 2. The providers that offered part-time and had an opening were \$55-\$65 per day, which left us with the option of me quitting my career or looking for unlicensed & more affordable care. I was astonished at the rates and lack of options. We ended up finding an unlicensed provided on Craigslist (which I never thought would be the option and last resort we were left with).

We ended up finding a very supportive provider that was flexible and affordable and had a clean home/environment and loving demeanor towards our son. She ended up building a home and moving to another City so we have been looking since he was born for a new provider. He is now 1yrs old and we still have not found anything comparable. This leaves us with driving an hour out of our way in the morning and evenings to drop off and pick up our child. This burden is leaving us with large life decisions about our ability to even have a second child. Currently, we are running into the impossible demands of work and inflexibility of balancing our home life, as well as the expensive childcare (especially when you have two children needing care). It does not make financial sense for me to continue working part-time in a career that I love and enjoy, if we have two children with how expensive childcare is.

I continue to be astonished at how any working parent(s) can have a family that they feel connected to. We are facing the tough decision of having another child and potentially meaning I would leave a career that I worked hard for to stay home with them, or only have one child and getting to continue my career. This is absurd in our developed country, with two parents with Masters degrees that we can't afford childcare for two kids. Furthermore, the childcare that is an option are not quality. We have gone into many provider homes (licensed and unlicensed), where they don't even have safe places for the kids to sleep (there are no play pens/cribs), the house is dirty, they don't have education or training in childcare or development, the hours are inflexible for parents that have salary positions and don't go into work the same time every-day, or are not nurturing.

We had a terrible experience where our child "tried" a licensed daycare provider for two weeks and was essentially neglected because "he wouldn't nap when she wanted him to." Our son ended up being left crying for 40 minutes to over an hour and had blisters on his bottom from not being changed regularly. Even more disheartening is this in-home provider was the referral lady for daycare providers in our county. This is unacceptable and truly a daily battle. We should have high quality, safe and affordable childcare that is able to adapt to current work lifestyle's and not force parents to choose between having 1 child and a career or 2 children and no career.

Jennifer, Fort Collins

I provide free day care for my niece to help their young family make ends meet. Child care for an infant can cost over thousand dollars a month and combined with childcare for a preschooler that can make it impossible for a young family to make ends meet in a town such as ours with a moderate cost of living.

I find great joy in watching my niece but I wonder about all the other families who aren't as lucky as mine and don't

have extended family in town to help with childcare. Affordable childcare makes it possible for women to continue their careers and support their families! It is not a privilege, it is what's just and needed. Other nations do a much better job of supporting young families, America needs to step up to the plate.

**"Affordable
childcare makes it
possible for women
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just and needed."**

Jennifer, Fort Collins

Jernice, Denver

I am a single mother of three children ages 9, 7, and 2. At one point in time, I was a full time student, and I used the child care subsidy to put my two older children in daycare, and preschool. I would not have been able to finish school without child care. I graduated and got a full time job, but I didn't have anyone to watch my children. Again I used the child care assistance for my children while I was a working during the day. This is a good program for people who do not have an economic advantage.

Having put my children in daycare was the best thing I could have done for them and myself. They learned so much that they wouldn't have otherwise learned if they were not in preschool, or child care. We can not give up on our children. We have to put them

first because they are our future. Child care alone is a whole pay check if there is no subsidy to help out. People would not be able to survive and give their families the necessities of life. I am a person who wants to better myself, and sometimes I need a little help.

Having an education is number one in my book, and my children should have the same opportunities as others. I am working on getting to the point where I don't need any help, but it is a process, and takes time.

CONNECTICUT

Leslie, Stamford

I read to and played with children here for 17 years. As a volunteer I knew the more words heard, books read, and those the children had of their own made it more likely to be ready to attend school and be literate. Unfortunately many who are in the field of Child Care are not paid at all well. Some cannot afford to pay for their child to be cared for properly.

Not only does pre school experience help the children, but create jobs for the teachers. In Head Start Programs, the vision, hearing, and differences in learning are tested. When the families have difficulties, a Social Worker can help them deal with other programs they may be eligible for also.

Amy, New Haven

I taught preschool for many years and noticed the the ways that kids grew both socially and in terms of readiness to learn. It's important.

Kellianne, Brandford

I'm in the process of trying to find affordable childcare for my two children while I go back to work full-time and go to school part-time. At this point, I am at a loss, because for both of them to go to daycare will cost almost my entire paycheck per week. I can't afford to NOT go back to work, and I can't afford TO go back to work. What is someone like me, who is trying to build a better life and future for her children supposed to do?

Lisa, Putnam

Childcare is an important issue to thousand of parents across this country. Parents should not have to worry that their children are in a safe, secure and nurturing environment while they are out making a living. Many parents are in minimum wage jobs, where the cost of daycare surpasses the amount earned. The burden to these parents are two-fold. First in providing a safe haven for their children. Second providing food, shelter and clothing for their children.

Today's economy requires many parents to chose which of these will happen. The social implications are monumental. Children go hungry. Parents can't pay the bills. Families lose their homes. Assistance guidelines do not pick up the slack to these families. The burden of poverty is overwhelming to these families as well as to society. Education in early childhood is crucial for today's child. Social interactions determine how well children integrate into society. Today's children are tomorrow's leaders. Let's support the children through providing their parents with affordable, reliable childcare.

DELAWARE

Chris Hostler, Wilmington

I raised five children while working full time. Of course, daycare was a major issue for my family. I had some family caretakers but outside care as well. I was very fortunate to have good day care, but our budget was definitely affected by the cost. Now, I see my own kids going through the same problem finding good child care and being able to afford it. The pre-K program helped my one daughter in the Red Clay District, but in the Brandywine School District it is very limited. I see that we are making progress, but it cannot come quick enough. I don't want to see my grand kids facing the same problems. It is not that difficult. Let's just do it!

Carol, Wilmington

My husband and I were working part-time while planning retirement, and were able to provide child care to our

infant granddaughter. Her parents both worked one and two jobs, and would never have been able to pay for adequate day care for an infant.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Charles, DC

The District's public schools offer pre-kindergarten classes, all day, to 3- and 4-year-old children since fall 2014 (if memory serves). Some schools offer Pre-K-3 and Pre-K-4 classes separately, while others, depending on enrollment and staffing, offer a combination (Pre-K-3/4). Enrollment of Pre-K children is optional, whereas enrollment in Kindergarten and beyond is, of course, required.

My grandson, who turned 4 last November, has prospered in his Pre-K class since last September. He is in a bilingual school, where class is conducted in English one day and Spanish the next. The program began with Mayor Vincent Gray's (2011-2015) leadership and the concurrence of the City Council; it continues with Mayor Muriel Bowser's leadership. The school also offers an after-care program serving children from closing time (approximately 3:30 PM) to 6 PM to give working parents a chance to retrieve their children. Finally, the school happens to be "in-boundary" for my grandson, but it also serves children from outside the neighborhood who want to attend.

We have a school lottery (since 2014) in which parents may list school preferences; my grandson's school happened to be his parents' first choice in the lottery, and he gets to stay in the school (until he is promoted out of elementary school) once he is enrolled there.

Darlene Jackson, DC

My one and only grandson at 14 months old was diagnosed with what is called hydrophilics. He had over 200 tumors in his brain and down his spine. Now thank God they were not cancerous, however, they were so aggressive that they multiplied and acted as if they were that he

had surgery. Khalil is now 4 years old - the doctor released him in July 2015 to be around other children and to start school. The county had to do an extensive testing that began in August and was concluded in November 2015, with him, his doctors, and therapist.

Khalil enjoys going to school and being around other children, and is learning extremely well the teachers and his parents are saying. So pre-k is extremely vital for our children to thrive! DO NOT take away any pre-k from any state in the USA!!!

Anne, DC

I went through at least 18 caregivers before my two children turned 5. I removed my first infant from a group day care when I found Sarah napping in the bathtub--the safest place in the house for her, the caregiver said. I learned that one caregiver had quit when I found her key to our house on the kitchen table.

Once, when I was anxiously looking at my watch, worried about being late for work in, a friend of my caregiver called to say that our nanny was in Miami. She was awaiting deportation for being undocumented. It was a mark of my desperation that I even considered hiring someone without a green card.

At first my husband and I resisted a live-in nanny because we feared for the loss of our privacy. One day we looked at each other and asked, "What privacy?" The advantage of a live-in was, she was in the house and therefore more likely to appear for work in the morning. We paid well. I signed my full professional paycheck over to our nanny every pay period.

Ultimately, when my second daughter turned six, we finally found a good caregiver. She stayed with us 10 years. Neither of our offices ever offered day care. I only got four days off when my second child was born. Ultimately, I quit my job and gave up a beloved career. We lived on peanut butter, but at least I knew my kids were getting a solid upbringing. Now my kids are grown and I am unemployed--my skills decades out of date.

Caitlin, DC

We pay over \$2000 per month for quality child care in Washington DC. It took months of visiting day cares, getting on ten wait lists (which cost between \$25 and \$200) for day cares when I was just a few months pregnant. After all of that work, we were accepted into one day care by the time I needed to go back to work after maternity leave, and have since been using that day care.

This situation is unsustainable for the middle class. It forces women to choose between a career and motherhood when affordability is such an issue. As an educated woman, this is not what I bargained for and it is not what's right for children or families. Quality child care is the cost of a college education in the DC area.

FLORIDA

Judith, Mount Dora

Because my grand daughter was taught early, she knows everything in pre-k and is ready for first grade at age 4.5. Being a retired teacher, I know how important early learning can be.

Mikaela, Holiday

It is pretty much impossible to work a job, pay rent and pay for daycare without financial assistance. I ask that the programs to assist with the cost of daycare are strengthened.

Sandy, Tavares

I would like to request in addition to quality, affordable childcare a more flexible, quality, affordable childcare that is individualized, that takes into account that not every child is the same child with the same learning processes, the same assets, nor the same learning impediments.

My grandson has been a voracious and comprehensive reader since he was three. Instead of being viewed as an asset his advanced vocabulary, reading comprehension and spelling skills have been perceived and interpreted as a negative skill set. Thus I am requesting more than quality affordable childcare,

TOXIC STRESS CAN DAMAGE THE DEVELOPING BRAIN CAUSING LIFELONG PROBLEMS FOR LEARNING, BEHAVIOR AND PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH



<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

I am requesting and suggesting better affordable childcare. I am asking that we raise the bar and ask for more. Our children not only deserve more personalized testing and individualized out of the box learning structures, they need it. I thank you in my grandson's name.

Allika, Sanford

I struggled with paying for child care. At \$540 a month for tuition and unable to get assistance because our family income wasn't below the poverty line, but there is a \$700 difference in my husband's net vs gross, but they didn't care, so I had to drop out of nsg school and pull my daughter out of childcare, and this was partly due to the ridiculous Sept 1 cut off my daughters birthday is September 6, so because of 5 days she has to sit behind. This is why the children up north are smarter. They start school earlier. Change the September 1 cut off its ridiculous.

Richard, Pembroke Pines

My wife and I had a hard time being full time parents but a harder time being working parents trying to afford full time day care. My wife in the military and in college when our first daughter was born. I worked two jobs while in

college that was short lived because even with the military paying for my wife's education, collectively we did not earn enough for me to stay in school. She was an E-5, a Staff Sgt. and I was her dependent. She was bound for officer training when she finished. What we did was rely on a relative who had moved in with us. She was not reliable, so I eventually had to stop full time work and become a part time employee.

After my wife became an officer, a 2nd Lt. we could afford part time day care and I worked evenings since my wife had a daytime job with most weekends off. We had a second child and I stayed part time and kept the youngest at home and our oldest on three half days at day care for the socializing skills she was lacking in because we lived in a neighborhood with very few children and none her age. I started working more from my home but the jobs were not lucrative and though the pay was better for each hour spent the period between jobs made that income unreliable. I decided that full time house dad was the most efficient and least expensive option. We stuck with part time day care because the way we moved around kept our kids relationships with other kids their age to a minimum.

Good day care was too expensive, not

that the caregivers themselves were raking in good incomes. Most of the time we could only count on one teacher lasting roughly 6 months before the lousy pay, spoiled kids and unhelpful parents inspired them to move on. If that sounds insensitive to my fellow parents it's just how I saw things. Parents wanted to do well by their kids but their defensive attitude toward the shortcoming of their kids, neglected because of the parents professional (and often social life where some steam had to be dissipated because of the unrelenting stress) and the claim that those kids acting out was normal caused more than one good teacher to throw in the towel. The quality of the teachers started to seriously deteriorate because of the abuse by the administrative staff and defensive parents.

By the time we moved again (my wife's degree completed) we were just shy of a year from our youngest being eligible for kindergarten. For that year we did only 2 half days, again for socializing with kids her age. Day care is ridiculously expensive but it was essential. The way we moved around it was essential for our kids so that they had kids their own age to play with and learn from. While we don't regret their attending, we did not like the cost and the often bordering on poor quality of staff and care givers to regular employee turn-overs.

Despite these complaints we often sympathized with the teachers. This entirely for-profit industry rewards a few on the backs of the many who had to act as filters for the bad policies, budget cutting and other measures that made providing care second to making money. Even administrators were often little more than facility managers absorbing abuse from parents who resented the musical chair hiring practices caused by poor pay, long work hours and general lack of respect for those providing the care. This system is severely broken.

Dawn, Jacksonville

When the expense of a nanny was quickly draining our budget, I started my search for childcare. The first center

I toured (by appointment) was in fact "awful." The teachers obviously did not want to be there. They casually flung food at the children during snack time, let kids walk around with no pants and dirty behinds as they waited for toiletting assistance, and had a general attitude of "I don't care." And this is what I saw when I toured with an appointment, meaning they knew I was coming. I didn't even complete the tour. Less than halfway though I kindly told the director that I had seen enough, and I walked out.

I kept searching and kept having similar experiences. I finally found one childcare center that was not as bad as the others. I'm not saying it was great, mind you...just not bad. This center had cameras in the rooms so I could watch my children via the internet during the day. What I saw my first day of watching the internet camera shocked me...About a year later I started my search again.

This time I found a private Montessori school that was perfect in every way: caring teachers, structured class time, and an environment that felt safe and secure. Were those things really that much to ask? The only problem was the cost. Putting both my kids in this school was about the same price per month as the nanny. I enrolled them because of the educational aspect. While the nanny was great, she was not a teacher, and I wanted my kids to have a solid educational foundation.

My kids have been in the private Montessori school for nearly two years. And we've drained our savings to keep them there. Why a safe, educational, and caring environment should cost so much is beyond me. For a country that claims to put children first, we still don't have adequate, affordable childcare, plain and simple. The "put children first" motto is meaningless unless we make caring for preschool children a priority. After all, the preschool years are some of the most formative years of a child's life. I'm determined to keep my kids in the caring, safe, and educational environment they are in, no matter what the sacrifice on my part.

I feel fortunate that I have the means to scrape together the money each month to afford quality childcare. I know many parents cannot and have to settle for something they don't want for their children. And in this country, that's shameful. It's time to really put children first and not just give lip service to the phrase. Our children and our future depend on it.

Angie, Miami

I don't know what I would have done without my sister with how expensive care is. My sister has two kids of her own, 5 & 3, and she stays home with them, so when I started to work again, I asked her if she could watch my son. It was a great decision for us.

He loves being with his cousins and his aunt and she keeps him on a schedule. She's really good with him and treats him very well. I couldn't have asked for better child care and at a reasonable price, so I can't imagine how other families do it!

Amy, Miami

My daughters are now in their 30's, but I'm still paying the price of not having affordable and trustworthy childcare options when they were young. When I was ready to go back to work after my oldest was born, my mother was working and my grandmother was too elderly to help with the care, so we started to look for childcare.

At the time, I had a job at the airport that paid \$500 a week, but everywhere we went, care for my daughter was either more or the same as my take home pay. So we had to make the only decision that made sense, I had to stay home with my daughter.

While caring for my daughters is one of the most amazing things I've ever done, my career never recovered. After so many years out of the workforce (with a big tech boom that I didn't understand) I jumped from odd job to odd job, but for the most part, I just couldn't find work. Parents need and deserve to have more options than we did.

Meredith, Orlando, FL

Between student loans and the cost of childcare, we've had to make some difficult financial decisions for our family over the last couple of years. When my oldest was identified as being on the autism spectrum, things became more challenging as we also began navigating the difficult terrain of parenting a special needs child while working full time.



Going through the process we also learned about how families with special needs children encounter therapies that insurance won't cover, hours of endless testing, and many rushed afternoons away from work. It's just too much and my family is not alone. In my "Mommyhood" Facebook group I've seen countless conversations about the cost of childcare, about whether someone can afford to have another child, about staying home because they can't afford to work, about how to squeeze every cent out of a paycheck at the grocery store. At work, behind closed doors, mothers discuss the impact maternity leave will have on our evaluations, plan to help one another manage the transition back to work, lament over pumping in a closet or a bathroom.

My childhood friend watches her nieces and nephews – five children – on her days off from nursing because quality childcare is so unaffordable. The woman checking me out in the store told me about being a single mom trying to take care of her son and sick mother on minimum wage. People are suffering and, as a community, we need to do something about it.

Barbara, Orlando

First I must say that my children are 29 and 31, but this is not a new issue. In the 1980s, in the Orlando area, I lived over 30 miles from my job.

My childcare options were limited to those who would take my school age children to school and pick them up when school was out. As a single mother I had little wiggle room on keeping within the daycare hours and getting in the time required for my job.

Add Orlando's notorious afternoon thunderstorms to the mix and it presented some real issues. One afternoon, traffic on the highway came to almost a stop due to a bad storm with tornadoes. I was faced with a decision ... continue on to daycare or stop, find

a phone and call. The latter option may have added 20-30 minutes with the traffic problems. I chose to get to the daycare facility as soon as possible. I was 23 minutes late and I was charged \$1/minute in fees. I was told if I had only called (this was before cell phones!), they would have waived the fees, but I was gambling on which one was better because the policy did not state that a phone call would relax the fees.

I thought late fees were for "party parents" who stopped at the bar after work. Thinking back, I never saw that kind of parent. I only saw the ones whose blood pressure would race and whose driving may have been impaired due to the rush and the stress of avoiding the \$1/minute late fee.

GEORGIA

Amy, Augusta

I'm a well-educated professional mom, and my experience has been that high quality childcare is expensive and rare. Families who cannot afford it are forced to accept daycare situations that are far less than ideal, where there are too many children cared for by under-trained caregivers with high rates of turnover. These situations are not conducive to children developing the language, cognitive, and social skills they need.

Charles, Doraville

Even though my children is 15 and 10 years old now, both had great experiences in both daycare and pre-k which

helped them educationally and taught them social skills.

Angela, Atlanta

My son entered Pre K at the age of 4. In that same year he started reading. He excelled and loved learning. He is now a “graduating” senior majoring in Economics, and has secured a very good job in his desired field, which he will start in July. He is a great example of the foundation laid by receiving a Pre K education.

Tamara, College Park

I am a single mother of two beautiful children: my son is 11 and my daughter is 8. I get help for my son via child support from his father as we were previously married. He’s been very helpful in us raising our son. With my daughter, I get no help. I have attempted since she was 3 and I am on my own with this. Childcare is very expensive even for kids my age so I am still in a bind and would think that each case of childcare should be looked into and based on each situation not on a set level.

HAWAII

Kate, Honolulu

I am the Grandmother of two! My daughter is a single mother! I am providing child care for the 3 year old as she can’t afford to place them both in child care! As a 60 year old woman, I am too old to keep up with an active and inquisitive 3 year old!

Vicky, Pahoa

The Montessori Country School is a wonderful Montessori-based Preschool and Kindergarten. As I received a partial state subsidy to pay his tuition, this allowed me to go back to work part-time. In the meantime, Sean received an excellent preparation for elementary school.

Now my son is a nationally recognized classical musician who has performed at the annual fundraiser for his preschool alma mater. He has also provid-

ed Arts Leadership to fourth grade students in his community. Sean is not the only success story for affordable, high-quality Preschool. Early Learning is an essential investment in our children which pays immeasurable dividends, as they are our future.

IDAHO

Kate, Boise

I am a public health professional working in my state government position for nearly 8 years. My husband has worked in professional sales and account management in the technology and telecommunications industry for more than 15 years. We have two children, ages 3 and 8 months. For the past 6 months, I have been the “breadwinner” for the family, as my husband was unfairly let go from his job while I was on (unpaid) maternity leave with our newborn son. I went back to work earlier than I had planned so that we could get a paycheck. Due to the circumstances of his departure, he has had an extremely difficult time finding employment.

He has been collecting unemployment which, thankfully, has kept food on the table and a roof over our heads. When all of this happened, we realized we’d have a tough time paying for full-time child care for our son, so we made the decision to move him to part time care and he would be home with my husband and baby part-time. Recently, with a lack of job offers, we chose to pull our son from daycare/preschool to help save some more money. We had been having a lot of quality concerns with the daycare so it was a necessary decision.

A new NAEYC accredited daycare/preschool is opening soon in our neighborhood and we have both children registered, however, without two adequate incomes, there is no way we can pay monthly tuition. We may be able to pay for part-time preschool for my older son, but with my husband still at home, there is no reason to enroll the baby. The trouble is, being accredited, they have only 4 spots for infants and we may lose that precious spot if my husband isn’t

working. I am beyond stressed that my husband’s unemployed status will continue into 2016 and we will not be able to keep our spot for my baby at the new childcare center. At this point in time, he has 4 weeks of unemployment left. I don’t know what we’ll do if he isn’t approved for an extension.

My son is missing the interaction with children and he is getting behind on learning lessons from his previous daycare. Being a mama and the only income-earner is a much harder position to be in than I ever dreamed. We are grateful that we can provide a loving, warm home for our children but uncertain about what the future may bring.

Michelle, Boise

It has been a few years since my kids were in daycare, but I can still remember the summer I had all 3 of them in daycare and the expense was over \$1,400 per month and that was back in 2000.

I was fortunate enough to have a great job where I could afford that, but that amount is way too much for most people’s budgets. I had just gotten divorced and needed to return to work full time. I was making over \$30 dollars a hour back then so I could make it work. But I can’t imagine how families making minimum wage or even under \$20 dollars/hour can afford to send their kids to daycare. Quality daycare needs to be available to all, regardless of the amount of income they make. Daycare providers need to be compensated with a decent wage as well because it is a tough, but important job.

ILLINOIS

Heidi, Plano

I am a Montessori teacher and an advocate for early childhood education, which I realize is difficult for many people. This should not be a luxury for people. Please make this affordable for all!

