



**Ms. FOUNDATION**  
FOR WOMEN



# RAISING OUR NATION

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**FORGING A MORE ROBUST AND EQUITABLE  
CHILDCARE SYSTEM IN AMERICA**



**Ms. FOUNDATION**  
FOR WOMEN

The Ms. Foundation for Women is a nonprofit public foundation created to deliver funding and other strategic resources to organizations that elevate women's and girls' voices and solutions across race and class in communities nationwide. Since 1972, the Ms. Foundation has been working to identify and support emerging and established groups poised to act when and where change is needed. Our grants—paired with capacity building, networking and other strategic opportunities—enable organizations to advance grassroots solutions and build social movements within and across three areas: Economic Justice, Reproductive Justice and Safety.

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# **RAISING OUR NATION**

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**DR. SANJAY PINTO**

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# PREFACE

*“The truth is, a job doesn’t necessarily mean an adequate income. There are some ten million jobs that now pay less than the minimum wage, and if you’re a woman, you’ve got the best chance of getting one. Why would a 45-year-old woman work all day in a laundry ironing shirts at 90-some cents an hour? Because she knows there’s some place lower she could be. She could be on welfare. Society needs women on welfare as “examples” to let every woman, factory workers and housewife workers alike, know what will happen if she lets up, if she’s laid off, if she tries to go it alone without a man. So these ladies stay on their feet or on their knees all their lives instead of asking why they’re only getting 90-some cents an hour, instead of daring to fight and complain.*

*...We poor [welfare] women will really liberate... this country.”*

*“Welfare as a Women’s Issue” by Johnnie Tillmon,  
published in Ms. Magazine in 1972.*

Johnnie Tillmon, born in 1926 to a sharecropper family from Arkansas, moved to Compton, California in the 1950s and worked as a laundry worker. Forced to stop working due to illness, she went on welfare to support her children. Her experience navigating the welfare system uncovered the myriad ways black women were bullied, criminalized and pushed out of economic security programs, and would later become the impetus of a revolutionary grassroots movement for welfare rights.

Tillmon would later go on to become the Executive Director of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), a 22,000 family-strong national network whose membership was mostly African American and over 90% women, with local chapters in nearly every major city and state. Today, it is considered the largest grassroots movement in American history that consistently foregrounded women of color and particularly African American women as the drivers of public policy, mobilization, and organizing efforts. The NWRO led massive grassroots campaigns that resulted in changes to childcare regulations, eligibility rules, and other aspects of the welfare system. Moreover, it raised awareness among tens of thousands of poor women, who saw the fractures of the welfare system as a purposeful and racialized attempt to preserve inequality and curb economic security for poor women. For these low-income women, the welfare rights

movement reinforced the idea that childcare was not merely an individual responsibility but part of a deep fabric of public supports that people deserved. The welfare rights movement prospered between the civil rights and women's rights movements. While the struggles and victories of the welfare rights movement are often forgotten in our nation's history, the impact of the NWRO was immense.

The NWRO won numerous measures at the state and local level. They secured public funding for critical food, housing and childcare programs that kept thousands of women off the streets and out of extreme poverty, some of which are still in place to this day. They galvanized thousands of women and paved the way for the passage of the Comprehensive Child Care Act of 1972, which was the result of tireless efforts by education, welfare rights, community development, feminist and civil rights activists. The Child Care Act passed Congress with bipartisan support but was ultimately vetoed by President Richard Nixon.

In addition to advocacy and policy efforts, the welfare rights movement invested in and developed infrastructure for workforce sectors that trade unions consistently overlooked in favor of predominately male and white employment sectors. Included in these efforts were care workers, who despite being central to the functioning of the national economy, lingered at the corners of formal economic analysis, labor statistics and GDP calculations.

