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The Child Care for Working Families Act: A Step Forward for America's Children



Families need access to safe, affordable child care for their children in order to work and children need high-quality care to support their developing brains and to build a strong foundation for their future success in school and in life. Yet quality, affordable child care is beyond the reach of far too many working families. Center-based child care for infants and toddlers is more expensive than public four-year college in 31 states and the District of Columbia. Many low-income families need help to afford care, but only 15 percent of eligible children are able to access a publically-funded subsidy due to insufficient funding. More than 370,000 subsidies were lost between 2006 and 2015.

The Child Care for Working Families Act provides help to families, ensuring every family who needs it can afford high-quality child care for their children. The bill recognizes children need a continuum of support in the earliest years of their lives and in addition to child care subsidies supports universal access to preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds and full-day, full year Early Head Start and Head Start for the poorest children.

To guarantee families have high-quality, affordable child care, the Child Care for Working Families Act:

- Establishes a new partnership between the states and the federal government to ensure no family with an income below 150% of its state's median income pays more than 7 percent of its annual income on child care and that every family eligible for child care assistance receives it. Under this partnership, families with incomes at or below 75% of their state's median income would be exempt from any copays.
- Provides funding and support for states to build tiered systems for measuring the quality of eligible child care providers, including the degree to which the provider meets rigorous and evidence-based standards.
- Invests significant new funding to improve the quality of child care across a variety of settings, including investments in startup and quality improvement grants to prepare providers to participate in their state's tiered system for measuring provider quality described above.
- Maintains an effective and diverse workforce by ensuring child care staff are paid a living wage that wages are comparable to elementary school educators with similar credentials and experience in their state.
- Ensures that states meet the special needs of the most vulnerable children, including children who are homeless or in foster care and children with disabilities.

- Recognizes the critical importance of supporting children during their earliest years of greatest brain development and provides additional funding to states to support providers serving infants and toddlers.

To support states in providing high-quality preschool, the bill:

- Provides grants to states that agree to provide access to high-quality preschool for all children ages 3 through 5 not yet enrolled in kindergarten who live in families with incomes below 150% of the state's median income.
- Requires states to improve transitions between preschool and elementary school, including by establishing or increasing enrollment in full-day kindergarten.
- Promotes quality in preschool by directing funds to local educational agencies, Head Start providers and licensed child care providers that meet the highest tier of the states' tiered system for measuring program quality and by requiring high staff qualifications for teachers, supporting ongoing professional development for preschool teachers and school leaders and requiring salaries for preschool teachers to be equivalent to those of elementary school teachers with similar credentials and experience.
- Requires states to conduct an annual Preschool Equity Review with data on how well preschool programs funded through these grants are serving children with disabilities, low-income children, children of various races and ethnicities, and dual language learners.
- Reserves specific funding for states to correct resource inequities they identified in their preschool programs and expand access to high-quality preschool in high-need school districts.

To support more consistent access to the comprehensive, high-quality services offered by Head Start and Early Head Start programs, the bill:

- Provides grants to Head Start and Early Head Start agencies to provide access to a full school day and full school year of services.

The Child Care for Working Families Act (S.1806 and H.R.3773) was introduced by Senator Patty Murray and Representative Bobby Scott on September 14, 2017.