Marianne, Des Plaines

For six years I was a head Start teacher at the Des Plaines Head start Center.

We served a largely immigrant population, and over 70% of our children were Hispanic and Latino. We also were serving an increasing number of middle eastern families, including Syrian refugees. Many of the children were English language learners, and many parents spoke no English. For many children, this was their first experience outside the family. The children would spend two years in our program where they received nutritionally balanced meals along with their pre-school education.

I would watch them blossom from children who did not speak into laughing, confident children who were ready to take on the challenges of Kindergarten. Children without pre-school do not have the same success rate as those who do have a quality pre-school education. In today's Kindergarten children begin to learn to read as early as October. They write in journals and solve math problems. Not an easy task if you don't speak English, or recognize letters or numbers.

Two years ago our agency lost their grant due to incompetence. We had gone through a year fraught with problems like no working phones or computers. Thanks to help from our wonderful congressional representatives, we got through the year and our center stayed open under a temporary agency. At the end of that year, no one wanted Des Plaines so our 134 slots were given to other suburbs that already had services, leaving a void in Des Plaines. That means over one hundred low income families have lost their lifeline to a high quality pre-school education. It should not be like this.

These children, and other children like them deserve to have that good head start in life. I hope that someday our elected officials will come to realize the high return they get on dollars invested in quality preschool education.

John, Elgin

My wife and I are retired teachers with 63 years of teaching experience between us. Our experience working with children shows beyond a question of a doubt that

CHILDCARE COSTS OFTEN EXCEED THE COSTS OF HOUSING, TUITION, FOOD AND TRANSPORTATION MAKING IT OUT OF REACH FOR MANY WORKING FAMILIES



<http://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/reports-and-research/costofcare/>

early learning experiences are extremely important for transforming children eventually into successful adults!

Amos Moore, Chicago

Early childhood education is an excellent way to promote educational excellence, high school performance, and to avoid delinquency. Children who participate in pre kindergarten education, school readiness projects benefit from becoming ready to learn in school and from being more likely to have learning obstacles diagnosed and treated.

Many people with low literacy could have been worked with if they had been diagnosed early in life. Prevention of non literacy and criminal careers saves many citizens unnecessary suffering, and saves municipalities savings in court, policing, costs, and helps in attracting high income migrants.

Yusdivia, Aurora

I am the mother of two girls ages 4 and 1, and I am one of many mothers who

were denied childcare assistance by several agencies. My first little girl was looked after by my family and friends for a year, until they said they could no longer care for her. I went to seek Childcare assistance at centers and places like Head Start, and their response was always that my "income was very high to receive help." I also had to choose a day care center that had flexible hours for me, my work hours were from 6am to 3pm and all centers or most opened at 6am so we struggled a lot to find a childcare agency but above all we struggled with the cost!

My work income went completely and directly to the childcare center with nothing to spare, so my husband had to look for two full time jobs, to buy food and other things for the house. He only slept 4hrs per night to get by with our expenses. When the second baby was on the way we decided it was more economical for me to stay at home to take care of the two and my husband would continue with the two full-time jobs.

It's been a year since I've been at home

with the girls but the thought that I need return to work to pay for my daughters' childcare again only to have nothing left over for expenses saddens me very much, it saddens me to not be able to better myself and provide for my family.

Soy madre de dos niñas edades 4 y 1, y soy una de tantas madres que la ayuda para el cuidado de niñas fue negado por varias agencias. Mi primera niña me la cuidaron familiares y amigas por un año, hasta que me dijeron que ya no podían cuidarla, fui a buscar ayuda a los centros de cuidado y lugares como Head Start, y la respuesta siempre era que "Mis ingresos eran muy altos para recibir ayuda" así que tuve que escoger un centro de cuidado que tuviera horas flexibles para mí, mis horas de trabajo eran de 6am a 3pm y todos los centros o la mayoría abren a las 6am así que batallamos mucho, por el horario, la locación pero sobretodo el costo!, mi cheque de trabajo iba directamente al centro de cuidado sin nada de sobra, así que mi esposo tuvo que buscar dos trabajos de tiempo completo, para poder comprar comida, y demás cosas para la casa. El dormía solo 4hrs por noche para poder sobrevivir con los gastos, cuando la segunda bebe venia en camino decidimos que era más económico que yo me quedara en casa a cuidar de las dos y el continuaría los dos trabajos de tiempo completo. Y

a hace un año que estoy en casa con las niñas pero el solo pensar que debo regresar a trabajar para volver a pagar el cuidado de mis hijas sin tener nada de sobra para gastar me entristece mucho el no poder superarme como persona y como proveedora para mi hogar.

Susan, Chicago

I was fired for bringing my son to work because I didn't have childcare. School was out, and with both kids in two different districts, I wasn't going to make my daughter stay home from school to watch her brother. No care was provided by the Park SDistrict or the YMCA and could not afford Kinder care drop in rates. Was authorized to bring him to

work instead. I thought I was being dependable by being at work rather than calling out, but the President saw him in office and I got fired.

"These very children are expected to run the free world, it only makes sense to give them a head start."

Cathay, Rockford

Bonnie, Chicago

I have a BA degree and was an honors student at a top university, but I'm having a hard time getting back into the work force after taking time off to raise my young kids. I've been a nanny for 5 other people's babies and toddlers with low pay and no benefits.

My husband and I are presently both freelancers, barely making ends meet, with no savings, benefits, retirement money or college money for the kids. It's sad in this country that people who chose to be there for their kids during their crucial early years are plunged into poverty if they don't have a trust fund or rare high salary. And we're the lucky ones who had a choice and could scrape by.

Most of my friends work full time and have an extremely tough time juggling their family logistics and rarely see their kids at all, especially the vast majorities of divorced & single moms!

Cathay, Rockford

We have a family of eight children who attended early childhood programs & the program contributed to who they

are now. The children are now adults ranging from ages 18 to 28, all completed high school and are living productive lives. Early childhood programs not only help alleviate costs associated with other un-affordable options, but helped the children develop self-esteem, confidence & social skills.

The children in the U.S. are falling behind just about every country in the educational realm & if we expect America to regain its status in the world our children need education as soon as possible. These very children are expected to run the free world, it only makes sense to give them a head start.

Joy, Glencoe

Early care is the best preparation for school and life. Small children need the continuity and structure and basic skills. It makes them better learners and more disciplined adults.

Sarah, East Peoria

I lost my job when I got pregnant. In a way, it was a blessing - even at \$17 an hour, I would basically be working to put my son in daycare. Now I can stay home with him. It became even more important this summer. My brother and sister-in-law were finally able to get back to work, but their son needed a sitter. He stays with me now, and even at a reduced rate it takes nearly half of my brothers check to cover the costs.

We're finally leveling out, but making ends meet is getting harder and harder. I would love to go back to work, but child care costs prevent that, plus it would make life difficult for my brother and sister-in-law too.

Gwyneth, Chicago

My daughter is entering sixth grade, my son is entering third. I am still paying off the massive credit card debt from their preschool. I have the feeling it will be a long haul. There was no adequate program from the time they were toilet trained until they entered kindergarten (three years!), and unless I wished to stop working, I needed somewhere for

them that had teachers paid reasonable salaries (no benefits!), who had backgrounds in early childhood education, and could prepare them for their schooling years adequately.

Our local school has only a TWO HOUR program for preschool, three days a week. This is clearly inadequate preparation for the requirements that will be expected of children, and ill serves their future experience in grade school. Both my children entered kindergarten prepared, but at a rather high cost to our family, financially.

INDIANA

Dixie, Chandler

As a child who didn't have the advantage of early childhood education, which was deemed unimportant in my school years, I definitely started out behind. I had to struggle to catch up in both education and the needed socialization skills. It took me most of high school to finally reach both of those landmarks. There was no pre-k and I could have done more in my life had the early education been available to me.

Donna, Indianapolis

I am a home daycare provider. I see it all the time. that parents cannot afford child care. and end up leaving my facility. The hardship is not only on the parent, it is on the children also. They are shifted from care to care. No stability or security and this too affects their future. I do the best I can to help these parents financially, but I too am a single mom trying to work and provide for my family. So reality is.... It is a hardship to all involved. Please help!

Monica, Bloomington

All children require quality early learning services. These were not in place when my children were young. I could barely afford to send them to daycare when working full-time as an MSW, LCSW, ACSW social worker in a children's hospital. Our family went without many things to pay for daycare. These early learning programs are nec-

NEARLY 12 MILLION CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE REGULARLY SPEND TIME IN CHILD CARE



U.S. Congressional Committee on Education and Labor, July 2009 (PDF)

essary in giving every child a positive start in life! It is so very important!

Manetric, Indianapolis

Last year when my husband lost his job we soon lost everything else afterwards. My husband lost his job in the early months of 2012. When that happened we were only able to afford staying in our rental home for another month. My oldest son was still in 2nd grade while 2 year old was in daycare... until I had to take him out because I could no longer afford the low price of \$300 a month by myself and still pay for groceries, give money to the family member that was allowing my family of 4 to stay, gas money, lunch money for me and my oldest child etc.

We did not qualify for daycare assistance due to the guidelines that are set for a family of 4. We were only \$100 dollars over the guideline limits but we were still unable to get any type of assistance. For families that are only a check or two away from poverty it is hard to find an affordable but quality daycare that is on your way to work. It would be greatly appreciated if more could be done legislatively to help working parents.

IOWA

Kim, Iowa City

Looking for childcare is a very hard. My daughter has autism and at school she requires a one-on-one aide throughout the school day. When school is out, my daughter still requires a high degree of adult supervision. I am a single mother who must work full-time to support us. I cannot afford to pay an aide an hourly rate of \$10 an hour or more for every hour my daughter is out of school and I must be at work.

This becomes acutely problematic over the summer months. Finding childcare with adequate training is a big issue, but even more critical is the impossible expense it presents

Alison, Des Moines

I volunteer for the HeadStart programs here in Iowa and I'm very disappointed about recent funding cuts. Times are tight for everyone and I understand tough decisions need to be made. However, cutting early education and childcare for our youth will only continue to make things worse for those who need it the most. As a country we have the obligation to set our children up with

the tools they will need to survive in the world. Early education has been proven time and time again to be one of the most beneficial things children can be provided.

H, Des Moines

I never could have finished my college education without affordable child care, for many it means not being able to work, please help women succeed.

Elizabeth, Des Moines

Twenty years ago my husband left me with two sets of twins, 6 months and two years old. I was the sole provider and had to work, Iowa had a day care subsidy and because a new daycare had just opened I was able to place all 4 children in the same center. At first we were trying to figure out how to place the boys in as many as 3 separate daycares, a home day care could not legally care for all of my children because there were limits on the number of children under a certain age.

I struggled for years to keep a roof over our head and food in their bellies, with very, very little help from their father. Because I had a child with special needs (Autism Spectrum) it was a constant struggle to keep daycare. My annual income would pay for housing and health care and food and the bare essentials but could not accommodate four children in day care. There were few alternatives, a shelter or foster care I suppose. Now my boys are grown up and working and paying taxes, two are serving in the military in Afghanistan. My family could not have survived without the day care subsidy and were constantly in danger of losing it, if I earned a dollar too much I could lose the whole subsidy. Those were tough years, but we survived with a lot of help and a lot of creativity.

Amy, Mt. Pleasant

The families in our community are really struggling to find childcare for their children. Our only center had to close because factory layoffs made families

unable to pay. The only other center is in another town, and they are completely full.

Parents without the option of adjusting their work hours or having family babysit are forced to leave their children in private homes, with people they don't know well. I am a Family Support Specialist, and parents often come to me asking for help in finding safe childcare for their children. Right now there's not much I can tell them.

Jessica, Lamoni

Child Care is a big plus in today's society. Especially with single moms (like me) that get paid minimum wages and can't afford to pay out of pocket because their living paycheck to paycheck. I know I live paycheck to paycheck. I have to pay my rent plus my bills and that takes my only two checks a month that I get from work up. Plus it also teaches your child to be independent. Not only because their not with you 24/7 but because it teaches them to mind for other people as well. It also teaches them to get along with other children and to see how other people live as well.

The child care provider I have right now is awesome. She is the best one I have had yet. She is good with my kids as well as making them mind and listen to her. The early learning is an awesome idea. It keeps the kids learning and makes them want to learn more. It advances their education.

KANSAS

K, Shawnee

My firstborn daughter was blessed to attend a Montessori pre-school with a terrific teacher. The students were of all races, nationalities, and ranged from 3-6, since the school also housed kindergarten. I could not have planned a better experience for her. B

eing a middle school educator myself, I wanted her to have a low affective filter classroom, one with an absence of threat, but also with a philosophy of engagement, curiosity and motiva-

tion. My daughter loved going to school - the experiences she had (like family style lunches where kids passed bowls of food and washed their own dishes) would never have occurred at a traditional school.

Kim, Overland Park

My husband works full-time and I work 30 hours a week as a freelance writer/editor. For several years, my mother and mother-in-law cared for our two children. It was awesome! But in 2009, when my children were 3 and 4, both women got cancer. Suddenly, we were faced with child-care fees of \$1,700/month. At the same time, I was working less in order to help care for my mom and mother-in-law.

We ended up taking out a home equity line of credit just to get by. Today, we are \$20,000 in debt and not sure when we will be able to pay it off. Still, I consider us the lucky ones. We have good jobs and will be OK. My heart aches for those families facing similar situations without flexible, well-paying jobs. Our country's lack of affordable, quality child-care and early education is a national tragedy.

Sister Janice, Garden City

I serve pregnant and parenting teens as a Parents as Teachers educator. Finding a stable caregiver that the teen can afford is a huge challenge. Often the caregiver is a family member or a "friend" because that is all the teen can afford. This leaves the teen at the mercy of that person.

a. The school receives a call that the teen must come home because something came up that the care giver prefers to do the rest of the day.

b. The care giver and the teen have some interpersonal glitch and suddenly the teen has no one to care for his/her child.

c. The care giver is less than desirable in quality but the teen cannot afford anything better.

The result of any or a combination of the above is that the teen's school at-

tendance is disrupted and often results in dropping out totally. Please do all you can to help these students stay in school so they can become a contributing member of our society. Also help the children of these teens have positive caregivers.

KENTUCKY

Rosellyn, Louisville

I am a retired teacher and winner of numerous awards including the Ashland Oil regional teaching award. I trained in a school-wide change program at the University of Oregon and collaborated in bringing that reading program to students in poverty in a Louisville school. The program had an important language learning component for five-year old children. I saw the difference just that one component made in our reading achievement.

I am deeply aware of what the research says about how much the correct pre-K programs can improve achievement. I want to live in a city where all our children are educated and democracy is alive and well. These programs change lives. We owe it to the children of our community to provide them. Better to provide funding when children are young, than to provide funding for incarceration! The savings will be great!

Amanda, Burlington

As a mother of three, I can attest to the fact that finding quality AND affordable preschool options that didn't eat up everything that one person would earn has been impossible for our family. Since the birth of our son in 2002 and our daughters in 2007 and 2008, we have never once had both parents working full-time at the same time. We simply cannot afford it!

Public pre-school options in our area are based income (one must qualify for food stamps or SNAP benefits) or the child must be developmentally or physically delayed. We did not want either stigma attached to our children and decided it was best for us to work

EARLY LEARNING BOOSTS OUR ECONOMY



FOR EVERY
DOLLAR INVESTED
IN HIGH-QUALITY
EARLY LEARNING
THERE IS A LATER
RETURN OF \$8!

https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/early_childhood_report1.pdf

things out at home. For our family not having 2 full-time incomes, has put us in debt "up to our eyeballs," because even when your intent and content with living simply, simply living is costly. A quality, public preschool option would have been very helpful for our family and I hope it will be available for others in the near future.

There are many developed nations already assisting families in this way. When we support families and children from the beginning, communities have lower crime rates, lower rates of incarceration, better health, and higher rates of high school graduation.

Shelly, Jeffersonville

Twins! Yippee! Infant daycare-nightmare! I had enough money left to buy groceries after paying for daycare...that was working full time...it was almost not worth working, but we still would have made too much money for any financial help, if I had been able to stay at home...messed up!

LOUISIANA

Beatrice, Plaquemine

I have four children and all four of them have benefited wonderfully from early childhood education. My oldest son is just finishing up his freshman year of college and my second son is a straight A student, my daughter is continuously on honor roll and my youngest son is in pre-k 4 and LOVING it and learning by leaps and bounds. I attribute it to early childhood education. Please continue with this, it builds a strong foundation for young minds.

Erica, Slidell

We have been blessed with two healthy children and are wanting another child to complete our family. However, with the cost of daycare and other rising expenses, our dream is far from reality. To pay for daycare for one child is 25% of our monthly budget.

I understand that everyone needs to be paid, but daycare is ridiculously expensive.

sive. We can't afford our expenses on just one income, we must have two to survive. It's just frustrating.

Colette, New Orleans

My husband and I have a beautiful 3 year old son. It's been extremely difficult to keep him in daycare. The weekly fee is \$110. With me taking a huge pay cut after Hurricane Katrina, almost \$10,000 less a year now and my husband taking a huge cut as well. I have applied for Childcare Assistance only to be turned down twice this year alone. First we made too much – I bring home under \$700 every two weeks and our mortgage is \$985, and that doesn't include food and utilities and BASIC NECESSITIES. I just applied again about 1 month ago, in desperation due to the fact that he has now lost his job, not knowing that now both parents have to still be currently working to receive assistance. It doesn't count that you are out every day looking for a new job.

So now I'll have to take my son out of daycare because we can't afford the tuition and keep him home with dad.... but at the same time dad needs to be out pounding the pavement applying for new jobs which he can't do with a 3 year old tagging along with him. I hate this. It's very stressful for us right now. It's a tug-of-war: pay the mortgage, buy food, or pay daycare, or skip the mortgage this month and buy his asthma meds.

MAINE

Diana, Lincolnville

I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker working with preschool children and their families in a small rural community in Maine. I have been working with families of young children since my own two daughters (now in their 30s) entered Kindergarten. I worked with some of the poorest families in the county. I make home visits to assist parents to provide good parenting for their children. I have been in homes where I was unable to take off my coat and my feet were freezing with winter boots on because the family could not

afford to heat their trailer home. I have seen refrigerators with virtually nothing in them.

I have seen many parents wishing and wanting to have the dignity of working to earn a living, but who are unable to afford transportation in this rural community much less childcare for their children while they do work. Now my own daughter, with a Masters Degree and her husband are facing hardship trying to live and work near family and being unable to afford mortgage payments or childcare so they both can work. This is no joke. Something must be done about the increasing income inequality in this country.

Jennifer, Gorham

In 2005, \$200 was the local going rate for a clean, safe, licensed daycare. There were higher and lower options, but that was going rate for good quality care. A dependable licensed daycare required payment every week, regardless of the center being closed for 1 week every summer and the last week of December, and whether your child attended or not. That's acceptable to me, I want the people who care for my child to have the best employment they can and hopefully some continuing education.

I loved my daycare and the people who helped raise my son for 3 yrs. But I was counting the weeks until he started all day school (kindergarten in my city is still half day) and that weekly bill would be half (Then the challenges of finding before and after care that met our criteria, in our school district was the next obstacle.) I have 5 years of college, my husband has 2. We are not big money makers and consider ourselves lucky to have M-F jobs with daytime hours. If we can each make \$30,000/yr, we consider ourselves lucky. For more than 3 years \$10,400 of that income went to child care. There are colleges that don't charge that much, and you can get loans and grants for them.

For the first 2yrs of our son's life we cobbled together part time jobs so that one of us and occasionally a grandparent

could be with our child. Because really, isn't our primary job raising that child? To help him become healthy, well adjusted, confident, and, oh yeah, happy? We were lucky that we only had to go the 5 full days of childcare for 3 years. Lots of families have to do it while their children are newborns. But that \$10,400 was a huge portion of our income. And there were weeks we were cash poor and struggled with writing that check.

Deborah, Waterville

Our daughter is a newly single mother of 2 children under the age of 2. In order to support them, she needs to continue her work as a High School Art teacher. The daycare closest to her work wants \$400/week (\$1600/month). Of course we will help her, but we are retirement age. It seems that it would be in the public interest to have some way of helping single parents in our daughter's position.

MARYLAND

Makia, Annapolis

I'm a single mom searching for childcare assistance as I write this. I am anxious to return back to the workforce, but childcare is the only barrier blocking me from doing so. I also would like to say pre-k is a wonderful opportunity for toddlers to experience what a classroom setting is like before intervening with the other kids of all ages. So with that being said, please as a single mom Mr. or Mrs. Mayor of Annapolis support affordable childcare and pre-k classes.

Bonnie, Columbia

My story: I'm a 29 year old mother of two. My husband and I have been struggling to stay afloat since our first was born in 2011. We live with family so that we can both work and afford to send our 21 month and 4 year old to childcare. The typical cost of childcare is \$270/ week for one child, one. That's 25, 920 a year for childcare. To rent in the Howard county area you can expect to pay no less than 1,500 a month, plus food, plus utilities, plus insurance, plus clothing, car payment, student loan

June, Laurel, MD

I wanted my 4 year old grandson to be placed in a licensed preschool program. My sons and I had agreed that we would all contribute to the cost for him to attend. My grandson's mother said she had not attended school until



she was 6 years old. She refused to agree to place him in a preschool program. My grandson started kindergarten when he was 6 years old. He is in the 9th grade today. He struggles to maintain passing grades in most of his classes. Of course, this affects his self-esteem and motivation to learn. It also dictates the children he is most likely to identify and associate with.

My son uses intervention strategies such as tutors and after school support. Nonetheless, it is an uphill battle. According to evidence based research, 0-5 years is sensitive (optimum) learning period based on the rapid brain development during this time (Berger, had 2012). I had worked with children long enough to know the benefits of early childhood education. However, now that we have evidence based research to support the critical nature of early childhood education, we can't afford to fail them. Our future depends on it.

debt, and the list goes on. I'm a teacher with a masters degree and a mother of two scraping by and we call ourselves a great country. Who are we comparing our country to, I wonder? I'm sure there are people in more difficult situations than mine who must work multiple jobs to support their childcare costs/living expenses. I thank my lucky stars I have in-laws who have been so giving. There are so many issues that could be resolved if there were a public program, like the public school system for early childcare.

Alita-geri, Fort Washington

I recently gave birth to my first born on March 6th of 2016. My husband and I often contemplate the education system and what it has to offer or the lack therein. It is our misfortune that the schools that surround us do not offer pre-kindergarten education and the education that is offered doesn't rank well with neighboring counties or nationally.