Unfortunately and unsurprisingly, these gains were met with extraordinary pushback and were vulnerable to political attack. The result of the opposing forces came to a head with the passing of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, otherwise known as welfare reform, changed the terms of federal aid to the poor and added various work requirements for recipients. These reforms resulted in an influx of tens of thousands of economically disadvantaged women into the workforce, and forced these women to abandon their roles as primary caregivers to their own children and to seek out, in most cases, paid childcare services. Philanthropic organizations and advocates reconstituted themselves around opportunities to improve the quality of low-wage jobs, while the issue of childcare became even more critical.

Today, quality childcare is inaccessible to most families in the U.S. due to the high cost of care. In many cities and states across the country, childcare costs more than rent or mortgage payments. For women and parents in low wage jobs, subminimum wages, lack of paid sick days or family care policies, unpredictable scheduling, and a lack of access to collective bargaining have created a host of new challenges that create barriers

to affordable, accessible, quality childcare. Many mothers working in low wage jobs are forced to reject promotions because a pay increase would compromise their eligibility requirements for childcare subsidies, which were originally intended to help women transition into the workplace and pave a path to economic security. These women navigate an intensely unforgiving and often punitive childcare bureaucracy, all while balancing multiple jobs, paying taxes and voting, struggling with bills and carving out time to care for themselves and their families.



*Johnnie Tillmon addressing a Mother's Day March on Washington, ca. 1968 or 1969. George Wiley sits directly behind her, on the left. Ethel Kennedy looks on.*

On the other side of the coin, childcare providers remain some of the most underpaid workers in the US. Center-based and home-based childcare facilities alike – particularly those serving low-income parents – are dependent on subsidies from the federal and state government to offset the high cost of running a childcare facility. Amid state budget wars that pit funding for vital infrastructure, quality education and childcare against prisons and tax breaks for large corporations, low wages are a direct outcome of the inadequacy of existing subsidies. As poor women, women of color, and immigrant women, childcare workers face myriad challenges. The precarity of their lives makes them vulnerable to sexual harassment, and they are reluctant to speak out because of their dependency on irregular or unregulated employment and meager wages. Many live under the constant threat of law enforcement, deportation, and family separation. Their access to health and reproductive care is often limited, especially now, with religious exemptions being prescribed by employers or the government.

Today, we are at a moment when we must address these multilayered systems failures by working at the nexus of workplace policies and traditional public support systems. In 2012, the Ms. Foundation for Women refocused its economic justice grantmaking and advocacy portfolios on raising the visibility of childcare as central to fair and equitable economic policy as well as a vital work support for many women, particularly those in low wage jobs. Since then, we have assembled a cohort of grantees that represent diverse stakeholders in the childcare sector. They include groups of low-in-

come parents, many of whom are low-wage workers, and groups of family home care providers, domestic workers, and center-based childcare and early childhood professionals, many of whom are parents themselves. These grassroots grantees represent economically disadvantaged women who are racially diverse, from a spectrum of gender orientations and identifications, and variable in citizenship and documentation status. They bring a range of cultural, political, and economic perspectives.

Since we began focusing our efforts in this sector, interest on this issue has grown among elected officials as well as movement leaders. Today, we see a new opportunity to reframe the debate around childcare through a women's economic justice lens. Across the country, we see a new commitment by local legislators to the importance of early childhood education. More funders are interested in supporting work aimed at increasing public subsidies for childcare and appreciate the importance of improving job quality. National networks working on issues of racial and economic justice are mobilizing around this critical sector and thinking through new policy reforms and measures to support the growing care workforce. Unions are investing heavily to ensure that childcare workers have collective bargaining rights and access to quality jobs. Demographic shifts are painting a new picture of the value and importance of women and women of color to our economy and our social justice movements. Grassroots organizations, worker centers and childcare advocacy organizations are working at the intersections of childcare and workplace policies through our funding support. There is an increased level of understanding that an explicit and integrated gender lens must be part of the framing around public policy and advocacy efforts.

The last time childcare was a national issue was in 1972. If we are going to leverage the current momentum, we must ensure that we are building infrastructure at the local and state level that supports women- and women of color-led organizations that do direct organizing and integrate it into every aspect of their policy, research, and economic analysis.

The ingredients are there. Relevant stakeholders are connected. Now is the time to deepen the conversation and support women of color-led organizing efforts.

The Economic Justice program at the Ms. Foundation for Women created this report to be an introductory tool in understanding the childcare landscape. It includes the historical and policy forces that make up the bedrock of childcare policy as it intersects with significant social movements. Finally, it profiles local, statewide, and national organizations that are mobilizing

communities and advocating for change to our national childcare policy.

This report would not have been possible without the research skills and thought partnership of Dr. Sanjay Pinto, who listened to me for countless hours and connected together the research, grantee stories and policy issues that make up the complexity of the American childcare system to compile this report. His attention to detail, representation, and commitment to participatory research was invaluable to this process. Next, to the amazing grantee partners that I have the privilege of working with, thank you for your care, patience, precise and critical analysis of deeply complicated policy problems, and willingness to share your knowledge. Your thoughts helped shape the foundation's work on this issue and sharpened our collective analysis. And finally, to my colleagues on the Programs Team, thank you all for providing insight, feedback, and guidance through the arc of this strategy development, but especially to Naveen Khan for jumping right into this report and driving the process forward. Your hard work, commitment, feedback, agility, adaptability, and meticulous attention to this report have been paramount to its realization.

In solidarity,  
Aleyamma Mathew  
Director, Women's Economic Justice

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America's childcare system needs an overhaul. Many parents do not have access to the childcare they need in order to secure stable employment. Most providers earn low wages, often finding it difficult to make ends meet for their own families. Too many children do not have access to care of the highest quality, with negative consequences for their future prospects and those of our nation. Transforming the American childcare landscape requires new frameworks that cut across existing policy and organizing silos. It also demands changes in the practices of America's employers and a far greater public commitment to developing a more expansive and equitable system.

## Chapter One: Setting the Context

Developing a childcare system that works better for everyone requires confronting inequalities that are deeply rooted in American society. Chapter One examines the gender and racial inequities that the American childcare system both reflects and reinforces.

- Women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities including childcare, particularly in households where they are the sole earners.<sup>i</sup> Childcare access challenges have a particular impact on women's employment decisions and their ability to achieve economic security for themselves and their families.
- Women's role as caregivers and the inadequacies of the American childcare system contribute to gender inequalities in the labor market. Employers discriminate against women due in part to their role as caregivers, and childcare workers and others face low wages that stem in part from the gender-based devaluation of caregiving work.<sup>ii</sup>
- Women of color are highly concentrated in low-wage, unstable jobs and comprise an especially disadvantaged segment of the childcare workforce.<sup>iii</sup> Add to this their lower levels of wealth and higher likelihood of being sole earners, and childcare challenges often have a particular impact on their ability to achieve economic security.<sup>iv</sup>



- Racial politics and racist administrative practices have held back efforts to develop a more expansive and equitable system of childcare in the US.<sup>v</sup> So, too, has opposition to shifting gender norms. In 21st century America, transforming the childcare system goes hand-in-hand with embracing values of racial and gender equality.

## Chapter Two: Defining the Problem

The need for childcare in America is great, and there is a not-so-small army of center-based providers, family providers, and nannies aiming to meet those needs. However, despite the existence of public programs including Head Start, childcare subsidies, and public pre-kindergarten, inadequate resources together with flawed labor market policies lead to serious problems of childcare access, job quality, and childcare quality.

- Many low- and middle-income families are caught in a vicious cycle. Childcare access challenges make it difficult to secure good-quality jobs, while low-paying, unstable jobs prevent parents from accessing the childcare they need.<sup>vi</sup>
- Center-based childcare workers, family providers, and nannies face serious job quality challenges. Despite the valuable work that they do, childcare workers are among the lowest paid in the American economy.<sup>vii</sup>
- Access to high-quality childcare depends too much on how much parents are able to pay. Childcare quality is closely connected to job quality for childcare providers, as low pay and inadequate career ladders dampen incentives for investing in training and education.<sup>viii</sup>

## Chapter Three: Mobilizing for Change

Chapter Three sketches a framework for thinking about the way forward, drawing on the important work being done by Ms. Foundation grantees and other advocates, and focusing on two key goals: changing the frame—i.e., developing capacities and forging alliances that connect the dots among issues of childcare access, job quality, and childcare quality; and expanding the resource base—i.e., increasing public investment while enhancing the role of employers in building the kind of childcare system that America needs. The following are key policy and resource objectives around which policymakers and childcare and worker advocates should align:

### Childcare Access

- Make childcare affordable for all families – Expand eligibility, eliminate waiting lists, and reduce or eliminate co-payments through increased funding for publicly subsidized childcare.