We acknowledged before we started our family that our choices were narrowed down to relocating once she is

school age or to enrolling her in private school in order for her to have a quality education. Initiating pre-kindergarten education is just one of the many improvements that needs to occur in order for the local school to be to complete on a regional and national level.

Keri, Potomac

We very much love the program and potential of new programs at Rock Spring Children's Center in Bethesda, MD. Any and all potential for growth regarding early childhood education is a huge deal for us. The cost vs. quality at RSCC very good; but slightly high We hope affordable rates can be for all early childhood locations in Mont. county.

Maggie, Silver Spring

My daughter currently attends the early learning center (ELC) on the Takoma Park/Silver Spring campus of Montgomery College, a NAEYC accredited program. The College announced in November 2015 that it was closing the centers in June 2016, a highly compressed timeline. The main reason for closing this ELC and a second ELC with a Head Start program is that the College wants to get out of the childcare business. The college did not consult with existing students, staff, or community member families who use the ELC before making this decision. The families of children currently attending and many community members do not want the ELCS to close. The ELCS have been a vital provider of childcare services for nearly 40 years.

Montgomery County itself passed legislation in May 2015 to expand childcare in the county. The College itself acknowledges the importance of the ELCs. Despite many efforts by the ELC families to find a champion for the centers, no one has come forward to help us keep the ELCs open. Our efforts include: a petition with 852 signatures, press coverage, letters to the College president, letters to the Montgomery County Council, letters to the Maryland Board of Education, and public comments to offer the College Board of Trustees expertise in

fundraising, and grantwriting.

The ELC on the TP/SS campus was started by a group of nursing students in the late 1970s. The TP/SS ELC earned the nickname “Kids’ House” because the program is run from a big brick house with a large backyard.

The full-time teachers have benefits and are generally paid a higher salary, and they are wonderful, caring people. In addition, many students are able to observe and work at the ELC as part of their teaching curriculum. What is not to be proud of and support? Thank you for the opportunity to share my story.

Alysia, Silver Spring

I’m concerned about the closing of Montgomery College (MC) Early Learning Centers (ELC) in Takoma Park and Rockville Maryland. I’ve always spoken very highly of Montgomery College and the professors. After graduating from high school I enrolled into Morgan State University and quickly figured out that the university campus life was not for me.

After visiting MC I was impressed by the professionalism of the professors, their backgrounds, the convenient class location, availability of quality childcare and diversity of students, staff, classes and was convinced that MC was just right for me. Montgomery College has not only provided me with quality classes but also access to a wonderful NAEYC accredited child care facility for my daughters, which allowed me the opportunity to return to school.

Overall ELC has been a second home for my now 4 year old daughter, as well as my oldest daughter, now 9, when she attended. The teachers and staff are engaging and genuinely enjoy being a part of our children’s lives. ELC is also one of the only affordable preschool programs in the area that has a learn through play curriculum.

Unfortunately last November, parents were informed of the college’s decision to close both Takoma Park and Rockville ELC on June 30, 2016. The late notice did not provide parents

adequate time to obtain future childcare nor were we included in the decision making process in regards to the closing.

The college decided to close the ELCs on June 30, 2016 because it is the end of the college’s fiscal year. The college did not consider that June 30 is in the middle of the summer and that it is difficult to find comparable childcare during the summer months for preschool children...The college’s execution of its decision is careless, has negatively affected current families and faculty and is a great loss to quality, affordable child care in Montgomery County.

Clara, Silver Spring

I was lucky enough to discover a wonderful cooperative preschool in our neighborhood. Each classroom is run by two teachers and a classroom parent each day. Having parents participate in the work and responsibilities of the school keeps costs down and makes quality edification affordable. Each parent is in the classroom about 1 day per month. I have found that on my days to assist, I learn as much as the kids. The teachers provide me a wonderful example of how to lead, stimulate and discipline small children.

I have found myself becoming a better parent as I learn how to communicate clearly with my children and facilitate their own learning of social interactions and classroom material. Best of all, the coop format builds community across the families as you get to know each child in the classroom. I feel lucky to have found such a lovely model for early childhood education.

Charis, Fort Meade

As a military spouse, the lack of affordable high quality childcare has been the primary reason that I haven’t been able to sustain a career. We are stationed far away from family and the Childcare on post is unacceptable. The support and security that affordable quality childcare could provide to our nation’s families is invaluable.

A second income would take my family from low income to middle class. It would mean two cars instead of one. The possibility of living in a better school district. In my case, 1 hour of before and 2 hours of after school care would mean I could work full time and know that my kids are okay. Jobs with “mommy hours” are few and far between, but what’s even more difficult to line up is a safe and positive environment for kids for just a few hours a day for a reasonable price. Please help! The stress that this puts on families and the difference it could make in our children’s futures is of massive importance to the trajectory of America. Also, one of my children has a “superior” IQ and he has not been challenged to maximize that in either the part day preschool program on post or in the public schools.

The fact that we couldn’t afford an excellent preschool and can’t afford private school for him, even with a partial scholarship, on enlisted military pay is a waste of his intellect. There is no telling what he, my other child or the millions of American children could achieve if our country chose to make the most of their potential.

Lenalee, Baltimore

I am a 42 year old Budget Analyst, grew up in the inner city of Baltimore where I still reside and work today. I know the struggles of middle class America and have been subjected to many of the social-economic issues we face as a society in the low to moderate income bracket one of those being affordable, safe, quality early learning childcare or preschool. I was a single mother who raised 3 daughters on my own from 1989-2013 and always had difficulty finding quality child care and preschool programs when my children were young and had an even worse experience in having them attend the Baltimore City public school system which did not do a very good job in providing any of them an adequate education and it is my biggest regret in life.

Despite being honor roll students not 1 of my 3 upon graduating from high school were accepted into a University.

I had them assessed and was told two had the education of a 5th grader and the other of an 8th grader. It was devastating to them when they realized how far behind they were compared to the rest of the world and even worse my employer pays tuition remission, 1/2 their college tuition to attend any University in the country, would of been covered. This is one of the major reasons I came to work where I do when they all were in elementary school. Instead of getting a higher education at a University they have had to go the part-time community college and trade school route. In order to be able to work back when my children were small I had to do 3-4 part time book-keeping jobs while the other girls were in the Head Start Program or elementary school. I would have to take my youngest with me until she was age 3 to work because that was the youngest age Head Start accepted.

I was very fortunate to find places like a church office, florist shop etc. that would let me bring her to work. Now grown, 2 of my girls have children of their own. My oldest grandson is Tristan age 5, and my granddaughter Rosalie age 17 months. Because my daughter separated from the father of their children and are not able to be financially be independent and self sufficient in order to afford living on their own, they and their children had to move back home with me. Rosalie's mom is 20 and still in school and Tristan's mother is 26 working full time. I also work full time. We have been unsuccessful in finding a quality preschool or daycare in our neighborhood or surrounding area that we can afford collectively for both of them. Due to the increase in property value in my area in the last 5 years and arrival of new residents who earn much higher income bracket then we do the least expensive daycare or early learning opportunity cost \$600 a month for 1 child. For 2 children that is \$1200 month and there is a 1 year waiting list.

The HeadStart program after 35 years of being in my neighborhood had to close this Fall because there are not enough low income residents who meet the federal guidelines living in the neighborhood like there used to be in

order to give them the enrollment they needed to stay open. The other working families like ours make too much money to qualify, considering a family of 4 has to make \$26,235 or less to qualify according to the ECEAP Income Eligibility limits (110% FPG). That number should be \$45,500 as a family of 4 living on that yearly income has a very tight budget that consists of affording just the basic living expenses mortgage/property taxes/insurance, car payment, car insurance, gas and electric, water bill, food, gas, forget having cable, or extra to put in savings, take a family vacation what is that. We therefore have to rely on my mother, who

“As a new mother, I thought my biggest challenge would be the nighttime feedings... but nothing prepared me for the huge challenge of finding quality daycare.”

Gabriela, Rockville

are the children's great grandmother, who is retired at age 72 to care for the children so me and Tristan's mom can continue to work full time and Rosalie's mom can finish school. Tristan turned 5 in November 2014 and due to the early learning at HeadStart he received the 2 years prior is more than ready for kindergarten but because Maryland State regulations require children to be five years old by September 1 of the school year and early admission request can only be for children who turn 5 between September 2nd and October 15th he

cannot attend this year. More and more with the cost of living going up and up and our salary increases not being commensurate to how high food and utility costs have risen in the last 10 years we cannot afford \$1200 a month for preschool or daycare for them.

Although we are so very blessed and grateful my mom watches them for us and really enjoys doing so, we can't help but to feel guilty that instead of enjoying her golden years and having the freedom to live out her days doing the things she had always planned is now having to make that sacrifice so her great grandchildren can be well cared for and her daughter and granddaughter can go to work each day in order to keep the family's boat afloat. The issue of not having affordable early learning environments available to working families is a crisis in more ways than one.

Gabriela, Rockville

As a new mother, I thought my biggest challenge would be the nighttime feedings. Yes, those first weeks were hard, and I was lucky to have enough paid leave saved up to take 4 months off work (I'm a federal govt employee), but nothing prepared me for the huge challenge of finding quality daycare. After all, the DC metro area has some top-notch universities, hospitals and other "customer care" institutions. I started in my neighborhood in Rockville, MD, scouring the area for in-home daycare providers.

Despite the fact all are licensed and inspected annually, I was shocked to discover some serious issues ranging from safety to hygiene. One provider encouraged her toddlers to ride around on her huge dogs who took up most of the floor space in her small daycare. Another provider had recent hip surgery and wasn't able to lift her children to place them on a changing table, so she told the toddlers to climb to the top of the stairs so she could change their diapers from a few stairs below. As I witnessed these situations during my daycare interviews, all I could think was, "And they charge \$13,000 per year for this?!!".

Sure, caring for an infant is something most parents would pay astronomically high prices for, but for this price I wanted someone special whom my baby would feel comfortable with and whom I could entrust not to send her to the ER. We finally found a lovely lady who genuinely loved children and wasn't just in it for the money (most in-home daycares in my area are licensed up to 8 children and earn significantly more than I do in a year!). I have accepted the price of teaching my baby basic skills and ensuring she doesn't sit in a poopy diaper for hours. But my husband and I are also having lengthy discussions about when we can afford to have a 2nd baby if we are looking at paying for daycare for two children -- or even if we can wait long enough for the first child to reach kindergarten as we may be too old by then.

Julie, Bethesda

It was costing me money to work. Two masters degrees and my starting salary was 40k. Well, daycare was about 20k. Then I had another child and I was paying 40k. Luckily we found a non-profit daycare after a couple of years that "only" cost 30k for both kids. Thanks for letting us deduct 5k of that. That helps a lot. Just kidding. Why the whole thing is not deductible is beyond reason.

Also, I'm lucky and my salary has increased and I had a partner to share the burden. If I hadn't had a partner or a family member to take care of the kids, I guess I would have had to go on welfare. I'm sure that happens to lots of people. How could it not? Surely daycare subsidies would be cheaper than forcing people onto welfare.

MASSACHUSETTS

John, Burlington

Our kids have grown up and moved away, but making sure that younger generations of parents have the same opportunities for their children that we had for ours is still important to us. Our children had a great experience going to pre-K programs - it really gave them a head start on school and on life - and

we hope that some day all the children of this country will be able to have the same kind of experience.

Stephanie, Medford

I am a single mother that works full-time as a social worker. I pay \$1500 a month for my 3.5 year old son to go to a full day Pre-K childcare 4 days a week. His grandmother cares for him 1 day a week. This childcare fee is with a single parent discount and is still far more than I pay for our studio apartment. There is a need for high quality affordable Pre-K childcare. Please help us make that a reality in Medford for the good of the whole community. Thank you!

Jeanne, Boston

All families should have access to quality pre-k programs. You should not need a college degree and a fat checkbook to secure a spot for your child in a safe, quality program. Parents should feel comfort in dropping their child off and joy in picking their child up from school.

Elizabeth, Newton

Our child did not receive early education experiences, as we lived abroad at the time. He has suffered some academically as a result of not getting early services or access to reading and writing tuition, at an appropriate starting age, other than what I taught him myself. We're still trying to catch up a few years later! Early learning and enrichment programs really do make a significant difference!

Jennifer, Newton

I am a single parent who has adopted 2 children from foster care. My work has always been in early childhood and mental health. I strongly support actions that assist families in need. Our future depends on your decisions and your work is appreciated.

Ellen, Groton

Where I live quality, state licensed, child care by a professional trained in early

child development costs \$1000/month, so the cost of two children under the age of 5 (the age of half day kindergarten) is twice that. My take home pay is \$5,000/month as a college professor for a well ranked local university. My mortgage is \$2100.

Everything we can afford above the mortgage comes from my husband's salary. Every study worth reading tells us the kids with a pre-k year of education are far better prepared for schools than their peers and yet we don't fund universal pre-k, because education ultimately in this country is a luxury not a human right. I love my job. It's my calling. But the price of childcare is part of a massively sexist and class coordinated assault on women. Childcare is undervalued and falls unevenly on women. If you want good women in the workforce, you must subsidize childcare. It's part of our social fabric.

Karalyn, Hanover

When I had my first child I did not at all understand the expense and personal anguish that childcare would put me through as a working parent. The thing that makes it so utterly defeating is the fact that I'm not alone. My story and plight was always greeted with a knowing nod as every other mother I spoke to felt the same way and yet no one had answers. The idea of a home/work balance is complete nonsense. Raising small children is a FULL time job period. Not even a 9-5 job, it is a round the clock constant vigilance and worry type of work.

In today's society it is impossible for families to live on 1 income alone. You are very blessed if you somehow saved enough to do so, and then families are left without savings by the time their children enter school. So the only alternative is to put your most precious part of your lives in the care of strangers. I was fortunate enough to have my parents and a trusted few sitters watch my son for his first year after my maternity leave, but then it became too difficult to constantly replace sitters as they would move on to other things in their lives (the pay we were able to offer, not

enough for them to make a career on). Plus the constant need for last minute back up care in case someone was sick or unable to make it in the snow.

I had to turn to a full-time day care center. I interviewed several and decided on the best one and it was The Best in the area - it was bright, friendly, offered my son wonderful enrichment activities throughout the day, socialization with other kids and caring adults, they also provided constant communication with the parents so that I still felt a part of my young son's life. But all of that came with a price. It cost more than our mortgage!! Suddenly as a middle class family just making enough to support ourselves, we were saddled with the equivalent to a 2nd home!! My husband and I laughed at the idea of "discretionary income". Or even saving money for what? college? retirement? HA, double HA. Who could possibly do such things when we were now scraping by like college students again. But what were we to do, pull our son out of the best place for him to be if not home with us.

How can you put a price on your infant's safety and well-being? Especially when they can not speak for themselves and tell you about their day. Our center was also well-known for being good to its employees. Which it absolutely should. Those employees care for the most important part of every family and they did it well. I'm sure in the scheme of jobs and salaries, they probably even deserve more. The problem is that the working families in this country can not afford that bill of care on their own. Just like we have public schools, we need to fund care for our younger children as well.

Suzanne, Auburn

Affordable, quality childcare is paramount to child education and education success. The children are the future leaders, taxpayers and world citizens of the US. As a mother of 2 children under school age, I worry that my children are receiving the quality care they deserve and the educational and social development they need to become well-rounded and informed members of society.

STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT CHILDREN WITH MORE DEVELOPED SOCIAL COMPETENCE SKILLS ARE MORE LIKELY TO LIVE HEALTHIER, SUCCESSFUL LIVES AS ADULTS



<http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2015/07/how-children-social-competence-impacts-their-well-being-in-adulthood.html>

As a researcher, my job prospects are insecure. I live from research contract to research contract and therefore it is not certain I will have enough income to make ends meet - including the cost of daycare. If politicians truly believe in putting families first, then can't we focus on supporting the families that exist now rather than attacking women and abortion clinics? Please pledge to support children and families at all life stages, not just forcing women to have children or making it virtually impossible for lower income, hard working women to have access to life saving health care. The community at large has a responsibility to ensure that all children have every opportunity to succeed and I am including politicians in that community.

Josie, Westborough

Single working professional mom of 2 young children. I do not qualify for low income discounts and I don't make enough to afford child care for both of my children. When the cost of childcare is more than your monthly rent and cost of living expenses combined, there is something seriously wrong with the system and it needs to stop.

MICHIGAN

Lindsay, Royal Oak

I'm thrilled with the preschool my son is in this year. Tommy started in the "Sunshine Club," which is part of the Berkeley Building Blocks preschool program in the Berkley School District. I found this school through the Great Start to Quality website. His class (as well as the 2nd year class called "Ready-K") follow the High Scope Curriculum, which is play-based. I know how important play is at this age for growth and development. And this curriculum works! He has grown and flourished since he started in September 2015. He can spell his name, is starting to write his name and much more. But much more important than the academics at this age, he has grown emotionally and socially by leaps and bounds. I cannot say enough about this program, this school district and this curriculum. Oh and on top of all this, the tuition is very cost-efficient!

Jacqueline, Detroit

In the early 70s when I was teaching at a local community college, a number of students brought their children to

class; I didn't mind but I thought why does this have to be. I discussed this with the Board of Trustees, got a small grant from a local organization and received many donations of children's furniture and other items and began an evening child care center for students. Thus, eliminating one barrier to furthering their education. We need more programs like this one for student parents!

Jillian, Detroit

My husband and I were born and raised in southwest Detroit, where we still reside. Four degrees, 7 years of marriage, and a mortgage later, we had a daughter and found that quality childcare was scarce and expensive. After getting through 3 years with family help and sacrifice, we looked forward to a high quality preschool program, only to find that we could barely afford to pay for it along with all of our student loans and other household bills.

We looked into the head start program (Matrix Vistas Nuevas Head Start) that I once worked for to be told that we would be wait listed because of our income level. Thank goodness that a spit became available, and two years later our daughter was more than ready for kindergarten. Throughout her two years of preschool, our daughter received quality educational experiences that focused on her developing academic, social, and emotional needs, from kind and caring professionals. It was the answer to our prayers and I am sure that so many families could benefit from such programs as these.

Shaughan, Grosse Pointe

As a kindergarten teacher, mother, and early childhood educator, I feel that early childhood education is more important than most people realize. The fact that kindergarten is not mandatory in Michigan is absolutely ridiculous! It is imperative that we find and fund ways to educate our children, in developmentally appropriate ways, to better prepare them for the rigors and expectations of today's world. Anything else does them an injustice.

Jody Ann, Flint

I was born in rural Michigan. And I was fortunate to have Aunt Ilah who is less than ten years older than I am. And she loved to play "school." I was her only student – I was about three. When I entered kindergarten in the village school – K-6 in one room - I could already read and write.

We didn't have Early Education programs then – but I had Aunt Ilah. For children today to have a fair start with education and a comfortable place in the world, there is an essential need for early preparation. Most working families cannot afford special early tutoring – and their children start public schools already a little behind others.

When a mother works a full job, tends house, cooks and cares for the family – it's already bedtime. No time, no energy left for tutoring. And if English is the family's second language, then it's double jeopardy for the kids. Now 75 I'm a devoted reader and often say thank you to Aunt Ilah for her gift to me of the joy of early education.

MINNESOTA

Eric, West Saint Paul

My friend works as a speech therapist helping children whose first language is not English. She observes that services like the one that she offers are very much needed and sought after, but there are long waiting lists.

Children who have to wait in line miss out on the help they need. I teach English as a second language, and formerly I taught German at the college level. Learning to speak a second language takes a lot of work, even for children.

Most children who don't speak English are strongly motivated to learn English, but we need to help them to succeed in school as well as their peers who speak English as a first language. If we fail to help these children, our failure will worsen achievement gaps linked to race and wealth, which reflect our failure to right the wrongs of racial and economic inequality.

Kelly, Circle Pines

I keep hearing about how people struggle to afford college for their children and how we need to find ways to lower or cap the rising costs of college tuition. Parents begin saving for college when their children are very little. Politicians strive to make it more affordable. However, it seems like everyone ignores the high cost of childcare in the early years. There's no assistance for childcare costs for people of middle income - no loans, no grants, nobody warns parents that you may want to start saving for daycare. However, the cost of daycare can cost just as much in a year as a year of college.

I want to share some information on our family situation. My husband and I both work full time and we have our two children (ages 6 and 3) in a day care center. Just in daycare costs alone, we paid an annual amount of \$21,000 in 2010. This past year our oldest daughter started kindergarten, so our costs dropped to \$19,000. However, we now have a third child and I'm currently on maternity leave trying to figure out daycare for when I go back to work. With three children in a daycare center, one of them school-age, the cost is going to go up to about \$27,000 a year. Basically the cost of a year of college. Definitely more than our mortgage each month. Sure there are options. One of us could quit our job and stay home until the kids are all in school.

However, unless one of us made less than approximately \$27,000 a year, it does not seem to justify making the change to remove the daycare expense. Many people also use relatives for their child care, but that just isn't an option for us. Another option is to switch to an in-home daycare, which is typically slightly lower cost than a center. For us, we need one that would take three children, one being a newborn. Finding an in-home daycare with openings for three children, one being a newborn, is next to impossible. It just seems that something should change. One easy fix would be to raise the flex spending limit where we're able to use pre-tax money for daycare. The maximum limit for our

flex spending (cafeteria plan) account is \$5000 a year, which doesn't even come close to covering our child care costs. How long has it been at that limit? I just don't understand why there's so much assistance around getting a college education, and no help for education and care in the early years.

e keep hearing how the first few years of life are so important to a child, yet many parents are forced into situations they know aren't ideal just because they can't afford better care. And how are we supposed to start saving for our child's college education when we struggle to make ends meet to pay for childcare? Something has to change.

Wanda, Wayzata

Both of my children attended Early Childhood and Family Education programs in Buffalo, Minnesota. Those programs taught me how to be a better and more informed parent. I learned what to expect of my children at each developmental stage. I attended parenting classes with other parents and we were able to learn from each other and to encourage each other.

My children had the opportunity to be taught by experts in early childhood education and they had the opportunity to socialize with children of their own age. ECFE is one of the most valuable programs I have observed after living in California and New Jersey. Early childhood education is vital to our children's education. Any stages of learning readiness missed along the way impair a child's learning for life.

MISSISSIPPI

Veronica, Southaven

My little one is almost 15 years old now, but my first grandchild is coming and I remember how difficult it was for me to find a preschool for my son and daughters. This is an important issue - the future generations are in our hands!