- Broaden the scope of coverage – Expand and coordinate existing childcare programs to make services available all day and all year, to young children of all ages and parents with varying schedules.
- Improve the stability of coverage – Eliminate administrative barriers by allowing for periods of job search and streamlining application and verification procedures. Reduce the “cliff effect” by adjusting income eligibility rules.<sup>ix</sup>

## **Job Quality**

- Increase wages – Raise the floor through increased minimum wage standards, and cultivate high-road employer practices with respect to wages and other working conditions.
- Mandate fair scheduling – Require advance notice of work schedules and pay requirements when workers report to work but are sent home early. Establish the right to request flexible or stable schedules.
- Expand leave requirements – Guarantee and expand access to paid and unpaid family leave as well as paid sick days, ensuring that parents are able to care for children after birth and when they become ill.

## **Childcare Quality**

- Expand access to training for childcare providers – Subsidize higher education and other childcare-specific training for providers, helping them to provide higher-quality childcare services.
- Increase and stabilize pay for childcare providers – Reduce turnover by mandating higher pay and reimbursement rates for providers. Establish wage and career ladders so investments in education are reflected in increased pay.
- Enhance the attention that children receive – Where relevant, reduce child-to-caregiver ratios to the levels recommended by childcare experts, promoting improved safety and higher-quality care.

# INTRODUCTION

Eloise Rossiter is a 29-year-old mother of two living in Richmond, California, which sits just off the San Francisco Bay. In addition to working full-time and raising her boys, she is currently pursuing a college degree, majoring in psychology with a minor in public health. Over the years, issues of erratic work scheduling have hampered Rossiter's ability to secure the childcare she needs, leading her to turn to friends and relatives for help. Eventually, she was able to find a family daycare center that provides good-quality services while accommodating her schedule. Although the cost of this care is significant, a public subsidy has made it more affordable.

Still, Rossiter has found herself caught in a dilemma. In 2014, in her job as a program coordinator at a medical care company, she was offered a promotion that would have brought with it a raise and improved career prospects. It should have been easy to say yes. But, if she did, Rossiter would have lost the subsidy that enables her to pay for childcare, falling victim to what is often referred to as the "cliff effect."<sup>1</sup> In the end, she has had to pass up this and other promotions. "Nobody should ever have to choose between career growth and making sure you have stable childcare," Rossiter recently said in testimony delivered on Capitol Hill.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing that her circumstances are not unique, she has become involved in efforts to increase public childcare support so that she and others like her are not forced into these kinds of impossible choices.

Rossiter's story provides a window into the shortcomings of the American childcare system. As of 2014, there were some 20 million children under the age of 5 in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The vast majority of mothers and fathers with young children work outside the home, and securing stable, good-quality childcare is an urgent necessity for these working parents.<sup>4</sup> But, while public education is available for older children, care for children under the age of 5 is treated to a much greater extent as a private responsibility rather than a public concern.<sup>5</sup> Many parents who need help paying for childcare do not receive any public support, and, like Rossiter, even many who do access government benefits confront serious challenges. The inadequacies of our childcare system continue to constrain the employment

options of large numbers of low- and middle-income parents.<sup>6</sup> In turn, this serves as a barrier to the economic security of their families and undermines the economic vitality of our nation.<sup>7</sup>