Betty Jo, Greenville

I learned the importance of good child care from my mother, Ruth Brent, who

helped to found the first licensed day care in Mississippi. She saw the need and acted, and I have tried to follow in her footsteps. I have been an employee and board member of Washington County Head Start. We are grateful for the Federal dollars that come to our community. Even so, we are not filling the needs of our children, we need more action from elected leaders!

Julieta, Brandon

At the age of 3, my child was declared developmentally delayed by specialists in the school district. As a result, he was accepted into the only preschool program in the area funded by public funds. There are a few other preschools in the county, but are run by area churches that require membership in order to accept children into their programs.

By the time he entered elementary school, my child was at the same level of other kids in his class. At the age of 7, he made into the Venture program for gifted children. My child's is a success story. Without the support of preschool teachers, he would've never made. This program is only opened to a few kids every year. Every child in our state/nation should be given the same opportunity.

MISSOURI

Leah, St. Louis

My husband and I both work full time, and both make enough that one staying home would not make sense. After years of climbing the ladder, we are comfortable (but not safe), if that makes sense. We have the means to pay our bills and put food on the table; but with the rising cost of food and utilities, and student loan payments, we find it difficult to do it all and also save for emergencies (let alone college for our son). For that reason, we are just a major illness away from major ruin.

Affordable and quality childcare is of the essence at this time in history. Please consider those of us that work hard to drive the economy forward, yet still have difficulty securing a future for

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ourselves and our children. We have to choose a lesser quality for our child's daycare, in order to make ends meet. My dream is for all parents to be able to afford quality daycare: so that children will have a strong future academically, and parents will have a strong future financially.

Katie, Rolla

Childcare for my two children was more than my mortgage! Costs for quality care are outrageous and a huge burden for working families.

Rebecca, St. Louis

I am SO lucky to have a wonderful and loving mother-in-law who watches my adorable 1 1/2 yr old daughter while I work full-time and complete my schooling so at some time in the near future I will be able to have a better-paying, more secure, more fulfilling job. My husband is also a real partner in parenting. Without them, I would not be on such a solid path to fulfilling my dreams, and my dreams DO matter, too.

I am grateful for what I have, but what if my MIL is no longer to take care of my daughter? Our arrangement works, but we don't have a real safety net if something would happen to her. I am really quite disgusted with the lack of solutions for affordable childcare in the US, and it needs to change.

Leah Walters, St. Louis

My husband and I both work full time, and both make enough that one staying home would not make sense. After years of climbing the ladder, we are comfortable (but not safe), if that makes sense. We have the means to pay our bills and put food on the table; but with the rising cost of food and utilities, and student loan payments, we find it difficult to do it all and also save for emergencies (let alone college for our son). For that reason, we are just a major illness away from major ruin. Affordable and quality childcare is of the essence. Please consider those of us that work hard to drive the economy forward, yet still have difficulty securing a future for ourselves and our children. We have to choose a lesser quality for our child's daycare, in order to make ends meet. My dream is for all parents to be able to afford quality daycare: so that children will have a strong future academically, and parents will have a strong future financially.

Carol, Milan

My two granddaughters have struggled for years trying to overcome their poverty. They can not afford to go to work or school because of the cost of child care for their preschoolers.

MONTANA

Susan, Bigfork

I do not have children, but my siblings do. I watched my sister raise 3 children on her own. She struggled at times to find childcare for her kids. Luckily she was a hairdresser and could make her own working hours. But, I know couples who both work and when a child gets sick one of them has to take off work to care for that child. If you are a sin-

gle parent, you can lose your job over childcare issues. What's wrong with our country that children are placed last in priority? Our children are our future! Without proper childcare and education for our children our own future is at risk! Our Congress people need to change their priorities and work to find solutions to some of our basic issues. That means they need to start talking to one another!

Frank, Lewistown

I was the Director of Central MT Head-Start for 5 years and saw the incredible difference it made for families to have support with their young children!

Tina, Billings

I am single parent whose daughter is grown now. But when she was little I used the early learning programs. I believe they really helped my child grow and develop. So if the programs are no longer available to others then how can our new generation have a chance to grow and learn with help. They will not have the chance if the programs are cut off.

Rachel, Missoula

I found myself a single parent with two small children back in 1989. I returned to college at the UofM, and got my bachelor's degree in Social Work in 1993. Without Childcare Resources, and the financial assistance I received with childcare, I would have been unable to go to college. Another issue related to this, is that day-care providers are one of the lowest paid segments of employment. It is appalling to me that caring for children has been classified as a low-skill form of employment, and that day-care providers barely make enough to survive. Without state assistance, these important jobs would become even more marginal.

NEBRASKA

Chelsey, Omaha

I have two small children, ages 2 and 4. My husband and I both work in the non-profit sector. We live in an affordable

city, Omaha, Nebraska. We have been trying to find a workable system since we had children. I worked full-time when my first daughter was born. The short-maternity leave and rat-race lifestyle led me to find a part-time night job making a lot less money and not using the Master's degree that I have. But it allowed us to not have to pay for childcare.

When the second child came along I tried to work full-time again. We were paying \$330 a week in childcare. In a month's time we would pay much more in childcare than we did for our mortgage. It was daunting. Now I work 3 days a week. We pay \$180 in childcare a week. Figuring out a daycare for this system was confusing. My older daughter goes to preschool. My younger daughter attends a separate in-home daycare 2 days a week and my mother-in-law watches her 1 day a week. We don't have a lot of extra expenses. We both drive cars from 2004 and 2005 that are paid off. We live in a modest home we bought for \$132,000.

Our lives are simple. Yet, we still struggle with the financial burden of raising our children. Tax breaks for families are so important. We are all trying our best to raise our kids, feed them, keep them safe, and also be a viable part of the economy. However, most of us are using any extra income on childcare costs.

Julie, Norfolk

My son was born healthy, but not so happy. He developed Colic shortly after we were released from the hospital. I am a nurse and I can tell you that nothing prepares you an infant that cries most of the day and night. I spent countless hours at the doctor's office desperate for a solution, but with little success. I would have to wait it out like all the other mothers in the world. I returned back to work at 11 weeks because that is all the institution I worked for would allow. My son continued to cry more than the average infant his age.

My husband and I went through 5 daycare facilities in less than a year because he was more work than they expected or because something happened and

we felt we were unable to trust the facility. It was extremely stressful and caused strain in our marriage and on our parental roles. With the last day-care, we decided I would have to say home with him (although we had no idea how we would afford it) because we couldn't do this any longer.

Finally, we did find a wonderful woman who takes exceptional care of our son and I can continue to work in Nursing. However, I have since changed my area of specialty to working with pregnant women and infants to help them through the struggles of parenthood.

NEVADA

Marguerita, North Las Vegas

I believe the screening and assessment in early childhood learning; are invaluable. In early development, finding issues: might give many children a chance to receive resources necessary to go forward with success in their later learning experiences.

Data shows many times over too many children fall through cracks. No fault of their own. They are just children who wonder why am I different? Why can't I learn like most kids? Give children all the chances to be successful in life. The world becomes a better place!

Samantha, Henderson

Right now, my son is 4 months old. I've been single since I was about 3 months pregnant. The Las Vegas Urban League is such a struggle to deal with. The system is so messed up. I don't believe many daycares around town are affordable AND great for children. I have no job, because I can't afford to pay a sitter and sure can't afford child care at an institution.

All the money I'd make would go straight to them. We need a better system in place. My heart is terribly broken and I feel like a no-good mother being unable to work. My son's father works two jobs but that money doesn't go to my son, so I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place. Please help us out!

STRONG SOCIAL COMPETENCE SKILLS BY THE TIME A CHILD REACHES KINDERGARTEN



INCREASES THEIR LIKELIHOOD OF GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL AND HAVING A FULL-TIME JOB AT THE AGE OF 25

<http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2015/07/how-childrens-social-competence-impacts-their-well-being-in-adu.html>

Shellie, Henderson

Like many mothers around the world, I didn't necessarily WANT to go back to work after my maternity leave ended, but I HAD to. I felt guilty about leaving my little ones, but knowing that they were with kind, caring people, learning new and interesting things in a clean, safe environment made it bearable. My 2 yr old comes home each day with stories about books he's read, things he's done, and friends he's played with.

I truly appreciate all that our child care facility does for my sons (my 3 month old just started) when I can't be there to do it myself. Balancing child care costs is always a struggle. Right now, we are in a stable place, but many families are not. At some point it becomes counter-intuitive to continue working if child care costs exceed your income (after all other necessary expenses: food, mortgage, utilities, etc.) Families are faced with less and less discretionary funds to put back into the economy.

Don't you realize that family/child purchases are probably a LARGE part of the GDP (I know I spend a healthy chunk of change on items for my boys (diapers,

clothes, foods, toys, etc). When costs rise, spending in those areas decreases. If I have to quit my job and stay home to care for my sons (while that would be really nice), my discretionary spending will significantly decrease. Can't you see the bigger picture?

Darcy, Laughlin

I am 37 years old and my little girl is now 17 months old. I am a single MOM raising my daughter alone. My little girl Lilly-anna is my miracle my heart that makes it beat my sun that makes it shine. My story is one I am sure you have heard many times over. I live in Laughlin Nevada but I work in Bullhead City Arizona. My problem is that I just recently moved to Nevada and I cannot get childcare. My little girl is in this wonderful daycare because I am a working MOM that has to work to support us because I don't get child support so it is solely up to me to make ends meet.

When I lived in Arizona the state was helping me out, but now that I live in Nevada they are telling me I am \$78 over the amount of money I make so I don't qualify for there child care program, I

fall in the 70 percentile of parents that don't qualify but if I want to call back in month the state is looking into changing that but currently they don't have enough money for parents who fall into the 70 percentile group.....Are you kidding me we are talking about the state of Nevada you know the one that Las Vegas is located in. The state that has so many tourist coming to spend their money they have to build bigger hotels and casinos...and they are telling me they cannot help me out..I am a hard-working mom that needs a little help I am not a MOM how sits on her butt and just waits for the check to come in. I need some help. Not only is their no childcare located in Laughlin NV but I also have to pay AZ state tax because I work in AZ so that is some more money taken away from me. Somebody needs to help us MOMS out. My little girl goes to a great day care but it cost me \$575 a month to keep her there. How in gods name do I keep paying this. I don't make that much money I make enough to pay rent and child care forget diapers and wippies oh and you wanted us to eat this month good luck.

It is not fair that our legislature is not willing to do more to help us hard working MOMS out. Do they not realize that our little people are our future? That quality childcare and education is what shapes these little minds. I love my daughters daycare the people their take great care of her I can't say enough about the ladies and the staff at her daycare they are wonderful, caring, loving people and I am very lucky to have found a place for my daughter to go that I feel safe and secure leaving her their. But it has come down to do I even bother working if I can't even pay for the daycare. I am american citizen and have paid taxes all my life I have voted since I was 18 years old I have done the right things and got an education I have a job, I just need a little help right now and when you ask for it they make you feel like you're nothing and why did I bother wasting my time.

Remember the little people you are denying...Remember the future you are denying....Our legislature our States need to pay more attention to the Won-

derful hard working MOMS out there and less time thinking of ways to ripe us off and take our money. Maybe becoming a MOM later in life opened up my eyes and understanding how great my own MOM is..I think growing up we take advantage and don't appreciate all the things MOMS do, but now I understand the MOMMY role and I will do anything to see that my daughter gets the best care and development possible even if that means I have to work two jobs to afford her daycare it is worth it because the development and the learning she gets by being around other children is something she can only get by being in daycare. I just hope the state of Nevada can find some money laying on the floor and help us MOMS out. We are trying to make it and along the way make our little ones Great Well Respected American Citizens that have something to give back to this country. They need to help us out just like we need to Support them in the decisions they make.

So take a moment and remember your childhood and how you weren't denied the simple things in life don't deny and turn your backs on our little ones future because they want a chance to make it just like you had. Thank you for your time. I hope this helps out in the fight for ALL GREAT MOMS AROUND THE COUNTRY!

NEW HAMPHIRE

Suzanne, Claremont

I teach French in Vermont, and my husband is from France. Since I have a master's degree, we decided that he would stay at home when we got pregnant. That's what happened - he has been at home full-time with our daughter for the past two years, since any income he would be able to earn would be significantly less than what we would have to pay for child care.

But this means that my income is the only one we have - and I have just been told by my principal that my job is being eliminated due to district budget cuts. So we risk losing everything we have, due to the high cost that child care would take from our family.

Susan, Nashua

My daughter-in-law and my son are planning a baby. They both work, and checked the prices on child care in Hingham, Mass., where they plan to live. The child care expense for one infant for a month is nearly \$2300.

This is a travesty. They may not be able to afford a baby until they are 35 years old, and they are already 29 and 30 years old. When my son was an infant in Jacksonville Florida, in 1985, the child care was \$45. a week, which was about \$200. a month. What has happened to this country that we don't recognize the burden on our young people trying to locate affordable child care for their children?

Glenn, Hanover

I'm a parent of 3 children. All of our kids utilized preschools from the time they were toddlers right up to kindergarten. A number of my colleagues are single moms and they use day care and preschools to be able to keep working full time to support themselves and their families, to enhance their children's early learning and school preparedness, and to give their children the advantage of early education that will make them more informed and productive citizens of this great nation of ours. D

ay care and preschool programs become harder and harder to find, let alone ones that are affordable and convenient to home and/or work. Our nation's young children do not all share the advantage of good day care and preschools that my kids had. My wife and I consider ourselves very fortunate to have found excellent programs that helped our kids' early development. Not all these programs were affordable, but we managed to get by. My wife formed a babysitting cooperative to assist parents in childcare that did not involve cash payment. We and many others found this plan extremely helpful, but such ventures require an investment of time that some parents do not have. Many of my colleagues loved the idea of the co-op, but as single parents, they found it very difficult to take on the added responsibility of contributing

their own time to caring for other's kids. Also, the kind of regular/daily child care they needed was more than the co-op could provide.

Some people use family members, friends, or neighbors to meet their child care needs, but they also must have a backup plan, as the individuals caring for these kids also have doctor's appointments, sick days, and many other reasons to need time of their own when they can't maintain daily child care services. Organized programs have employees and are able to cover for times when an employee needs to be away from work, when an individual provider of day care cannot.

Please consider the investment in our future via the early education these children receive, the work ethic they get from a hard working parent who supports their family, and the jobs saved – the parents' jobs and the day care/preschool workers' jobs.

Alice, Lancaster

As a grandmother and step-grandmother of twenty-one children from eleven families, I can tell you that appropriate day care is already expensive and difficult to find. In the current economy it is necessary for even well educated and well employed parents both to be working. If one should lose a job, benefits, mortgage payments, etc. are jeopardized and another family falls into poverty with all the negative impacts that creates.

The data show that such situations result in long term damage to the health and welfare of parents and children alike unless the young children can be properly nurtured in a suitable day care setting. It is the only safety net left for too many families already.

Cheryl, Franklin

I have never had to put my children in daycare because I have worked as a home daycare provider for over 20 years. In the past few years, I have seen many parents struggle with being able to afford daycare for their children. I

have lost several families due to a parent losing a job due to layoffs. I have done free daycare for people who needed to go to job interviews and couldn't afford to pay.

I do not take a paid vacation because it would create hardship for many of my daycare families to have to pay for me to take two weeks off while having to pay another sitter while I am gone. I also do not take paid sick days for the same reason. In my town, over the past few years, several local daycares have closed so good, affordable daycare is becoming harder and harder to find.

I have a Bachelor's degree in Child & Family Studies and also keep up with the latest childcare/child rearing topics so I can do the best possible job for the children I care for. I love my job and I truly love the children I care for but it is one of the most underpaid professions in this country.

NEW JERSEY

Yolanda, Jersey City

Kreative Kids Family Childcare is an accredited program with a small group of 5 children. We provide high quality childcare, promote healthy eating with cooking 101 and a fitness program that also promote daily physical activities. Our main goal is to give the children a rewarding experience with lots of love that entails social emotional development, language, cognitive and motor skills.

We also include the community into lesson plan and activities (library, Liberty science center, local police and fire departments) Come visit us!

Jehanara, New Milford

I have a son who is 26 months and currently in full time day care. I was shocked to see the cost of child care and the fact that for some centers a full day is 9-3 and an extended day (for a much higher rate) is from 7 -6.30. How are parents who work full time supposed to afford quality child care? Ever since he has started day care I am constantly looking to cut back on other things to

afford these additional expenses.

All politicians seem to be big on family and we are constantly bombarded by images of them surrounded by their doting family members and when it comes down to it, I do not see a lot of focus on issues like affordable child care, child care credits or paid family leave or a shift in how the corporate world views working mothers and the latent discrimination that seems to lurk under the surface once a woman has a baby and joins the workforce. We NEED our elected representatives to stand up for women on issues that truly matter to women.

Elizabeth, Hoboken

I taught my entire adult life and as a young widowed mother early childcare and education were invaluable to me and my young son. Our city needs to provide early education for all of its children!

Sheila, Willingboro

Five of my nine children went to Pre-K in Willingboro, NJ. They have now graduated high school and gone on to college and it all started from that early education.

Anne, Holmdel

I paid for my granddaughter's child care until her parents were able to pick it up. Too many don't have the resources and jobs we have, but their children deserve care and educations also. Please see that they have them.

Nancy, Cedar Grove

When left as a single parent when my baby was a year old, it was a blessing for me when I found a center in Little Falls New Jersey that took in my child and kept her for me from 7:30 am to 6:00 PM. It was not a good feeling to know that I had to leave my child behind with strangers all day when I returned to work after being home for a year with my baby.

But I learned that the center had caring

and wonderful teachers that my daughter grew to love and she was always very happy to sing to me songs she had learned at the daycare and the work of arts she created. Of course her learning progress of numbers, letters and ability to get along with all the other children was a great benefit for my child. If it was not for that day care center, I would have not been able to work and support my family which at the time I had a teenage daughter as well the baby.

Jamie, Hawthorne

I received partial government funding to place my son in daycare so I can work, however the only places I could afford (to pay the remaining balance) were trashy with staff who just “baby sat” the children.

Thankfully I found a church daycare who did wonders with my ADHD son. However I didn’t find them until my son was 3 1/2 which was already a little late to break his bad habits. It is extremely crucial to have affordable and competent child care centers, owners and workers.

Alice, Ringoes

I am self employed and had a lot of problems finding decent child care for my son. My mother stepped in to help. The situation remains the same for many mothers even with two incomes! When my daughter was born we had two incomes and still finding decent child care was a problem and it was very expensive with two incomes.

My mother stepped in again. This should not be the case. Single moms need help. At one point I found myself in a single mom position and now again. Many single and married mothers do not have a mom to help and do not have the income to get good child care and support the family.

Kathleen, Robbinsville

In my area, affordable childcare does not exist. There is expensive childcare that is not high quality, and there is high quality childcare that is not affordable.

I have been working as a teacher, and I quickly learned that the teachers I work with have family members who take care of their children. I imagine this is the only way they can “afford” high quality childcare. It’s an ideal situation, too. Unfortunately, my husband and I don’t live near our family, so we faced a difficult decision.

We’re both educators, and we make a modest living. We examined our budget and determined that we could both take on extra roles and responsibilities at our schools (and have less time at home) so that we could place our newborn daughter in a high quality childcare situation, or I would have to resign from my job and we would need to tighten our budget severely. We couldn’t imagine losing anymore time away from our little girl than the demanding hours we already spend at our schools, so I resigned from my job as a teacher last week. I will miss my students and fellow staff greatly, and I know they will miss me--staff has told me and students emailed me while I was on leave to tell me how excited they were to have me as their teacher this fall. It’s going to be very difficult for us to survive on one income, especially a public educator’s income. We’re terrified. Unfortunately, we didn’t have a choice in the end. We didn’t want to be absent from our daughter’s life and all the unique and exciting moments she will experience each day.

Hopefully, our country recognizes soon that in order to be a strong and healthy nation, we have to support our families, all families regardless of their socioeconomic standing. I am a different person after going through pregnancy, labor, and postpartum/maternity leave, and my eyes have been opened to the dangerous lack of support mothers and children receive from our government. The current system is not only unsustainable if we intend on growing and developing the minds and hearts of our citizens, creative and innovative industries, and solutions to the daunting challenges we face, the current system is destructive. It hurts mothers, it hurts fathers, it hurts children, it hurts families, it hurts communities, and it

hurts our country. It’s a pain we all feel in some facet even if we don’t recognize the source.

Establishing high quality care for all children is one step towards alleviating the ill. A humane society takes excellent care of its young and reaps endless rewards as a result, an improved quality of life, greater happiness, what we all seek in order to have fulfilling lives. Policies like this serve everyone’s best interest.

Joanne, Westmont

As a former pre-school teacher, I can attest to the fact that these children need a basis education to prepare them for what’s to come. Please don’t forget these children.

NEW MEXICO

Myron, Corrales

Raising twins from age 2 and the child care costs have been out of control. I can’t imagine what some that make a lot less than me have to do to make ends meet. I am a bit more fortunate but still it has been very expensive.

Mary Ann, Albuquerque

I began working with young children when I was 14. I got a BA and MS in early childhood education, falling in love with a newly developing field, working with young children and their families. Because the field paid (and still pays) so poorly I always had a least 2 jobs. I had a tiny pension and no savings when I lost my job in 2009. I lost everything - my house, my job, my car. Luckily I had a partner who took me in and supported me while I went through the process of applying for disability.

Now I live on disability and a small income from teaching at the community college. I love teaching future early childhood teachers, but I always warn them - its a career for those passionate about young children and not trying to get rich. I have no regrets about my career choice but it does seem a high price to pay. I’ll never be able to retire so it’s great I love teaching still.

Jennifer, Las Cruces, NM

If being a mother isn't hard enough. I was a single mother twenty years ago with very little help from my ex-husband. I grew up in a family of six children and my mother was a single mother. The help of our family is what we required in order to make it. I remember going days without even seeing my mother, since she was always working. As mother of course we always want the best for our children. The best child care the best teachers and the best we can provide.

I believe working hard and juggling ten balls in the air at all time is hard enough for mothers and anything that can reduce that stress that mothers have to deal with on a daily basis by all means should be second nature. Please help with the high stress of raising a family. The children deserve it!



Shannon, Albuquerque

I am a single mother who must go through CYFD in my state to afford child-care. I do not get support from my ex-husband for child care so without state assistance I would not have childcare.

Allyson, Albuquerque

A few years ago, 10 actually, I was a full time student and working to support my family. Yes, I am a single parent. If I had not had the option of day care things could have been much different.

I now have a full time job and have completed school. The economy makes it tough but it would have been worse if I did not have a college degree under my belt. The outcome of this will make a difference to the children and their parents.

Melyssa, Rio Rancho

I have found it near impossible to find a reputable child care establishment. I have tried the child development center at the air force base. My then two year old told me his teacher hit him. I know my son he does not make things

up. Then I had him at another facility near to my work. It was a little cheaper and the facility boasted 23 years in business. Then it became clear she had also started abusing my now 3 year old. Left with no childcare I scrambled to find something affordable. The only option I had was la petite academy but I cannot afford them.

So now I have to rely on my own family who are unreliable and I do not feel comfortable with their childcare methods. Now I am not sure if I can work because I cannot afford the childcare. I worry about my son both with my family and with the day care. And with my student loans and other bills I need to work and cannot qualify for any help.

Jacqueline, Rio Rancho

I was paying up to \$300/wk! So I quit my job and stayed home with the kids because I was working for daycare :(It's very sad because my kids are very social and their only 3yrs old & 1yrs old. My 3yr old was very upset with me because she couldn't see her friend everyday. We need to do something about these prices!

NEW YORK

Susan, New York

I am the mother of two high school students who both benefitted immensely from pre-K education. We did not have access to public pre-K in our neighborhood, but were fortunate to be able to pay for a private pre-K program. I am very glad that we did, because pre-K turned out to be critical in diagnosing some learning and neurological challenges my son had and getting him onto the right path in a special education setting.

He is about to start college in a strong engineering program at a good university, and I know that without the head start pre-K gave him, and us, in finding the right education setting for him we would not be where we are today. For every family like ours, there are probably four or five others that are not able to avail themselves of quality early education for their kids.

Lack of access to affordable pre-K education puts kids at a disadvantage both in terms of a foundation for learning, and also discovery of any learning chal-

lenges that may need to be addressed early on to best support their academic success. It shouldn't be available only to those who can afford a private program.

James, New York

I work in the early education world and continue to be disturbed by how willing local governments are to underfund important programs. You can't attract skilled teachers if the local public schools pay substantially more in compensation and provide more vacation time and better benefits.

Christine, Bronx

I don't know what I would have done both, financially and quality day care/socialization & academic enrichment if it wasn't for the universal pre-k program at our local Y. So grateful for it to this day, and I don't know what parents do in areas that don't have a great family support system. I knew my child was safe, happy and learning while I was at work. My spouse and I can in no way afford to not be working - we must work to pay for basics.

Alexis, Ithaca

Try getting any information about Pre-K from the Ithaca City School District! They share nothing about how it is administered or who is lucky enough to get a spot. You just send in your application and keep your fingers crossed. If you don't qualify for "Universal Pre-K at the public school" you can look for private daycare. The only full time options we could find would cost our family over 15% of our annual income per child. So, there are less expensive "programs" that provide 3 hours of care and aren't called PreK because, apparently there are huge bureaucratic hurdles if you go for more than 3 hours. We cobble together a schedule where two parents split up the days, and we rely on grandparents to do pickups or dropoffs and we still struggle to pay the bills.

This only works for us because we are relatively privileged to have a two-par-



68 PERCENT OF MOMS WITH KIDS UNDER THE AGE OF SIX ARE IN THE WORKFORCE

Population Reference Bureau, 2012.

ent family, one parent can work part time, the other has a flexible salaried position, we have extended family to help, and we are still losing our minds trying to keep it together. It's amazing to me that a city like Ithaca, that identifies itself as so progressive, can't provide quality early childhood education to more of its families. They call it "Universal Pre-K" but I always feel the need to put quotes around that because it's not universal by any stretch of the imagination.

Christina, Mechanicville

While my husband and I fully appreciate the reasons why childcare is so expensive -- i.e. reasonable pay for caregivers, rising food and utility costs, etc. -- we are frustrated by the fact that our childcare costs are higher than our mortgage and car payments COMBINED! It only adds insult to injury when we file our taxes every year and are unable to claim more than \$3000 per child when we actually pay over \$15,000 for two children. (Let alone the fact you only get a percentage of that \$3000 per child when they calculate your refund.)

Luckily, we make enough money that we are able to afford a good daycare

center for our daughter and a good before/after care program for our school-aged son. Still, I can't help but look forward to a time when I don't sacrifice about half of my paycheck to ensure that my children have quality childcare!

Marie, Bronx

I really have no childcare. We were able, through a split schedule, to provide for our children's care at home. (We didn't see a lot of each other in those early years, but as the children grew, this situation improved.) However, I recall one evening student who, after the break, said she had to go right home: she had left her two younger children in the care of their big sister (age 9) and the girl put the casserole for their dinner on the burner instead of in the oven. I was appalled that this was the only way the student could get the education she needed and wanted!

Joyce, Greenlawn

I'm a retired Art Teacher K-12, Nursery School Teacher, Pre-school Teacher, Elementary school PTA Volunteer. I've seen too few quality care for young children. Many day-care and pre-schools

have too few teachers. All children need to run and jump and crawl. I've seen them sitting in high chairs watching T.V., being pushed around in multi-child strollers. They need to sing and dance and interact with their peers and older people. They need grass to roll and walk on.

NORTH CAROLINA

Margaret, Charlotte

My daughter works online remotely for her Federal job. When the 1 yr. old or the 3 yr. old is sick, I drive over (we live about 15 blocks from their home) to take care of them, play with them, feed them, take them for walks, and rest when they rest while my daughter keeps typing and phoning and skyping away upstairs, away from the kids.

If she gets sick, I take the kids to their high quality preschool (just 5 blocks away). My husband and I moved to Charlotte after we retired and sold our house in Raleigh so that we could be close enough to help with childcare since we remember how hard it is with very young children to work and have time to help your children grow and learn.

Jeannine, Durham

I am a college educated, married mother of two. I suppose we are considered working middle class. However for the past nine years childcare has cost more than our mortgage. We have coped with multiple layoffs over the past decade and childcare costs were a huge burden. But because we believe quality care was so important to a good start for our children we were able to make some sacrifices to make that investment.

Both of our children are at or above their grade level in elementary school now. I do not believe they would be where they are without the high quality childcare available to them. I see their classmates coming to school completely unprepared and already years behind. I believe all children in Durham deserve an opportunity to learn

and play and be their best when they come to school. I can't imagine how a low income family could afford this. And I know that the wait list for childcare subsidy are thousands of people long. This needs to change.

"I want nothing more than to have a second child, but in a two income household, we can barely afford quality childcare for one."

Jaime, Durham

Emily, Durham

Gavin was an exceptionally happy baby. We could take him anywhere and he would keep himself occupied. He put himself to sleep at night and stayed asleep all night. In no uncertain terms, he was a perfect baby. I decided to stay at home with him when he was about 18 months old since my husband had gotten a great job and we felt comfortable and had built up a respectable savings account. Right before his 2nd birthday, I discovered that I was pregnant and we were overjoyed!

At the same time, I noticed that Gavin wasn't speaking very much and started to have some epic tantrums that I had difficulty calming him down from. I wrote it off as being able to "feel" that I was distracted with the pregnancy and figured he would bounce back. 2 months later, my husband lost his job and Gavin's speech was getting worse. Now we were both not working and all of us were uninsured. Quite the dif-

ference from when I decided to stay at home. I was desperately looking for resources and how to get help for Gavin given our financial circumstance. The last thing I wanted was for him to suffer because we were broke.

That's when I found the CDSA. Every single person there was caring and understanding. They took all my concerns seriously. Gavin was assessed and started receiving speech services very quickly. When I showed concern about his hearing, they helped me get that checked out. Charlene Brown was more than a case worker. When it was time to transition out of the program, she gave me all my options and talked them over with me as many times as I needed to. When I declined the public school transition option, she supported me. When I called her and told her that I needed public schools and that he wasn't able to be in private pre-k, she was kind and even came to the IEP meeting with me. She held my hand when they told me that Gavin had Autism. She asked the questions that I couldn't bear to ask. I don't know how I would have found my way without the Durham CDSA.

I don't know where Gavin would be without the early intervention services he received. I certainly would not have been able to get him that assistance without the CDSA. Please please don't cut this wonderful program. It would be a huge disservice to the thousands of children that need help.

Jaime, Durham

I want nothing more than to have a second child, but in a two income household, we can barely afford quality childcare for one. I want to be responsible and be able to pay my bills. So I've accepted the fact that I have to wait until the first one is in public school to try for another child, at which point we'll both be well into our 40s. So fingers crossed.

Jasmine, Raleigh

As a K-2 Literacy Coach I see hundreds of kindergarten students arrive each year ill-prepared for the rigor of our standards. The students who have been

fortunate enough to have pre-k experience start out stronger and END stronger each year. Not all families can afford to send children to pre-k. The academic gap we see from kids from low-socio-economic backgrounds begins there. We could prevent failure in the later years and prevent stress on families and teachers as we grow a more healthy and educated population of citizens. DO IT!

Angela, Hillsborough

While raising children in Hillsborough, NC it was very difficult to find quality childcare that we could afford. The most viable options were church-based daycares who took on child care as a mission. Unfortunately, all of those day care centers have closed and are not an option presently. Hillsborough must invest in quality/affordable childcare because it is imperative for the safety and welfare of our children. Transporting children long distances puts them at risk. Parents already have the pressure of getting to work early and need to have local childcare to accommodate safety and welfare.

Kassidy, Boone

Looking for childcare is a very hard, but necessary task. No one can raise your child better than you. Therefore, you have to look for the safest, cleanest, and most educational place. It is very difficult to find many places that fit this description. Once you find the right fit for your child, you cannot afford it.

With a dual income family of 4, you wouldn't consider childcare a large financial burden, but I personally pay almost \$800/month. That is for only one 2 year old in full time Pre-K and one 9 year old for afterschool childcare. That is more than my house payment! It is very difficult to be a working mother and have half of your income go just towards daycare.

Rich, Concord

I remember that not too long ago we had to sacrifice certain things such as medicine or food to pay for a quality

daycare for our children. This was always a tough decision, because what do we cut this month to pay for the daycare. We were I guess lucky enough to get accepted in the state run program that helped pay most of our childcare, because now we could put our children in a really good daycare that took care of our children as good as us if not better than we did. Since this time I have become disabled and am able to be a stay at home dad, but I have not forgotten what it was like to struggle with this issue.

I will stand up and fight against anyone that says our children are expendable. I am sorry my children are not expendable and neither are the children of all the working class people. If they are screaming now about the spending for these programs, how much more will they scream when we all go on unemployment and other benefits, because we need to take care of our children, so do not cut the funding for these programs.

Sarah, Garner

No one ever tells you that full time childcare for two children will cost more than your mortgage. My oldest will be starting kindergarten in the fall and my husband and I are starting to breathe a little easier knowing that the end of paying daycare tuition for at least one child is in sight. We were able to manage these past five years without one of us leaving our jobs.

However, I've had several talented colleagues who compared the cost of daycare to what they would take home in their pay, and decided to leave the workforce. Parenthood is challenging enough without the financial pressures that having quality care entails.

Leslie, Asheville

I can not begin to explain the importance of high quality child care for NC moms! I was a single mother when I had my son. I had no help, a high school diploma and a not so great job. The center where my son attended (Verner) was the only way I could feel secure enough

to leave him for any amount of time. Not only did they care for my son, they pressed me to go further by showing me that my education affected my sons as well.

Fast forward to today (8 years later) and I am 3 months away from a Masters in Social Work and my LCSW. Having affordable, high quality, child care was the only way I was able to take myself from a fast food worker to a social worker.

Sandra, Wilmington

I was a single working mom, a teacher. I had to have quality infant care, childcare, preschool, after school care, and summer childcare (since I had to work summers and weekends to make ends meet). As a teacher, my income was considered below the median income and I needed affordable care. I qualified for the Child Development Centers reduced fees but it was still hard. I had to search, plead, take long bus rides around the city and rely on family and friends at every turn. Without affordable infant and preschool care I would not have made it.

Tina, Apex

Quality childcare in our area is expensive. Finding childcare for our twins that was not going to be more than or rent was difficult. I was shocked to find that many places would not even offer a sibling discount. We finally found a place that was willing to work with us. Access to early learning programs is critical and all parents should be able to go into work, knowing that their child is an environment that will enrich their lives and help them put their best foot forward. Access to high quality affordable childcare should be a the norm and never the exception.

Leslie, Morganton

I have taught kindergarten and first grade and after I retired I worked under the CDSA teaching children birth to 3 with developmental delays for 3 years. I presently tutor English as a second language students. Children who are able

to receive good preschool are more ready for kindergarten learning than those who do not. I once got a transfer kindergarten student after Christmas who when asked what color a green swatch was said, "The color of a frog." needless to say we had to work one on one every extra minute we could find to move this child ahead.

Children who have had good preschool do not come in with such a huge lack of knowledge. People say the bump preschool gives disappears. the problem in 3rd and 4th grade is that vocabulary kicks in. We need to figure out a fast way to bump up vocabulary for English as a second language students and children in poverty. But leaving out preschool surely makes things worse.

Sarah, Morrisville

As a family with 2 parents working outside the home, having high-quality, trustworthy childcare for our son has been crucial to our family's ability to earn a living, pay our bills, and contribute to the economy.

We are fortunate to be able to afford education for our toddler that will start him on the path to being a productive, educated, successful citizen, and I believe every family should have this opportunity, regardless of income level. Our society's future depends on our ability to provide quality care that is accessible to ALL children.

Cathy, Durham

Right now, I work full-time and my husband is a full-time student. The only reason he's in school and not a stay-at-home dad is because my awesome parents provide childcare during the day when I'm at work and he's in class. There's no way we could afford it otherwise. When they are sick or out of town, I have to take off work to be with the kids. This past year, we put my oldest son in a part-time preschool from 9-12 3 days a week. It's \$245 a month. We already run at a 'deficit' with our monthly expenses vs income, so this is just something else to get juggled around in the financial shell game. We applied for

the lottery to see if he can get in a free pre-k program next year.

Traditionally, about 20 of the 700+ applicants are accepted, since there are only 2 programs in the whole town and we're not in walking range. But his preschool teacher tells us that he's probably not ready (maybe something to do with just starting organized school type activities this year). So even if we literally win the lottery, we'll probably have to decline it and have him spend one more year in the part-time preschool before trying again. It sucks. And we're the lucky ones because we have help. There needs to be a better way.

"I was shocked to find that daycare was more expensive than law school! There is no way my family could afford to pay for childcare and law school simultaneously. Childcare should never cost as much as law school."

Kim, Durham

Malea, Wake Forest

My 3 year old son is in a high quality preschool and we are so grateful. It hasn't come without a price though. When we found out our health insurance was increasing by over 30%, I seriously questioned if we would be able to afford to keep him in preschool. We decided that

we had to make whatever adjustments we could to our monthly budget to make preschool a priority. (That means I depend on his school giving him a quality experience because we cannot afford to many other activities that we have to pay for.)

I remember the first time he sang a song that he had learned at school and it was such an amazing experience. Up until that point, I had the fortunate experience to have flexibility with my work schedule and he had been with me most of the time. His father and I were his only teachers and had taught him all he knew. To see him sing a song and do the movements along with it was unforgettable. I took a moment and thought WOW, he's learning! Look! I am so thankful for our preschool and his amazing teacher. He often asks about her on days he is not at school and looks forward to going.

I know this is laying the foundation for him to enjoy going to school when it is time for him to start Kindergarten. All families should have access to high quality, affordable preschool.

Kim, Durham

I was thrilled to start law school this past August at a state school in the area. I was working full time, had a 13 month old, and would be going to class three nights a week. I was stressed about juggling it all and was given a wonderful opportunity to care for a friend's baby and stay home with my daughter. The money I made by watching my friend's baby plus the money we were saving by not paying for childcare was equal to my full time salary. Then we had to start paying for school.

I was shocked to find that daycare was more expensive than law school! There is no way my family could afford to pay for childcare and law school simultaneously. Childcare should never cost as much as law school.

Emma, Asheville

I am a single grandma who is raising two granddaughters ages 5&6. I depend

on childcare subsidies to be able to work and provide for my girls. My oldest is special needs. Losing my childcare subsidies would put my family in danger of falling below the poverty line and would seriously affect our living situation. I did not birth these children and this was an unexpected role change at a time of my life where I should be preparing to retire.

Sarah, Asheville

Today is the last day of my childcare subsidy for my two preschool children. I found out 8 days ago that I would lose their subsidy, because I am now \$48 over the new income guidelines. I am a single mom, my kids' dad lives in Florida, I have never received child support. I have a master's degree and a professional job. Leaving my job is not an option for me. Cutting the income guidelines for subsidy hurts working families. That \$48 too much I make is costing me \$729 per month until my daughter starts kindergarten.

I thought I was doing pretty well scraping by and raising my kids on my own. I'm pursuing a second master's degree- hopefully leading me to a higher paying job. I'm not lazy; I have lived through the toughest of times and bounced back. I am not looking for a handout. Nor am I looking to get the wind knocked out of me, like it was 8 days ago.

Maritza, Hampstead

As a single mother, having dependable and affordable childcare is very important to me. I work full-time so childcare is a must for me, when I found out my voucher was terminated I didn't know what to do. If it wasn't for my sons after school program working with my income so I could afford to keep him in after school, he would have had to go home alone until I got home from work.

Sarah, Garner

I'm sure my story is similar to many other families'. Right now what my family pays toward childcare is greater than what we pay toward our mortgage each

month. We are incredibly fortunate to be able to afford quality childcare, but for many families we know, it is an incredible struggle to be able to find and pay for quality childcare. With the way the economy is, nobody should have to consider giving up a job because they can't afford to pay for quality childcare.

NORTH DAKOTA

Kristy, Mcleansville

I am an Early Childhood professional in Guilford County. Due to inadequate compensation, I cannot afford to send my two year old to school. This is extremely difficult for me since I provide high quality care to other families' children everyday. My child deserves high quality care as well. Please support Early Care so that teachers can afford to continue the work they do while also providing for their own families.

Jennifer, Wahpeton

My husband and I have a 9 month old son. We both work full time, plus my husband also farms part time with his father. We are having a hard time finding quality, affordable daycare, so my mother watches our son 3 days aweek and a friend of ours watches him the other 2 days. My mother doesn't charge us anything, our friend's rate is pretty reasonable.

We have been very fortunate to have this arrangement so far, but we will have to put our son in daycare soon, as my mother will not be able to watch him for much longer. I would prefer to stay at home with my son, but we cannot afford that either. I wish we had some better options. Part time options would be the best. I know there are many out there with no options.

OHIO

Christina, Columbus

I am a mother, a social worker, and a wife. When our son was young, childcare was very costly for us. We struggled each month to pay our provider and worried at times how we would pay the mortgage. We loved our son's pre-

school but we're only able to pay for it with a scholarship and support from my parents.

My husband and I had jobs and worked 40 hours a week and still we struggled to provide what our son needed in terms of care. It shouldn't be this way in America. Please do all you can to help. Thank you.

Monique, Wickliffe

When I first started looking for preschool for my son, I was in Los Angeles and it was very intimidating as most parents seemed to have put their child on a waiting list when their child was in the womb. It also was more than my share of my rent for any decent program I found. I then moved back to Ohio and still wonder how most can afford it. It's more than I make monthly. I tried applying for subsidized childcare but found that difficult to manage for I had to work the same hours my child was in the program.

It was not easy with my qualifications gaining emolument during those hours for most jobs I could possibly get were nights and weekends (retail and food service). So now I am back to the drawing board. That son is older now but I have a toddler whom I wish to get in a toddler program.

I first do not know the best way to find a good toddler program and two, am up against trying to find work to meet the eligibility requirements of Job and Family Services. I value education highly and only wish for my son to be exposed to an enlightening environment such as a toddler program to allow him better transition into preschool and those foundational learning steps travel with him, or propel him, to college.

If only there early learning centers could be more affordable and for there to be easier access to lower income folks such as myself to enable my bright little mind, along with all other early learners, to flourish and thrive through their scholarly journey. Please consider helping our youngest be the stars of the future.

Judy, Columbus

Preschool - Pre-K helped all 3 of my children to sit, listen and learn in kindergarten! They learned about the joy of learning and were hungry for more! These programs helped them in their social skills which is another important part of learning! Because of these programs they are and were not afraid to speak with teachers and professors as they grew! They had the confidence and strength to go after what is important! Thank you!

Eva, Solon

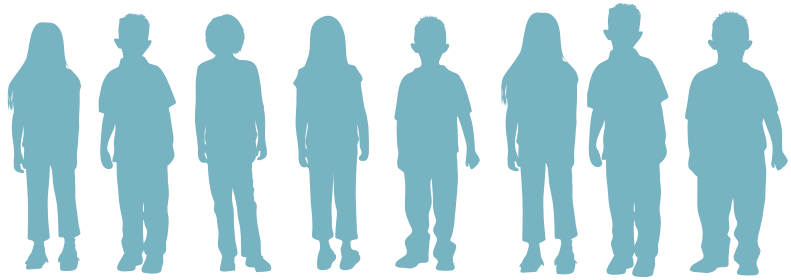
From early childhood research we know language skills are already concrete by age 3 and closes by age 5. My son learned math to time tables of 7 and how to read by age 4 in Montessori school. This head start helped him excel in school.

My daughter benefited from preschool which helped with her delayed speech and reading. Both are now successful university graduates and in careers. We also had tutors, lessons, sports and intervention inside and outside of school. All children should be afforded early learning opportunities. I know our country has been trying to institute this since 1963 under President Johnson! It's about time; we're falling behind educationally.

Sandra, Akron

I was a stay at home married mom who did not know the benefits of early learning for children. My child's first experience with learning outside of our home was public kindergarten. His lack of preparation put him in a position not to be successful. The frustration he and I both felt was unnecessary and preventable.

No child should have to start school failing kindergarten. He did and it set the tone for his 12 grades of education. We feel that if we had known and taken early learning he would have had a healthy start that would have motivated him to love learning and pursue it even when challenged.



MULTILINGUAL EXPOSURE HAS BEEN SHOWN TO IMPROVE A CHILD'S COGNITIVE SKILLS AND SOCIAL ABILITIES

<http://pss.sagepub.com/content/26/7/1090>

Since this happened to us I want to help others avoid it. Also, I know that many of the learning disabilities that children have can be detected in early learning sittings and children can enter kindergarten with a plan to succeed.

Monique, Wicliffe

To be honest, it's hard for me to find a decent enough job to cover or justify the costs of childcare because it is that expensive so I opt to take care of my children myself. If childcare was more reasonable, I could be a more productive member of the workforce and make more to support my children and not have to rely on assistance, but given the costs of childcare, I may make a dollar or two more than I spend on it if I were to get a job in which I'm qualified. So please help us with this issue. The children really ARE our future.