Among the large number of parents struggling to secure childcare are many childcare workers. Devoted to caring for and educating the youngest members of our society, this workforce also has an interest in ensuring that they can provide a decent standard of living for themselves and their own families. But, despite the immensely important work that they do, most childcare workers earn low wages.<sup>8</sup> Apart from its basic unfairness, low pay for

childcare providers undermines childcare quality by contributing to high levels of turnover and reducing incentives for investing in training and education.<sup>9</sup> More broadly, it contributes to the development of a low-wage economy, which, in ways that have been well-documented, fuels the kind of economic volatility that recently led us into crisis.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the impact on parents and providers, it is important to underscore how childcare

affects children. High-quality childcare has been shown to have significant positive effects on educational outcomes and career trajectories.<sup>11</sup> Yet, assessments of educational quality show that only a small fraction of paid childcare is of the highest quality.<sup>12</sup> Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are especially likely to derive strong long-term benefits from high-quality childcare.<sup>13</sup> But, in our current system, quality is determined all too much by how much parents are able to pay.<sup>14</sup> To the extent that the inadequacies of our childcare system also contribute to current conditions of economic disadvantage, they must be counted as an important factor in our country's alarming rates of childhood poverty.<sup>15</sup>

There are many compelling reasons to care about childcare in America. Yet, the cold, hard facts of the American childcare system suggest that it is not a national priority. Compared to its peers, the US falls far short in its development of an inclusive, equitable system of high-quality childcare.<sup>16</sup> Recent years have seen some meaningful moves towards changing this state of affairs, including an expansion of public pre-K programs in certain parts of the country. But, given where we are starting from, there is a great deal of work ahead.

The shortcomings of the American childcare system affect us all, but these ill effects are not equally shared. **Chapter One** sets a context for the discussion by probing the gender and racial inequities that the American childcare

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system both reflects and reinforces, adding to the analysis of income-based disparities that is an underlying thread throughout the report. Mothers—including those working outside the home—tend to take on greater childcare responsibilities than fathers.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, a lack of viable childcare options has disproportionate consequences for them. Women also comprise a vast majority of the undervalued and underpaid childcare workforce.<sup>18</sup> Addressing the relationship between childcare and gender inequality entails a dual challenge: Confronting the long-standing gender-based devaluation of women’s paid and unpaid caregiving while countering the notion that childcare is a “women’s issue” that only women should be interested in solving.

Women of color face particular challenges in relation to the American childcare system. They are highly overrepresented in the low-wage economy, and comprise a particularly disadvantaged segment of the childcare workforce.<sup>19</sup> Add to this their lower average levels of accumulated wealth and higher likelihood of being primary breadwinners in their families, and a lack of childcare options often has an outsized impact on their ability to provide for themselves and their children.<sup>20</sup> Race also looms large in the overall historical development of our childcare system. As in many other areas of American social policy, it has all too frequently been used as a wedge, blocking efforts to make childcare a widely accessible public good.<sup>21</sup> Confronting head-on the past and present use of ugly racial politics must play an important part in any large-scale effort to develop a childcare system that better serves low- and middle-income people of all backgrounds.

**Chapter Two** defines, more sharply, key problems of the American childcare system—issues of childcare access, job quality, and childcare quality. The need for childcare in America is great, and there is a not-so-small army of center-based providers, family providers, and nannies aiming to meet those needs. Despite the existence of public programs that seek to extend childcare access to those who would not otherwise be able to afford it, public underinvestment remains the major background condition for the system’s shortcomings.<sup>22</sup> It leaves many parents without the care they need, often propelling them into a vicious cycle of inadequate childcare access and poor job quality. It leaves most providers in poor quality jobs, often struggling to make ends meet. And it prevents most children from being able to access care of the highest quality.

**Chapter Three** concludes the report by sketching a framework for thinking about the way forward, focusing on two key goals and drawing on the important work being done by Ms. Foundation grantees and other advocates. One goal is to change the frame. Organizing and advocacy around issues of childcare access, job quality, and childcare quality often proceed within separate silos. Transforming the childcare system requires the building of new capacities and forging of new alliances that cut across these different domains, driving progress on all of these fronts simultaneously. Developing new frames, however, will only get us part of the way to where we need

to go. Certain questions—e.g., how to improve childcare affordability while raising pay for providers?—can only be fully answered with more resources. The second goal, then, is to expand the resource base, increasing public investment while enhancing the role of the private sector in building the kind of childcare system that American needs. Given our current politics, this task will not be simple. But it is hard to think of a more worthwhile endeavor.