Sunme, Loveland

I could not find quality childcare or work part-time so I stayed home for 8 years and lost pay+benefits. After all this I got divorced and that's when I re-

alized how much I had really lost. We need jobs for mothers - flexible, part-time (if needed), professional part-time jobs and more options. I really want to raise my kids with my values and would like to see more part-time jobs that pay decent wages commensurate with expertise.

OKLAHOMA

Magaritte, Tulsa

I became pregnant with my first child as a senior in college. After graduating and having a small baby I could not find work that paid enough for putting my baby in childcare. It would have cost more for me to have her in childcare then to work. The first year I stayed home with her while we lived on a very meager budget. My husband is a social worker and did not make a big salary. We were in debt every month. We are still struggling to not be in debt. It seems like having kids and being in debt go hand in hand. When she was 2 I was finally able to find work in my teaching artist field that I could then afford to have her in childcare. The situation was far from ideal, she was in a rural day care center

where I tried to minimize how often she was there. She went in the afternoons only when I was teaching. I then found an in home care that could take her on an as needed basis. Finding childcare while working part time in the arts was a full time job. With our second child I now have a job that is letting me be very flexible with my hours so I can have her in a mother's day out program.

We would not be able to afford a regular day care on my salary. Finding affordable, good, reliable care has been one of the hardest burdens on me becoming a parent. I see so many friends joining in the opting out movement and it saddens me. I want to be able to support my family & with the current situation I barely can.

I see many moms in my community that would benefit from having work outside of the home and they cannot do it because the jobs they qualify for would not cover their childcare costs. This is so backwards and lonely. In my ideal world there would be one system for how to work and have childcare a mother could afford. This system would have a part time and full time option. Currently there are too many options and not enough good ones.

Leticia, Oklahoma City

I am the mother of three children. Up until a few months ago, I lived with the father of my children. We worked our job schedules around our children because the cost of daycare is astronomical. For 3 children under the age of 6 years old, monthly costs for daycare range between \$1200 and \$1400. Our combined gross monthly income was \$3000 even as college graduates.

I worked days from 8:30am-5:00pm, would come home, and he would then leave for his shift from 6:30pm-12:00am. We didn't qualify for assistance and couldn't afford daycare costs so splitting our family time for childcare was our only option. I'm now a single mother. Needless to say NOW I qualify for state assistance. Something has to give.

Jennifer, Edmond

My daughter is almost two years old and I am raising her all alone. Her dad is in prison for a 4 year term and it is very hard on us. Not only is she not able to see her dad everyday but our financial situation is tough.

I am obligated to pay for everything, although it doesn't bother me a bit, the extra help with diapers, wipes, medical expenses and child care fees would be appreciated. Child care fees are so expensive these days. I would love to see them decrease.

OREGON

Jodi, Portland

Our childcare expenses are more than our mortgage. We pay \$1355 for our 19 month old and about \$500 for our 6 year old. My husband and I both work full time and it's essential that our children are somewhere safe while we're at work. It's also critical that childcare fit our schedules as best as possible, this means no closures for school holidays, opening before 730am and not closing until 6pm.

It's incredible how our economy forces a dual income and then doesn't provide an affordable and accessible childcare infrastructure. And when it doesn't work, instead of looking at the system, looks at the parents - as though we have done something wrong.

Because of the high cost of our childcare we are unable to pay down our student loans, which total well over \$100k. We have good incomes and we live modestly. We have been thrown into financial insecurity -first because there is no paid leave and second because childcare expenses are astronomical.

So we work towards an uncertain future. Maybe our wages will be garnished by the institutions that hold our student loans forcing one of us out of the workforce because we will no longer be able to afford childcare and without our dual income we won't be able to afford our house, so we'll lost

that too. The promise - that if we work hard both in education and the workforce, we can make a better future for our children - is broken.

Anna, Beaverton

Health begins at birth! I work with low-income Pre-K Head Start and Early Head Start children as a nutritionist. My goal, every year, is to provide more nutritious, clean, fresh, local and sound food for these kids than they had the year before. But -- we have a budget that makes it difficult to get the best foods, the most conscientious vendors, and a lot of our vendors, frankly, don't care about kids, they are only in it for profit.

Even nonprofit vendors cut corners everywhere they can. We need laws to require the quality and the quantity of food we can feed our children -- right from the start. We need our elected officials to see beyond the dollars and cents to the common sense -- well fed kids have less illness, miss less school, go farther in school, and wind up healthy adults, well prepared for their role in our nation. Help me help the next generation -- we really are all they have!

Eileen, Jasper

I needed affordable childcare when my children were younger. I remember how hard it was to juggle work and family. I had time periods when I didn't have childcare available and I worried as a result.

The Employment-Related Day Care was a lifeline when it was available for me to access. It's not easy to be employed when employers are resistant or outright hostile to flexible work schedules, job-sharing, telecommuting, or other potential arrangements.

Sandy, Corvallis

I was a young mother of two toddlers, living with my husband (their father) in a small rural community. My husband was abusive toward me; the physical and mental abuse had accelerated

since the birth of the children. Fortunately it was directed only at me. I realized that my only way out of the situation was to find a job, which would then mean that I would need childcare for my son and daughter. I did find a job as a healthcare worker. My husband made it my responsibility to pay for childcare, and that consumed the major part of the money I earned. I stayed in the marriage for 10 more years.

There was no way I could support myself and the children without depending on the income of my husband. When the kids were 10 and 12 years old, my husband walked out on us.

At that point the children were old enough to be home alone while I was at work. It would have been much better for them to have someone taking care of them, but there was no way I could provide for their other needs and also afford childcare.

Gwendolyn, Milwaukee

Husband needs to stay home since we cannot afford childcare.

Leon, Portland

My wife was able to quit her job and stay home with our children. One of them was very sick so it would have been very difficult if she had not been able to do so.

My wife was a very competent registered nurse. I'm not sure our son would have survived without 24 hour care for the first three years of his life.

PENNSYLVANIA

Samantha, Homestead

I'm currently pregnant with our first child. My significant other is employed full time, but due to cut backs, I currently am not (despite a legitimate full time job hunt). As I have been researching childcare, I'm absolutely terrified. We can't make ends meet if I don't work, but quality childcare is wildly expensive. Local, affordable options are not educational programs, but rather more of a baby-

sitting service. An affordable, quality option would reduce my anxiety considerably. This truly needs addressed, as all children should receive quality preschool and out of school programming.

"As I have been researching childcare, I'm absolutely terrified. We can't make ends meet if I don't work, but quality childcare is wildly expensive."

Samantha, Homestead

Elizabeth, Newtown

My grandchildren were fortunate enough to be able to attend a wonderful pre-school program and it made a huge difference in their development, both socially and in skills needed to succeed in elementary school - especially compared to their classmates who did not have that advantage.

Andrea, Middlebury Center

I was working two jobs trying to help support my daughter and help with the cost of living. Unfortunately, I soon found that I was spending more money on child care and gas than I was making each day.

I was actually saving more money by staying home. It's sad that even though I was working two jobs, I STILL couldn't afford to pay someone \$20 a day to watch my daughter. I'm a college graduate and am continuing my

education. I thought that getting a degree and a good job was what I was supposed to aim for and everything would be okay, unfortunately that's not the case. Every child has the right to go to a place where they are guaranteed to be taken care of and have access to a great education.

Angel, Pittsburgh

When we began our family in 2004, delivering our first in July 2005, our personal finances were amazing. We were doing very well for a middle class couple and found it to be the right time to start our family. We then decided to add a sibling two years later, adding a bonus surprise child and had twins. Our family was full. Then not long after the economy collapsed and it all went down the tubes. We struggled. We had to go to food banks, get state assistance with utilities, and food stamps. During this time we didn't have health insurance and without planning those one, I became pregnant with our fourth and final child.

We found a way to make it work and we worked very hard to move and relocate to an area with more jobs, cheaper rents and a somewhat stable economy. With that we rebuilt our family. We could never in all that time afford child care. Not when we just had the one, certainly not after the twins and never when had all four children. So for close to four years I was forced to quit my job, stay home to care full time, while my husband worked two full time jobs and in excess of 120 hours a week between the two, with the overtime. It was all a blur. It was all unhealthy for him. I am sure he shaved years off his life during this time. He developed high blood pressure and I developed many health problems. Lack of sleep, support, money, it all takes years off not only the quality of lives, but the overall duration of them.

If we had access to affordable healthcare and childcare, our family could have been built without causing all of this upheaval, stress, and turmoil. We could have been both working and active, contributing members of society, instead of draining ourselves and social

services during our time of need. This country has the ability to do better, but it chooses not to.

Cynthia, Allentown

I was a single parent with two children. Education is so very important! I struggled to pay for summer tutoring and child care year round I luckily had a good union job. Not many people can afford this essential opportunity for their children. They are our responsibility, our future!! Help the children get that essential opportunity of early education and year round education.

Christina, Philadelphia

Childcare is \$476 a week for two kids under 2. My husband and I sometimes had to forego eating to afford it and would have to skip paying bills. I was lucky enough to find a great daycare center and was able to build a great trust with the women that worked there.

Shani, Philadelphia

I don't mind that good childcare is expensive - my child is very important to me, and it's crucial that he receives excellent care while I am at work. But childcare is, to be sure, enormously expensive.

And the opportunity to use pre-tax dollars to pay for childcare is capped at \$5,000, when care for just one child costs far more than that. If nothing else, all childcare expenses should be eligible to be paid pre-tax, for that small savings. But if families are important to this country, they should be important enough to pay for.

RHODE ISLAND

Joyce, Providence

Once I found out I was expecting, I knew my entire life was going to change. From my exercise routine, to my diet, and overall health and well-being. My bundle of joy entered the world on November 18, 2007. It was this day that I decided to stay home, home school our child, and complete my undergradu-

ate degree. This was one of the most rewarding experiences ever. I exposed my child to nature, reading, art, foreign language, music, and so much more. When he turned two years old, I placed him in daycare to expand his mind and develop the necessary social skills he needed. But, to place my son in private daycare did not come without an expense. It was expensive and I struggled to balance all my expenses with the cost of daycare as well.

I completely comprehend the need to cut cost but it should not be at the expense of children learning. Early learning establishments provide a safe, structured, healthy, and positive learning environment where children can thrive & grow. Please take this story into consideration as you make your decision. Do not take away the learning opportunities of our children.

“If the government really wants to help the economy, try helping struggling families afford the basics that makes it possible for them to continue to be productive workers.”

Shanna, Providence

Shanna, Providence

My husband and I are college professors. I think that places us solidly in the “middle class.” However, even though we live in a fairly low rent apartment, have only one car and are both fully employed, we can't actually find child

care we can afford. Every month we barely balance our checkbook and we only have one child! I have no idea how families do it who do not have the job security and relatively good wages that we have (not to mention the health care benefits).

It simply seems to make more sense for a lot of families I know to have someone stay home with their child until that child enters school. Unfortunately, that comes with a long term cost in their family's income since long term career prospects are severely damaged by being out of the workforce for years at a time. This simply can not be good for our economy.

If the government really wants to help the economy, try helping struggling families afford the basics that makes it possible for them to continue to be productive workers.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Marti, Columbia

My son will turn 11 in several months and we are still paying for daycare. The cost of daycare was so prohibitive when he was an infant that, despite my husband and I both having college degrees and decent full-time jobs, we couldn't afford to pay it. But we couldn't afford not to work either. So we charged it. Ten years and several more degrees later and we're still paying off the credit card debt that we accrued during our son's first five years of life. It doesn't help that the cost of daycare never went away, even after he started public school, b/c the school day is shorter than the work day so we had to - and still do - pay for after school care.

I never intended for my son to be an only child but, thanks to the cost of daycare, I couldn't risk what little financial security we had by bringing another child into the equation.

Patrina, Columbia

Pre-school was a blessing as was the director allowing me to keep my child enrolled when I could pay tuition. I was able to work at the school to off-set the

fees I was unable to pay because our governor decided to downsize.

That being said, I found another job for almost a year & was offered another state position but at a much lower (\$8,000) annual salary. I have yet to catch up and my credit is total screwed up. No home ownership for me but I have a roof over my head and now a 16 year old daughter with brains & beauty that sees my struggle yet gets her studies done and participates in school activities as well as community/church activities.

Child care is very important in the shaping of our young children's minds and without that capability we would have a much worse society of juveniles running completely WILD...totally disrespecting themselves and others. Please keep education beginning with pre-school, childcare facilities and public school a main focus in these United States of America. Thank you.

Shannon, Chapin

I am a single grandmother raising my grandson. Things are very hard trying to make sure my grandson is in a safe place while I work. It takes every penny I make I work a full time job in the college and try to do odd jobs just to make ends meet. I receive no child support.

Frances, Irmo

Months before giving birth to our son (now 2 yrs. old) we started our search for a day care (child development center) for our soon to be born child. It was the hardest experience especially for me, being a first time mom! We would show up unexpectedly to different day cares only to find huge disappointments. I inquired about emergency contingency plans, curriculum, safety, training/education of the staff, staff/children ratio. I was shocked to hear/see the things we came across. Especially when you ask a "care giver" some questions, she evades you and you don't get a good "vibe" from her is the worst thing ever.

Finally we found a decent child development center for our son, and even

though I met with the staff, had reasonable answers to all of my questions... it still broke my heart to leave my 8 week old baby with strangers. He is now 2 yrs. old, and still goes to the same day care. Early child development is so important to our children, they are the future adults of tomorrow. How can we not care about this?

Jessica, Irmo

I pay \$200 a month just for after school care. I work 40+ hours a week and a 7.5% of my pay goes just to paying after school care. I could use that money to by food, clothes for my child or fix a car that is 10 yrs old and can't afford to be fixed.

If the government would give all of us working parents the same treatment that they give the unemployed parents (help), no of us would be struggling every month to make sure our families have what they need and bills can be paid.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Edward, Oglala

We NEED more investments in early learning. We have parochial, county schools, public schools, government schools, and language schools -- all of which has a severe shortage of teachers aides and assistants.

TENNESSEE

Frances, Memphis

I am a grandmother and I fear the day that my son and daughter-in-law ask me to assist with child care and after school care. My granddaughter will soon be 4 years old. She is currently in day care and its only affordable because it is based on income since my daughter-in-law is unemployed. Once she finds a job, the cost will be ridiculously high and I know I will be asked to assist with care. I can barely take care of my own bills but I will sacrifice to ensure my granddaughter receives the best cares. We need to work on making child care affordable for all.

Kathrandra, Chattanooga

I'm the single mom of an adopted daughter whose birth mother had a drug addiction. This caused my daughter to have ADHD and other behavioral problems. I work at a community college where quality child care is provided. However, it is very expensive. In the summer when there were fewer student aides, classes would be combined.

This generally happened at the time of day when the teachers were leaving for the day. When my daughter was about 2 1/2 years old, she started to bite some of the other children in the class. Instead of working out the situation in an intelligent manner, one of the teachers broke the confidentiality of my child's background. She frightened the other parents into thinking my child might have the AIDS virus. When my daughter bit the child of the college administrator over the day care, she was kicked out. I found care of her in a private home which was much less expensive, but in the opposite direction from where I worked.

Rachel, Nashville

My husband and I have delayed starting a family because we're overwhelmed by expensive daycare costs. In our area, daycare would cost the same as an extra mortgage payment per month. It's insanity! We both want to stay in our careers, but the math doesn't work once you have more than one child. I feel like this snowballs into so many other cultural problems.

Poverty issues, the fact that there aren't enough women in management positions in the U.S. workforce, etc. If we could alleviate some of the childcare cost burden, it would benefit our families and communities in so many positive ways!

Paige, Nashville

I know from experience with my first child that it is difficult enough finding affordable childcare that you can trust when you have a single child who is perfectly normal. I happen to have two children, one of whom has health and

FULL-TIME CHILDCARE FOR AN INFANT OR TODDLER COSTS MORE THAN COLLEGE IN MOST STATES IN OUR NATION



Katie McDonough. "Childcare is more expensive than college in a majority of states." Salon, Nov. 4, 2013.

dietary restrictions that made finding childcare almost impossible. I am well-educated and have a decent job and I truly feel that if I can have so much trouble finding affordable, trust-worthy childcare, it must be even more difficult for mothers with lower incomes, less education, and less access to resources than I. Here's my story...I returned to work the minimum allotted five weeks after giving birth to my second child. I'd planned on eight weeks of maternity leave, but unexpected expenses left us in need of income so I went back early. I could not afford to send both kids to the trusted, accredited center my daughter attended prior to my maternity leave, nor could I afford the childcare center offered by my employer, so after an exhaustive search and a number of interviews, I found what I thought was the next best thing: a stay-at-home mother who was looking to watch a couple of extra kids in her home. It was a great situation until my infant son's medical issues started.

From a very early age he started showing signs of severe food allergies: vomiting, chronic diarrhea, severe eczema, weight loss, etc. After a particularly bad

week, the mother I'd trusted for four months decided she was unable/unwilling to care for such a sick child any longer. I understood. He was a very sick baby and if I had not been the primary earner as well as the only source of health insurance in our family, I would have quit my job and stayed home with him myself. In fact, over the next couple of years I came very close to doing exactly that on several occasions. Having used up every bit of vacation and sick time allotted to me during my maternity leave, I was suddenly in need of immediate child care with very little time to search. I found another in-home situation, this one more of a child care center (unaccredited, because I couldn't afford otherwise with two children, but with positive recommendations from previous clients). His skin was frequently raw and weeping and his hair would fall out in large patches when he scratched his scalp. He needed constant supervision and frequent restraint to keep him from damaging his skin further by scratching and rubbing. I discussed his issues with the provider and was assured he would be well-taken care of. His health

continued to decline and I continued to use up my sick days as soon as they were accrued to get him to doctor's appointments and keep him home on the worst days, which seemed to be increasing in frequency. My daughter, on occasion, would make comments that concerned me about what happened at day care, but she was barely three and, when questioned, the owner always had a reasonable excuse. Still, my concern lingered and I kept my eyes open for an alternative.

One day, on a sudden impulse, I left work early and went to pick up the kids unannounced. I walked in the unlocked door and found all the children laying on the floor in the darkened basement for 'nap time.' There were no adults anywhere nearby. My son, the only infant, was sitting in a crib screaming and scratching his poor itchy face with bloody open wounds on his cheeks and forehead. I grabbed him and my daughter and repeatedly yelled up the stairs to try to get someone's attention. When someone finally appeared I told her my children would not be back.

To this day, nearly three years later, I feel intense guilt for putting them and then keeping them in a situation I did not fully trust simply because I didn't have the time or resources to find anything better. My third go-round did not go much better. I found another stay-at-home mom who seemed ideal at first, but once again things seemed to downhill. With no backup provider and children of her own, the care was unreliable.

In addition, my daughter, who was fully verbal by this time, informed me that the parents smoked inside, argued in front of the children, and had friends coming and going in the house throughout the day. I started looking for alternatives once again but before I found one I had to suddenly remove them when I became aware of abuse going on in the home. Yet again, feeling guilty and desperate, I found myself in a search for reliable childcare.

Unwilling to compromise my children's well-being for monetary savings any longer, I began to look at centers again.

They were prohibitively expensive, particularly the good ones with positive ratings from the state, but I applied for scholarships when possible and I knew my daughter would be starting Kindergarten soon so I thought we might be able to make it work for a little while. This time during my search, we had a definite diagnosis for my son. The severity and sheer number of his allergies meant he needed special care, including special treatment at meal-times. He could only eat food provided from home, he needed frequent application of topical steroids and lotion for his eczema, and he needed an epi-pen with him at all times in case of an anaphylactic reaction.

Childcare centers that welcomed me initially turned me away once I began to explain his needs. They didn't want to have the responsibility of learning how to use his medications or they claimed (incorrectly) that state guidelines did not allow them to provide children with food from home.

While I knew their exclusion was illegal, I was not willing to put my son somewhere they didn't really want him. I was so fortunate to finally find someone who was able and more than willing to care for my son and give him what he needed. Not only did she welcome him with open arms, having had a child with similar health issues herself, she gave our family an extra discount because she rightly assumed our medical expenses were draining us dry.

It has been over two years and I have been so happy with the care he's received. Even when my husband lost his job and we were unable to pay anything at all for months at a time, they bent over backwards to let us stay with them, offering a more-than-reasonable payment plan once he had part-time work again.

Thank you for letting me share my story. If it can help in any way to convince lawmakers that families are struggling and need their help in fixing the sad state of childcare in our country, then maybe it will redeem me to some extent for failing to provide my kids with sufficient care.

TEXAS

Daniela, Austin

I know I am one of the lucky ones who can send my daughter to a high quality, safe, enriching, child development center where she has the opportunity to learn, plays and grow. It breaks my heart to think that there are kids (and parents) out there who do not feel the same sense of security and comfort every day.

“As a first grade teacher for 30 years, I saw the effects of early childhood education and the suffering of those children who did not benefit from it.”

Patricia, Austin

Carole, Roanoke

I am a retired minister. When people ask me what I do, I tell them my full-time job is taking care of a 4 year old, my grandson. My son has custody of his children. Because I am able to take care of the youngest one, my son is able to work full-time (and be a taxpayer!) The \$600 or more a month that it would take to enroll my grandson in full-time day care would make it difficult for him to raise his children. We are fortunate that I have the means to stay home and take care of my grandson. But I am no longer earning a living myself.

Kim, Dallas

I received child care assistance while separated from my husband. I have two toddlers. They are both 11 months

apart. Affording childcare has always been difficult for me. When my son was born I would take him to our neighborhood nanny. Then when my daughter was born, I did the same. She was charging me \$20 a day for each one. I was paying \$200 a week.

Things started to get bad when I noticed she had too many children under her care and from time to time I noticed my son wasn't getting diaper changes. I applied for child care assistance while being married to my husband. However we were separated. If I only made \$500 a week before taxes and daycare was \$200 a week. Now I am being accused of child care fraud. I have my shoulders full of worries.

Chris, Iowa Park

With the cost of living today it takes a mother and dad both working with no end in site. To pay for my son's daycare I had to take a part time job in the evenings; time I could have spent with my 2 year old.

Patricia, Austin

As a first grade teacher for 30 years, I saw the effects of early childhood education and the suffering of those children who did not benefit from it. As a teacher of pre-school children for six years, I know how much the early years influence brain development. As a parent of two very successful daughters, I know that early education is essential to success in school.

And as a grandparent to a second grader, I see how early childhood education has paid off in learning a second language, reading, writing, math, science, thinking ability and reasoning skills. I am a convinced advocate of early childhood education and believer that lack of early skills lead to our prison gates. Education early on is the answer to many problems because education leads us out of poverty!

Early intervention costs less in the long run as prison and rehab are expensive! Education is the answer and an early start is essential!!

Kathleen, Austin

We are not bilingual, but believe that will be important to the next generation. So my grand daughter went to a spanish immersion pre-school and then started in public school in a dual-language program. It seems like her spanish is fading a bit, or at least not progressing as it once was, and I'm afraid she will lose it even with the dual-language approach. I know there are a lot of monolingual English-speaking families in this situation, and would love to know if the kids who are in dual-language public schools keep their second language later in life.

Thais, Austin

Finding and paying for high-quality childcare/preschool (and prenatal care) has become the driving force behind every decision our family has made in the last eight years. I have a 7-year-old daughter and a 2-year-old son. My husband is a teacher, I'm a city environmental worker. We've tried everything - two-working parents and high quality care, part-time mom and low-quality care, spent down our savings and went into debt to have mom at home for a year (only to become pregnant and have to take a full-time job to qualify for health insurance, but that's another story).

We tried to find decent, less expensive care to allow me to work a little less and have more time with the kids, but after a \$660/mo nanny kept our son in a playpen after he started crawling out of it and he had a bad fall, \$1,000/mo montessori care and two full-time working parents is where we're stuck. We had our children at the well-known working-parent interval: 5 years between each one.

Paying for two childcares is prohibitive on our mid-level salaries, and as my husband is a teacher, we can't afford for me to stay home or go back to school. I'd like to have another child, but by the time my son is in public school I'll be uncomfortably, ahem, far along in my baby-making years. Universal preschool at the 4-year-old age would have allowed us more flex-

ibility in deciding how many children to have. High-quality subsidized childcare would have given us the flexibility in our budget to either allow me to work part-time and have more time with the kids, or even have gone back to school for that PhD I've always wanted.

Accessible prenatal care would have allowed me to at least stay home through those taxing last months of pregnancy and for more than the 8 (unpaid) weeks I was granted with my second child. We're managing better than many. I still haven't paid off the debt from the year I spent with my daughter, and we have no savings, but we can pay the mortgage and we have employer-based healthcare.

But I have a great sadness (and yes, some anger) in my heart about having to make family decisions as a direct result of national economic policy. I certainly could have spent more time with my son when he was a baby, and even now I'm constantly searching for an as-yet-undiscovered way to work part-time to be home with the kids after 3pm. I'd love to redirect my career, but the down-time you experience while reworking a career isn't financially feasible for us right now. I'm unwilling to compromise on my children's care.

When I was a child, the only affordable care my parents could find involved a scary trailer down a dirt road, porn on TV, very unhealthy food and a junkie adult son who fed beer to my toddler brother. I've been there. My kids won't be thanks to our sacrifices. But we needed affordable high-quality childcare then, and we need it now.

Rose, Austin

When my son was in preschool in MA, I paid \$1200 a month. That was more than my rent. I was a single mom at the time and in college. I had to take out student loans - to pay for daycare! It is three years later, my son is in second grade in public school and I am still paying off the loans I took out for preschool.

Mary, Georgetown

Had spectacular child care for my girls while I worked as a Pediatric Oncology Nurse. Home setting by Montessori trained provider who also believed in structure!! Curriculum culminated in great end of the month family activities! The girls learning styles were embraced & built on by the provider!! Both girls graduated with honors in 4 years from universities! My son, 10 years later, had a marvelous early experience in a child care center affiliated with a school district. He is also an honor student! Individualized learning styles with HS students in the classrooms learning about child development - sadly the program has no longer monies to allow for teen parents to access!!! We must have excellent early childhood experiences for our children to adjunct care in the home!

Jim, Houston

Both of my daughters attended daycare prior to their start in public school. I believe that the daycare provided an environment that fostered the growth of both of my children. We could not have prepared the girls as well unless one of stayed home.

However, with two children to support, a one-parent provider was not a viable option. Fortunately we were both fully employed and were able to send our children to daycare. Children of parents who cannot afford daycare often enter kindergarten developmentally behind those who have attended daycare. The ability to pay for daycare should not be a factor in our children's education.

Jennifer, Fort Worth

I have been a public school teacher for over 20 years. Every dime we invest in our youth is an investment in our future.

Karin, Fort Worth

As an educator, Head Start is vital for helping our students. In our school district, Head Start helps our Spanish speaking students learn English before state mandated testing becomes an issue. Spanish only speaking homes have

produced some of the most intelligent and hard working students I have had the pleasure to teach. Please make this a priority.

Odilia, Fort Worth

I am a retired college professor. These past few months I have volunteered with an early learning program for low income families. The program is excellent because it actually trains parents to work with their children 2 to 4 years old to get them ready for school. The program aims to narrow the academic gap between middle class children and children from low income families. We need more programs such as this one.

UTAH

Sara, Logan

oth of my children we only able to attend 1/2 a year in preschool because the cost is too high in the private realm. Please put early education as a higher priority. These children are the leaders of tomorrow, don't you want to give them the best opportunity at a good solid foundation in education?

Pat, Murray

I was an Early Childhood Education teacher for over 25 years. Children who have been in a high quality ECE program have a major advantage when they start public or private school. ECE is crucial in developing a lifetime love of learning, socialization with other children and adults, and basics in math, science and reading. ECE teachers should be trained in the specifics of the way young children learn, totally different than older children.

Over the many years of teaching and being a director of a child care center I have observed hundreds of children go on to excel in K-12 school, higher education, and go on to live successful lives. I have nine children of my own. In discussing education with the teachers over many years, they all expressed their positive experiences with children who had attended ECE programs and how well prepared they are for school.

MORE THAN 85 PERCENT OF A CHILD'S CORE BRAIN STRUCTURE IS FORMED BY AGE 3



Child and Family Policy Center and Voices for America's Children, 2004

Erica, Ogden

I feel like continuing to work is so important as a mother, since I want to be a positive role model to my daughters and I don't want to feel dependent on my husband. However, I am deeply conflicted right now, since the daycare options for my youngest are so limited. My older daughter was cared for by family until she got into my employers' daycare at the age of 2 (this is the youngest age they are admitted). But with my youngest this will soon not be an option.

The daycare options are frightening, and I am worried that I may need to quit working because I am too disappointed in the quality of the care available in our area. I think that it is a shame for our family, children, and society, that women are faced with this dilemma.

Morgen, Logan

I am a senior in college and have three boys. They are 3.5 years old, 2 years old, and 1 month old. My husband barely

makes enough money for us to live off of. I am trying to finish school so that we can bring in more income. Right now I have very little work experience and if I went to work now I don't think I would be able to make enough money to cover the childcare costs.

I stay home most of the time with my children and have been fortunate enough to find people willing to watch my children for free in the mornings while I go to one or two classes. I take as many online classes as are available. I haven't been able to find anyone to watch my children for the upcoming semester. The only way for us to qualify for childcare assistance is if I'm working at least 15 hours a week.

Right now I feel like my only option is to start my own business from home that I can do in the evenings. Hopefully I can make some money and eventually finish school. I know that once my children are all in school it will be a lot easier for us to get on our feet, but I feel like I will be very far behind on my career.

VERMONT

Rosemary, Middletown Springs

I am a veteran Early Childhood Educator and a member of Vermont's Let's Grow Kids Campaign. I came to the field of Early Childhood Education rather by accident at the age of 17. I stuck with it because it felt good and I seemed to have an innate ability, but also because I believed, and still believe, that doing good work in this field would make a positive difference for all. Now, instead of being a professional scientist, as I had been headed for prior to that first Early Childhood Education experience, I am a citizen scientist who shares my love of science and the natural world, as well as my other passions, with children. And I see my work as a means to achieving happier, healthier children, families, and communities in a more peaceful, just nation.

Over 30 years later, I know that we still have a long way to go to support all children to grow to reach their full potential. These days my work is primarily offering literacy-based arts programs, and training both home and center based childcare providers to do so. Yet I still struggle to earn a living in the Early Learning field, and have never had an employee benefits package. Many of the programs with which I work are grant funded, and there is only so much to go around. Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were more access to funds by early learning facilities to provide their child and staff populations more of the valuable programming that I and others have to offer?

We now know that about 80% of a child's brain development occurs by age three, 90% by age five. Here in Vermont, 72% of our children under age 6 have all parents in the workforce, yet our childcare infrastructure has the capacity to accommodate only 40% of those in need of care. Meanwhile, 40%-50% of our children are entering Kindergarten unprepared; our school budgets are literally out of our control, due in large part to Special Education costs; many parents are stressed out due to issues surrounding the cost and quality

of their childcare options; and we are facing an incredibly sobering heroine epidemic.

All of these issues can be addressed and improved through supporting quality early childcare and learning experiences for our youngest Vermonters. Young children would have the support they need to build strong, resilient brains that will serve them well throughout their lives, and families would have childcare that they can both afford and feel good about. Research shows that communities would benefit by seeing more children enter school ready to learn and 40% less likely to need Special Ed services or be held back a grade, and 70% less likely to commit a crime by age 18. We would see lower rates of substance abuse and teen pregnancy.

Businesses would benefit from having workers who are more focused on their jobs because they are not stressed about the quality and cost of the care their children are receiving while the parents are in the workplace. And childcare quality would be improved by decreasing caregiver turnover when those providing the care can earn a livable wage without bankrupting families. It's time for everyone to understand the importance of the earliest years of learning and development and how they affect all of us.

Elizabeth, Middleton Springs

I live in a village blessed with a home-daycare provider, named Martha, who has been raising our children for 35 years. Her hourly fee is \$3 up from \$2.50 when my children first went there. When kids are sick, unlike most childcare providers, Martha doesn't charge. She has made it her mission to take in and nurture and teach as many children as she can simply out of personal passion and a sense of community service. She is serving the children and she is serving the parents. It is easy to spot a Martha's kid, because they are polite, creative, often good students and respectful of adults and other children.

Even when I worked part time from home, I sent my children to Martha's

more for the knowledge that any time spent with Martha was valuable time. Everything my children learned between ages 1.5 to 5, they learned from Martha. She taught music appreciation by playing and acting out Camille Saint Saens Carnival of the Animals, as well as Peter and the Wolf and Stravinsky's Firebird. She had story hour and dress-up time and always takes the kids outdoors no matter the weather. I could only wish every child and parent had access to this type of affordable, quality care but realize the world is not filled with Marthas.

There are millions of potential Marthas, but they all require far more financial compensation before they would devote their lives to cultivating great kids. If we want to cultivate more Marthas in this world, we need to invest in them.

Joanna, Burlington

I work at a large childcare center. At the moment 37 families that is more than half of our community is subsidized that means even though they are working they can't afford child care on their own probably another 10 families don't qualify for subsidy but spend more than half of their income on childcare. Some families can't have their children in a quality center because its too much for them. HELP On top of that quality professional we have teachers with BA's who are working on MA's who make \$12 an hour. This insanity needs to stop government get involved.

VIRGINIA

Alonzo, Triangle

I was raised in Newport News & Hampton, VA and I definitely support early learning for our youth so they will be better equipped to meet tomorrow's challenges.

Martha, Richmond

I was a member of the Board, and chairman for 3 terms, of Southside Child Development Center. The Center was non-profit and continuously struggled for most of that time. It had served Richmond and the metropolitan area for

75 years and taught children aged 2 to 5 years. The staff was wonderful to the children and taught them during these formative years even though they were operating on a shoestring. The teachers gave of their time for little pay and the supplies and surroundings the Center could afford were minimum, but the children thrived.

In June the Center must close its doors due to lack of funding. Where are these children going to go where they will receive such good care and such dedicated teachers? Certainly Richmond and its citizens can find funds to continue offering children good care and an excellent education during these critical early years of their lives. It is the least we can do to help build a rich and loving beginning for them at a critical time in their lives.

Ronique, Virginia Beach

My children's early learning experiences began at the Ramstein Air base library, long before they could read. Our activities included visits to the library and collecting lists of the Newberry and Caldecott winners, past and present. The treasure trove of books for both my toddler and infant proved to be a bonanza for their learning.

As they approached pre-school age, they both had the opportunity for pre-k education. The benefits, including play and loosely structured classroom activities, allowed them to begin their education with an interest in learning, not a begrudged attitude toward learning. Two days or three, whichever is available, allows preschool aged children the opportunity to adjust to the school environment and their maturing attitude toward school and learning.

Rida, Henrico

I am the proud mom of 3 teenage daughters and a pre-teen son. My two older children had the great opportunity to participate in a 3-4yr old head start program. Starting the formal educational process at that young age was greatly beneficial for them, and they displayed that throughout their years in

Amy, Arlington, VA

When we moved to Arlington, we had to give up the idea of a single family house for our family of four since rent is more than our active duty salary will allow. Then we inquired about preschool for our almost four year old.

Like our housing situation, we could not afford preschool in Arlington. Because of the \$300+ dollars a week for preschool and the expensive rent (our current apartment is actually raising our rent so we have to move, again), we are forced to move out of Arlington.

My husband's commute will be 1.5 hrs each way five days a week by public transportation (two buses and two metro trains) but now we'll afford preschool and rent. Arlington does not have affordable housing or preschool for young active duty military families.



school. Honestly, I feel they were able to create their own learning style without the pressure of grade school.

My oldest daughter graduated with an advanced studies diploma, and my other daughter was able to skip the eleventh grade. My younger children were not able to attend a preschool program and even now, they struggle with academics.

Caitlin, Vienna

I am a full-time working mother of two children. My husband and I were very grateful to get our children into the high-quality onsite childcare center at my public-sector workplace. But we were very lucky. There is a 1000 person waiting list every year, and no ability to expand. So many of my colleagues must go through the anxious process

of scrambling to find quality childcare, which is hard to come by in our area and very expensive, or choosing to reduce their hours or stay at home. High-quality childcare makes all the difference in a child's and a parent's life.

We can rest assured knowing our children are spending their days learning through enriching activities, which enables us to focus on our work. My son learned to read, count, and relate to others well before kindergarten. He has been ahead of the game ever since. Universal, affordable, quality childcare would keep more educated women in the workplace and boost productivity and GDP. It would also give more children the head start in life that they deserve--and that they will need to remain competitive in the future. This is a national imperative.

Katherine, Pulaski

Mortgage and car loans were manageable, but adding thousands and thousands for early education and much needed child care exhausted my savings and strained my finances. An early education child care program was costing me \$225 per week. After two years of paying thousands, I had to quit my full-time job to become a stay-at-home mom and sell my home to find more affordable housing.

WASHINGTON

Janet, Bellingham

When I went back to work when my daughter was three years old, it was a mixed blessing type of experience. I really needed to work and we really needed space from one another. My daughter was in denial of any positives in this situation. When I dropped her off in the morning, she would cry from the time her teacher picked her from my arms until my car was out of sight. Then, according to the staff, she had a wonderful, laughter filled day until I returned to pick her up in the afternoon. I, however, would pull over once I was out of sight of the daycare center and cry.

Though it was difficult for both of us, the experience of being at preschool was crucial to my daughter's social development. It was also very important to my sense of belonging in the adult work world and the very needed sense of utilization of my long education. None of this would have been possible without the state subsidized child care credit that is part of the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.

Eowyn, Bellingham

Both my boys, ages 7 and 4, have benefitted so much from rich pre-k programs. These programs have also done double duty as daycare while my husband and I work. The trouble is, it is expensive. Part of the reason I only work part time is that full time childcare at a great facility costs the same as a mortgage. More than one kid? Forget it. And yet, I absolutely want the early

childhood educators to be paid more than fair wages. (They're caring for and teaching of my precious children, after all.) Please do what you can to make quality pre-k and childcare more affordable. Thank you.

Carl, Spokane

I am retired I have worked in education & mental health for about 45 years. Adequate child care has been an issue for children and parents that I have counseled my entire career.

Llyn, Spokane

My son was raised in the 1980s and 1990s without his father in the household. I was extremely fortunate to live in safe, affordable communities, where child care was subsidized (Utah) and typically cost about \$2.00 an hour.

With affordable care for my son I was able to earn a Master's Degree and work at full time professional positions. He has gone on to obtain a BS in Engineering and now works at a professional position. His accomplishments are a product of my ability to complete my education and enter a technical profession.

And my career accomplishments were a result of having good affordable childcare available while I worked and studied. Affordable childcare is essential for professional development that our society depends upon to operate at the complex level we do.

Leah, Edmonds

My youngest daughter was lucky to be able to attend the Meadowdale Preschool program through Edmonds Parks and Rec. What a fantastic experience! If only more kids could have such a wonderful experience. Only a small number of kids can enroll because the program is limited by space (and probably funding). I know that my daughter's experience at Meadowdale set her up for success in school!

She is a bright and enthusiastic 2nd grader now and loves school. I wish more kids had access to the kind of

experience she had. What a difference quality pre-k could make in our community if the program could be expanded.

Gayle, Vancouver

I've been in the Early Childhood Education field for nearly thirty years and currently serve as a director of a non-profit preschool. Having AFFORDABLE childcare for our families is imperative to supporting healthy, successful families. When the economy is healthy, our childcare center is also successful, as we can also hire new employees and at competitive wages.

Politicians that realize the importance of an educated populace, starting with our youngest of citizens, know that one of the best investments in our future, is in our children. Providing access to affordable, quality childcare, creates an important partnership between parents, childcare providers, and their communities!!! Our politicians can be influential stakeholders in the lives of millions of people... and be a part of that positive ripple effect!

June, Seattle

The Children's School in Seattle has been at the forefront of providing quality and affordable preschool education for over 50 years. This not-for-profit school has been fortunate to maintain quality teacher, a low teacher-student ratio, low turnover rate but is still struggles to recruit quality educators.

The new reality is that the cost of living in Seattle is skyrocketing. In order to invest in quality, universal preschool, we have to invest in our teachers. The staff and the teachers spark the light in our children and inspire the love of learning at an early age.

Lauren, Seattle

I am a long time Early Childhood Educator. All children benefit from preschool programs that stress play, social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. Investing in Preschool programs not only benefits children and families, they benefit communities

Angelica, Tacoma, WA

A few months ago, I was about to turn down my hard-won admission into law school because of the cost of my children's childcare. Without help, there was no way I could afford to take on the loans for my education and pay for childcare for my 3 young children. It was either law school or my kids.

Luckily, just in time I found a way to help cover some of my childcare

expenses, but it is not guaranteed nor a sure way for any student. Leaving me without childcare stability and the chance that I may have to leave law school anytime due to improper access to childcare.



Yet, far too often do student parents struggle to make ends meet between the cost of tuition and childcare for their young children. Luck shouldn't be a requirement for student parents to be able to go to school to pursue their dreams and create brighter futures for their families. Enough is enough. It's time for a change.

and the overall health for the future. We Preschool teachers have the awesome honor and privilege to have a job and profession that creates great change and positive energy in Education. All developed countries in the world honor Early Childhood Education. The United States must too!

Siobhan, Seattle

We started looking for daycare 7 months before our son was born (10 months before we needed care). We thought we were ahead of the game until we were told that most daycare centers had waitlists of over a year. Some had two year waiting lists with people putting themselves on the list before they even got pregnant.

The only daycare in my neighborhood always has a waitlist of over 300 families. We did eventually get a spot in a

daycare that we liked but I still had to work a reduced schedule because they didn't have any full-time slots open until the next year. We are lucky to have a good daycare, but daycare in our city is very expensive (average \$1,900/mo.). If we had two children I would have to quit my job because my entire salary would go towards daycare.

Amy, Seattle

I am a single mom of an almost 3 year old daughter. During my first trimester I toured three daycare centers near my home and office and paid wait list fees from \$25-\$100. I did not receive word of an opening until just before my leave ended, and it was only for a Tues-Thurs spot. So for the first 5 weeks of my return to work, her dad stayed home and watched her on Mon and Wed, and I stayed home on Fridays.

On days when I had to be at work, I paid a friend to care for her. I used up all the leave I had to fund 5.5 weeks of maternity leave and paid for the rest with whatever savings I had left after paying for birth, so I found myself stuck taking unpaid days off when I couldn't find a babysitter. When she went full time, the cost was \$1945/month.

Thankfully her dad paid a portion of that, but coming back from almost 6 weeks without an income and no paid leave left, it was a crushing blow to my finances and put us in a precarious position for a while. I know I could have found cheaper options, but my daughter's safety was my top priority and I felt that a licensed, accredited program was the best choice. I was eventually able to move her to my top choice day care, one that is affiliated with my employer, and the cost dropped quite a bit.

She is now in the Twos room so the

cost is still more than my rent, but still cheaper than some. We are now trying to find a preschool for next year but preschool hours are short, and since we will have to pay tuition for preschool as well as for daycare before and after, it will once again become a financial drain unless we are able to get her into the City of Seattle preschool program when she turns 4.

I appreciate that I have the financial resources that I have, and the help from her dad, but Seattle became so expensive, so quickly, that our incomes that were once at least comfortable are now barely covering everything and we have zero flexibility.

My daughter and I share a one-bedroom apartment in Capitol Hill, where I have lived for most of the last 22 years, and suddenly I am unable to afford two bedrooms in my own community, let alone anywhere in the city, and this is further compounded by the cost of daycare and preschool.

My rent is less than 30% of my income, which I guess is ideal, but daycare is also almost as much as my rent, so it seems families are really not well considered when these metrics are developed for my area. Saving to buy a home is out of the question, and having another child is sadly off the table as well.

Hannah, Seattle

When I was 5 months pregnant with my first child, I couldn't find any quality infant child care. Well at least, no infant care for when my son would still be one. I have been involved in early learning issues for over a decade and with all my contacts and resources you might think I, of all people, would be able to find child care.

But the lack of infant care, let alone quality infant care, let alone quality, affordable infant care is as major an issue for me as it is to any and every parent out there. I was on the waiting lists at several places.

Others are too backlogged to even have a wait list. What are moms like I supposed to do when they need to go back to work?

Lauren, Seattle

I have a very important story, as I have the awesome responsibility in getting children ready for Kindergarten! Every day is an important day in the life of a child...and Early Childhood Educators work extremely hard in honoring the social/emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual development of each Preschooler, and truly set the tone for a child's success, not only in school, but in life. Just look at the Perry Preschool Project!

Holly, Seattle

With my first born I had to place him in a care center where he was horribly unhappy. But this country doesn't give you any time to visit child care centers to find a good fit. When you get hired, they want you to start right away and if you can't find child care, then they'll give the job to someone else. With my second, I had better luck and often got help paying for it but only because the center he was in offered a partial scholarship. But there was one time when I had to leave him in the care of someone who was so neglectful she had her license pulled.