# CHAPTER ONE

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

*The shortcomings of the American childcare system have a wide-ranging social impact, but they do not exact an equal toll on everyone. Low-wage workers and families on the lower end of the income spectrum face a particular set of challenges stemming from the inadequacies of our childcare system—issues that are highlighted throughout the report. This chapter develops a historical context for understanding the ways in which the weak and fragmented nature of our childcare system both reflect and reinforce a larger set of gender and racial inequalities within American society.*

In the decades following World War II, women entered the labor force in large numbers, and increased female labor force participation is an important reason why more families now require paid childcare. The American childcare system has not evolved to accommodate these changing realities, however, and its shortcomings continue to exert a disproportionate impact on women. Even with their growing presence in the labor force, women continue to spend more time than men on domestic tasks. A lack of good childcare options takes a particular toll on women's employment prospects and their ability to strike a balance between work and family.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, women dominate the ranks of the childcare workforce, where they tend to receive low wages based in part on the gender-based devaluation of "women's work."<sup>24</sup>

Understanding these general shifts is important. However, they do not capture the whole story. Economically disadvantaged women, including large numbers of immigrants and women of color, were often compelled to take up paid employment long before the post-War decades, with many of them caring for children as domestic laborers.<sup>25</sup> The role of black women as caregivers dates back to conditions of forced servitude under slavery. Today, women of color comprise an especially disadvantaged segment of the childcare workforce, while facing particular challenges as breadwinners and caregivers for their own families. Race has also been an important factor in the broader fragmentation of the American childcare system, and racial politics remain an ongoing reality that efforts to develop a more robust and equitable childcare system must confront.<sup>26</sup>

## Gender Roles and the Political Economy of Childcare

The scale of the demand for paid childcare in America reflects enormous changes in the gender division of labor within households and in the economy. Half a century ago, a significant majority of American households with children had fathers who worked outside the home and mothers who worked at household tasks including caring for children. Today, more than two out of three mothers are employed outside the home, including many who are the primary or sole breadwinners in their households.<sup>27</sup> These shifts are the single biggest reason why more families now use paid childcare.

The shortcomings of the American childcare system reflect a failure to come to terms with women's growing role as breadwinners, and to fully recog-

**Gender-based devaluation of childcare and other caregiving work is also an important factor in the low pay of the childcare workforce.**

nize the caregiving work that women continue to perform. Childcare is taken for granted as the individual responsibility of women, which is an important reason why it has not become a public policy priority. Gender-based devaluation of childcare and other caregiving work is also an important factor in the low pay of the childcare workforce.<sup>28</sup> Confronting gender inequality and outmoded gender assumptions thus has a crucial role to play in expanding ac-

cess to quality childcare and improving pay and working conditions for childcare providers.

The male breadwinner/female caregiver model of the household has deep cultural and historical roots. In the United States and elsewhere, the industrial revolution promoted a sharpening of the gender division of labor within households, as larger numbers of men took up employment outside the household unit and most women remained at home.<sup>29</sup> A popular turn of phrase—still common today in describing such an arrangement—held that men worked and women did not.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, while the paid labor that men did outside the domestic sphere was seen as work, the unpaid labor that women performed was generally regarded as their filial duty.