For the most part I managed to work late afternoon or evenings as my husband worked a 6:00 to 2:30 shift. I don't know how single parents afford it unless they're making \$90G a year or more. The staggering costs of child care just weren't worth it to me when I saw that the cost would eat up more than half my take-home. The alternative is one income, which doesn't pay the bills. As government employees, we aren't entitled to pay raises and now in 2013 we are making the same wages we made 15 years ago.

Cathy, Kirkland

I am a single mother of five children, not by choice. I was once married. I have been a casual Longshoreman at the Port of Seattle for going on ten years. My biggest obstacle has been childcare. I cannot get approved for state subsidized childcare due the fact that I work through the union and do not have a

guaranteed work schedule. I have noticed that there are not many women working in the Longshore industry partly due to the non parent friendly structure of dispatch and entry process into the union.

I have managed to hang on to my spot at the ports all these years by getting childcare from friends, family and an on call in home childcare. Lack of childcare has cost my availability at times. Sometimes care costs me my entire paycheck. I have seen people who entered the hours race after me pass me up time and time again to take the permanent spots. I feel like the structure of the state childcare program combined with the structure of dispatch is keeping women with children out of an entire industry that makes liveable wages. I do not feel I have had equal opportunity to pursue this line of work. But I still persist in hopes that one day I will be a member of the union.

Julie, Greenback

Although she is completely worth it, I am still working off debt accrued when I was underemployed when my daughter was born. Now 3.5 years later, I am one month away from my second (and last) child being born and am looking at reduced hours at work, and paying for two kids in childcare.

My 40 hour a week was reduced to 20. I have asked for 25 hours/week so that all \$1500 of my salary can go directly to childcare. My employer has agreed. I know they feel badly they offer no paid leave - including maternity. These sacrifices are all worth it. Sometimes they bring me to tears, but I know it will work out. I must say though, it is no surprise that childbirth is the leading cause of temporary poverty.

Please know that just as you are working hard to improve our community, I am working hard to be a loving, stable, and hardworking provider and mother.

Annie, Arlington

As a former Teacher's Aide I saw first hand how teachers are underpaid and

overworked. This was in the 1980s and 90s. It's gotten much worse since then. Teachers in our state face more challenges than ever before! Two of my children were in special education classes. How well they were tutored is beyond measure.

I saw everyday how their teachers and other regular education teachers went the extra mile for their students! This included buying the needy students school supplies out of their own pockets. I thank God for the extreme hard work all my sons' teachers did to help educate my boys!

Robert, Fircrest

I am a sixty-three year-old grandfather. We had our children when we were 27 and 32. Each child was tended to by a babysitter who had the charge of two children during their time together. In the 1970s and 1980s, we parents made a total of about \$50,000/year, and we were charges in the neighborhood of \$500-\$700/month.

Now, I babysit my ten-month old grandchild for free because my three-year-old granddaughter goes to preschool at a cost of \$1500/month. I do not resent this because my wife and I carved out a nice living through teaching and administering at the community college level. My wife still work and makes great money, and I have retired from teaching.

The parents of these grandchildren also make excellent money (approximately \$150,000 per year), and they cannot afford a babysitting option that costs for their younger grandchild because of their exorbitant housing costs. The world has changed and salaries need to keep up or costs need to come down.

Lori, Lacey

I raised my kids back in the day when most mothers were able to be home with their kids. As a grandmother, I helped my son and his wife, who were both school teachers, with their kids when they were pre-schoolers. "It takes a village" isn't just a slogan.

Kids need taking care of and working parents need the peace of mind that good day-care is being given. For those who weren't as fortunate as I was, I encourage the government to plan for helping defer the cost of good day-care for those who need the help.

Robert, Edmonds

24 thousand a year! Although my children are now in Primary School, they used to attend a preschool, that was a great learning experience for them, but at 24K a year is a bit ridiculous!

Sarah, Lake Forest Park

I am employed full time and have four children – that's going to be four kids I will have paid to put through child care, and all day kindergarten. The fact that I earn a good wage means that I don't qualify for any type of assistance. However, I don't receive child support and most of my income goes into child care.

I can speak to the importance of preschool in being ready for kindergarten, and the importance of quality preschool/child care for allowing me to work. Thus, not paying for preschool is not an option for me. But paying for preschool means that am unable to save for retirement like my peers and I am unable to save for a rainy day. I carry more debt than my peers and I am vulnerable to the rising costs of staple goods or to an emergency. But my child can't afford to miss high quality preschool, and it is a sacrifice that I am willing to make to assure her a good start in life. I just wonder... why does it have to be this hard?

WEST VIRGINIA

Marilyn, Charleston

I became a young, single mom of three small children (all from my marriage which dissolved before my oldest was in fourth grade). I had not yet finished my college degree when my ex-husband and I conceived our first child. I became a mother while I was still in college but I kept on pursuing my education.

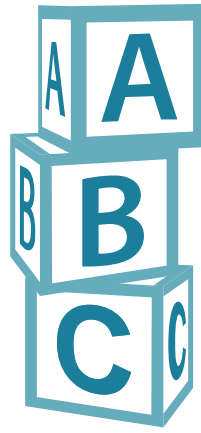
I soon became pregnant again and my

first two babies were only 19 months apart. I kept on working part-time and going to college because I wanted a future that was stable and bright for my children. Well, my third child was quite a surprise because she was conceived while I had an IUD! I kept on working and going to college, again knowing that my children would need me to have marketable skills in order to support them in the future. My marriage had been falling apart and, when fatherhood started becoming more intense, my ex-husband basically abandoned me and our three children without even paying any child support. I was very determined to not give up on myself, our future or my dreams.

The children were my main motivation to finish my college education. I kept working and I also took out student loans. What really enabled me to work was that I was able to get childcare subsidy vouchers. Without the vouchers I would never have been able to finish my college education nor what I have been able to work to clothe and put food on the table for the children. The vouchers for childcare helped reduce my cost of daycare and afterschool care from what would have been \$1200 per month down to approximately \$400 per month. That was still a lot to pay but there's no way I could have ever paid that \$1200 amount and still continued to provide for my children and finish my bachelors degree.

Fast forward a few years – thank God my children had Medicaid because one of my children developed an intestinal problem and needed long-term therapy and medical care. Without Medicaid he would have gotten sicker and sicker. I hate to even consider what might have happened... The good news is, those programs were out there for me and I did take advantage of them as they were designed. I completed my college degree successfully and became more gainfully employed and with the proper medical care, my son recovered from his intestinal disorder. We are all now living in a much better life as I am remarried to a lawyer and work as a teacher. My children are all doing well, staying healthy making good grades in

ENSURING THAT CHILDREN HAVE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES PRIOR TO ENTERING SCHOOL IS LIKELY TO LEAD TO BETTER OUTCOMES THAN REMEDIATION PROGRAMS AT A LATER AGE



"A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy..." Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, August 2007

school. They are in Marching Band, Girl & Boy Scouts and are all making good grades!

Programs like Medicaid and childcare subsidy vouchers/Early HeadStart are vital to the success of mothers and children and therefore vital to the stability and well-being of the next generation, the future of America. Please remember moms like me when you are deciding what programs should remain strong and where not to cut the budget. Thank you for your time in consideration of these vital programs.

Michelle, Shepherdstown

As a working mom of 2 finding quality childcare was a priority for me. I needed my children to be in a safe, nurturing stimulating environment and I was lucky to be able to find such places for my children.

As a kindergarten teacher of 15 years I can also speak to the needs of the children walking through my classroom door each fall. Our students need places where they can get early learning foundational skills in safe, nurturing and stimulating environments. Language,

reading and early math skills are invaluable to children. Experiences with other children, reading books, singing songs, fine motor, gross motor activities are just a few that can be gained in quality programs.

It used to be said that 'everything you need to know, you learned in Kindergarten.' Anymore, we need to give children a leg up before they even get there, to ensure their future success!

Katrina, Hansford

My youngest son was diagnosed with Autism when he was only 2 years old. He needed a lot of schooling to start to talk. He also is getting better now that he is almost seven years old. He spent 2 and 1/2 years in specialized per school in West Virginia. Now he is one of the smartest kid in his class and he is going on to first grade. I am very very proud of him for his accomplishment.

Amy, WV

I was working part-time, so finding a childcare provider that was willing to take a part-time child was very hard.

Once I had 2 kids, it was even harder because in-home providers didn't want to fill one of their two under-2 slots with a part-timer (in-home providers are allowed 6 kids, with only 2 under age 2). The high quality daycare center in the area has a 1.5 year waiting list and my employer's daycare center has a waiting list and requires \$25 per kid to be on the list.

I had found a nice in-home daycare provider that my kids went to for almost a year when she had medical problems and had to reduce the number of kids she was watching, so she gave me 2 weeks notice. I had been on one wait-list for 9 months so called to check but there were still no openings. I called several in-home providers and finally found one that had availability. After two weeks, she had a relative get sick and had to close her childcare.

Back to calling in-home providers, I find one who seems great, but then I drop the hammer-my first child has a peanut allergy. She's not comfortable with dealing with that. Back to the phones. I find one, they'll take them and deal with the allergy. I visit and the place is a bit sketchy, but what choice do I have? So that's where they went for several months. Did I mention that ALL of these places are in the opposite direction of my commute to work?

Luckily, I eventually got funding to increase to full time, making just enough to hire a nanny to get them out of sketchy care and save me the time of getting them ready, driving to and from the daycare, and dealing with the emotions of taking and picking them up. The other issue I have with childcare is how the IRS regulates flexible spending accounts for childcare expenses. If your employer offers it, you can have pre-tax money deducted from your paycheck to reimburse you for childcare expenses, allowing them to be tax-free expenses. But if you put your money in there and don't spend it, you lose it.

You have to have a big life event to be able to change the amount deducted, except for the annual open enrollment period. Changing daycare provider is not considered a big life event, so if

you are forced to change your provider, too bad. If you do have a big event, the change has to be submitted within 60 days of the event and the change (increase or decrease) has to match the event. I had a part-time nanny for a while, but after her other part-time employer's child started preschool she got a part-time job at Walmart that did not pay as well.

Soon after I had my second child, she asked for a big raise that I couldn't afford. I found an in-home provider for them so my childcare costs actually went down. I tried to use my 2nd child's birth to reduce the amount going into my flexible spending account, but decreasing the amount didn't match the addition of a child, so it was denied.

WISCONSIN

Heather, Brookfield

I am a director of All 'Bout Children Preschool in Brookfield, WI. I have the pleasure of seeing how important a early childhood setting can be for every child. The children are not just learning academics, they are learning life lessons. The children in a early childhood setting are learning how to interact with the world. They are learning to have a voice and how to make friends.

Leslie, Ashland

I live in 1 of only 4 school districts throughout WI with no public pre-K, only parochial fee-based preschool. Pre-K is just as essential as Kindergarten & should be part of public education throughout the U.S.

Kaye, Reedsville

We were foster parents for many years and ended up adopting 3 of those foster children. All our foster children attended Head Start, which is an excellent program and was very helpful to our children.

Please keep these programs available to the children in need who sometimes (we'll all too often don't get enough to eat and/or enough caring and help to catch up to the others).

Erin, Middleton

My children benefitted from a quality early childhood learning experience. However, the cost of this education was more than what it would have cost to attend the flagship university in our home state. Even as a high earner family, my entire paycheck went to pay their tuition. Most families cannot afford basic childcare, much less high-quality preschool education. Let's make an investment in ALL kids, not just a select few. Children who have exposure to books and whole language are better readers (and in turn better learners) later in their academic careers. This is an investment we cannot afford to miss.

Mary, La Crosse

I am not a Mom or Dad, but I have been a teacher, and I've seen what early education can do for a young person, and how eagerly they work to learn. They are our greatest hope for the future. We can't let them, or our world, down.

Katie, Madison

I work 35-40 hours per week at a child care center, where my one year old son is also enrolled. My partner works 40-50 hours a week as a mechanic at a very busy shop. Our daycare rate is cut in half because I'm an employee -- but is still more than half my paycheck each week. Our take home pay, between the two of us, is barely enough to make ends meet.

When we applied for benefits from the state, to try to offset the cost of daycare, we were told we make \$50 too much a month. FIFTY DOLLARS TOO MUCH, means that we pinch and scrimp and save and don't always eat like we should just to pay the bills, while never being able to put anything back for an emergency.

And all of the calculations the state did on our income, not one single question was asked about how much we pay for daycare. They assume my gross pay is what I take home. When I asked the worker I was dealing with "What about my child care tuition?" She told me simply that I should have a family

member watch my son because "that's what everyone else does." Oh really? I think this should change, DRASTICALLY!!

WYOMING

Wendy, Rawlins

Two of my grandchildren had speech problems, the third was afraid of groups. All went to Project Reach for two years and entered kindergarten able to deal with school. The ones with speech problems are talking up a storm...wish they had an "off" button sometimes. The One who was afraid is now making friends, enjoying school and reading three levels above his grade!

Pre school was the BEST thing ever for them and I see LOTS of other kids who have been helped so much. We need to keep funding these programs so as to get our kids on the path to learning. Thanks to the teachers, helpers and pathologists who were/are involved!!!

Joanna, Buffalo

Working in early childhood education I have first hand experience with young parents who try to do the best for their children. When a parent earns minimum wage and has long hours a good day care center with well qualified professional staff who earns a livable wage and can offer counseling and child rearing advice means all the difference to these fragile families.

Here in Buffalo Wyoming money is being spent on a new jail, remodeling and enlarging the senior center, but the day care center struggles along with bake sales, bazaars, and raffles for needed funds. Parents struggle to pay all the fees themselves. There is a huge waiting list. The staff barely earns minimum wage and must rely on their other family members for living expenses in their own homes.

Numerous studies have shown that early enrichment and care and guidance for the young child and his/her parents show great dividends in family stability, higher test scores and mental health.

(1) The City of Learners Committee is comprised of more than 70 community leaders who have committed to ensure that children in the City of Dayton receive a high quality education. These community conversations have led to the creation of five priority areas for the committee: 1) ensure all children attend a high quality school, 2) ensure high quality preschool is offered to all children, 3) increase business partnerships with schools, 4) provide mentors to more children, and 5) expand sites for afterschool and summer learning. These “Listening Sessions” captured the rich diversity of Dayton. They were held at a Dayton public school, a Catholic elementary school, a Catholic high school, a charter school, two community centers, a church, a preschool, and at Sinclair Community College. Additional conversations were held with educators, as well as a group of high school students. The Committee heard from parents and grandparents, concerned citizens, educators, high-school students, college students, preschool providers, business owners, nonprofit advocates, the City’s immigrant community, retirees and many others. Residents are passionate about the success of Dayton’s children and eager to support their schools, which they expect to be high quality and accountable.

(2) In the Durham Mayor’s Poverty Reduction Initiative, that focused efforts on a particular Durham census tract that meets a definition of “distressed,” Mayor Bell also prioritized early childhood and access to pre-k in the Education Committee’s recommendations. Mayor Bell led the City Council to pass a resolution in support of the creation of a task force to explore expanded access to high-quality pre-k with a vision of universal pre-k for Durham’s children.

(3) All four-year-old pre-kindergarten students in Duval County were invited to join. Free registration was conducted at neighborhood libraries and community centers as well as during a RALLY day at the Jacksonville Zoo in October. The Book Club books are written specifically to develop emergent literacy skills for four-year olds and each book focuses on a different part of the city. Each book also contains a parent page that provides strategies and games for helping children learn the literacy skills emphasized in the book. Each month, the Jacksonville Children’s Commission and Jacksonville Public Library also publish a list of recommended books, songs and rhymes that correspond with that month’s Book Club book. Mayor Peyton also hosted a Book Club show on the local FOX television affiliate station every Saturday morning where he read each month’s Book Club selection

(4) The guide can provide tips on creating a business plan and how to develop a quality childcare center. The economic development department can look for ways to support center owners and their businesses by hosting trainings to help early education centers develop business plans, learn about funding opportunities to improve their centers, and offer professional development for providers.

(5) See Susan B. Neuman and Donna C. Celano (2012), *Giving our Children a Fighting Chance: Poverty, Literacy, and the development of Information Capital*. Columbia University: Teacher’s College Press: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~sbneuman/pdf/givingourchildren.pdf>

(6) “NLC Publishes Case Studies of Educational Alignment for Young Children in Five Cities”: <http://www.nlc.org/media-center/news-search/nlc-publishes-case-studies-of-educational-alignment-for-young-children-in-five-cities>, and “San Jose needs to invest, innovate in 2016”: http://www.mercurynews.com/opinion/ci_29638337/sam-liccardo-san-jose-needs-invest-innovate-2016

(7) This can also be an opportunity to approach the local chamber of commerce as a co-sponsor, and feature business and community leaders who have already made the commitment to support early childhood programs as speakers at roundtables, including conversations on public investment.

(8) “Developing Positive Racial Perceptions in Our Children: Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto and Pitt’s Chief of Staff Kathy Humphrey will discuss findings of a new report on building positive racial perceptions in children,” March 31, 2016: <http://www.news.pitt.edu/news/developing-positive-racial-perceptions-our-children>

(9) High-quality early learning programs are among the most effective supports in bridging gaps and providing the experiences needed to support young children’s success in school and life. See Ahmad, F.Z. & Hamm, K. (2013) *The School Readiness Gap and Preschool Benefits for Children of Color*. Washington, D.C. Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2013/11/12/79252/the-school-readiness-gap-and-preschool-benefits-for-children-of-color/> and Isaacs, J. (2012) *Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children*. Washington, D.C. Brookings Institute: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/03/19-school-disadvantage-isaacs>

(10) *Playbook for becoming an early learning community*, White House (2014): https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/playbook_for_becoming_an_early_learning_community.pdf

(11) Early learning hubs have a strong focus on early education. Parent leadership training programs can generate large dividends in greater parent and family engagement in schools, neighborhoods and communities. In Fort Worth early learning hubs, FFN caregivers were also encouraged to attend not only the parent education programs, but also special monthly sessions that focused on various aspects of caring for others’ children. During these two-hour training sessions, FFN providers discussed topics ranging from child development to business relationships among friends and family. Upon request, childcare consultants also visited FFN caregivers in their homes to offer technical assistance and advice on improving their caregiving.

(12) “SLVHD Launches Nurse-Family Program Partnership Home visitation program to foster prenatal and early childhood health” July 16, 2008: <http://slcohealth.org/media/2008/pdf/20080716.pdf>

(13) This is a good time for new mothers to receive a packet of information and support on breastfeeding, home safety and other topics, referrals to additional resources, and baby- and mom-friendly items such as thermometers, nursing pillows, toys and baby-proofing supplies for the home. Some programs can also offer an in-home appointment with a nurse within the first few days after delivering at the hospital to provide additional information and support.

(14) Strong parental leave policies reduce turnover and ensure that employees are physically and emotionally ready when they return to work. These types of policies help attract and retain a talented city workforce.

(15) Early developmental screenings and intervention treatment services can greatly improve a child’s development. Developmental screenings also promote relationships between families and health care providers and promote healthy behavior and development. City leaders can partner with medical professionals, school administrators, and community partners to provide screenings that detect health and developmental barriers to future learning.

(16) In Boston, Countdown to Kindergarten provides information and support to parents and children. It is a yearlong process that begins in October of the year before the child enters kindergarten. The first step is visiting and choosing schools. Parents are supported with a checklist that helps them know what questions to ask as they look at schools. The next step is registration. Parents are supported with a registration checklist of all the documents they will need to register. After families receive their school assignments, they visit their new school at a welcome session to meet staff and other families. In the months before school starts they can pick up a free Kindergarten Readiness Kit and participate in events for kindergarteners and their families, including neighborhood days and a citywide celebration. Parents are supported with ideas for how to help their children get ready. Outreach is done in several ways, including Play to Learn Playgroups held in schools, early learning centers and community centers around the city.

(17) The funding will include evidence-based training for early care and education staff to engage in effective communication with families.

(18) See Bruner et. al. (2007). Village Building and School readiness: Closing Opportunity Gaps in a Diverse Society. Resource Brief: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network: <http://www.finebynine.org/uploaded/file/VBSR.pdf>

(19) See more on the Denver, CO Five by Five Program here: <https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/office-of-childrens-affairs/school-readiness/the-5-by-5-program.html>

(20) Such efforts may include promoting bilingual education and supports in early learning programming, creating incentives for educators to become certified in bilingual instruction or English as a second language, providing professional development and training to all educators and staff on culturally and linguistically responsive instructional strategies, and ensuring appropriate screening and assessment practices are utilized for young dual language learners. Research points to the multiple cognitive, social, and cultural benefits when young children’s home language is fostered, and that the first five years of a child’s life is an ideal time for learning two languages. See Espinosa, L. (2013) Pre-k-3rd: Challenging Common Myths about Dual Language Learners. New York: Foundation for Child Development: <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Challenging%20Common%20Myths%20Update.pdf> and What Does the Research Say about Dual Language Learners? <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/faqs/dll.htm>

(21) “Pre-K for All: Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña Kick Off First Day of School with Full-Day Pre-K for Every Four-Year-Old”: <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/596-15/pre-k-all-mayor-de-blasio-chancellor-fari-a-kick-off-first-day-school-full-day#/0>

MomsRising.org is an online and on-the-ground grassroots organization of more than a million people who are working to achieve economic security for all families in the United States. MomsRising is working for paid family leave, flexible work options, affordable childcare, and for an end to the wage and hiring discrimination which penalizes so many others. MomsRising also advocates for better childhood nutrition, health care for all, toxic-free environments, and breastfeeding rights so that all children can have a healthy start.

Established in 2006, MomsRising and its members are organizing and speaking out to improve public policy and to change the national dialogue on issues that are critically important to America's families. In 2013, Forbes.com named MomsRising's web site as one of the Top 100 Websites For Women for the fourth year in a row and Working Mother magazine included MomsRising on its "Best of the Net" list.

National League of Cities and the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families: The National League of Cities is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans. NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth and families in their communities. NLC launched the YEF Institute in 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers and other local leaders play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for youth.

The mission of School Readiness Consulting is comprised of one overarching goal: making sure all children, especially those in under-resourced communities, experience an early childhood education that translates to success in school and in life. We impact the lives of young children and their families by partnering states, cities, school districts, non-profit organizations, and foundations in pursuit of improving school readiness. Our comprehensive approach integrates our commitment to social justice and our expertise across practice, strategy, and evaluation to build equitable systems for young children, birth through third grade.