The period of time around World War II provided an important impetus for change. Millions of men went off to war, while millions of women were enlisted to work in factories.<sup>31</sup> With large numbers of women taking up



employment outside the home for the first time, providing the supports that would enable them to negotiate this transition became a social policy priority for the US government. There was significant debate over whether women with young children should be drawn into paid employment. But, with the passage of the Lanham Act in 1941, community care facilities were established in “war-impact areas.” The number of these centers fell far short of the targets that had been set, and, when World War II ended, the centers were shuttered and many women went from the factory floor back to their prior domestic roles. But the impact of wartime employment played an important role in transforming women’s roles.<sup>32</sup>

The forty-year period following World War II saw a monumental increase in the proportion of women in the labor force. Female labor force participation rose from 34% to 76% between 1948 and 1990. Moreover, fewer women were leaving the labor force once they had children. At the beginning of this period, most working women either exited the labor force entirely after giving birth or resumed paid employment only after their children were much older. A generation later, a majority of new mothers were back at work with a few months after giving birth.<sup>33</sup>

The rate of change in women’s labor force participation was not constant. During the so-called “golden era” of the 1950s and 1960s, the increase in women’s employment was relatively more gradual, and most families were still organized around a male breadwinner/female caregiver model. During the 1970s and 1980s, the rate of change accelerated significantly, and the majority of families became dual earner households.<sup>34</sup> The reasons are complex, but this surge in women’s employment was fueled in part by a feminist movement that propelled a sea-change in norms around gender roles and “a woman’s place.”<sup>35</sup>

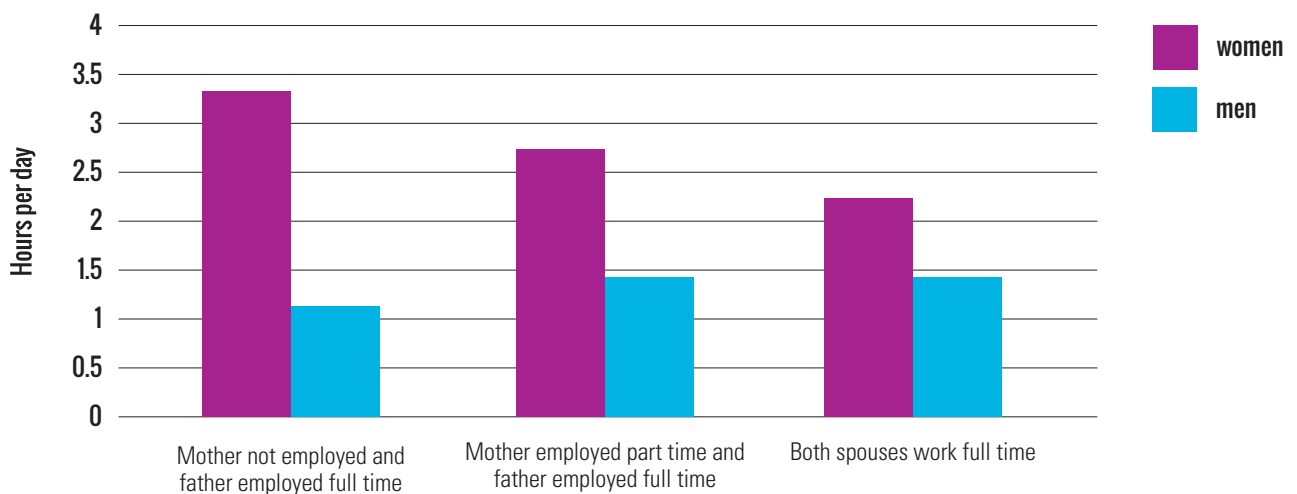
Not everyone supported these changes, however, and opposition to shifting gender norms played a consequential role in stifling the development of the American childcare system. In 1971, the US Senate passed a Comprehensive Child Development Bill by a vote of 63 to 17. The legislation would have established a national network of federally funded childcare centers, with parents paying fees on an income-based sliding scale—a system far more comprehensive than the patchwork we have in place today. President Nixon, however, vetoed the bill. According to historians of the period, this was due in part to Cold War politics, and Nixon’s desire to stand firm against interventions that could be construed as government overreach.<sup>36</sup> But he was also seeking to appease conservatives who were unhappy with increased women’s employment and its role in upsetting “traditional” family relations.<sup>37</sup>

Women’s economic participation continued to increase, however. The growth in female labor force participation did start to level off by the 1990s, but it held steadier than men’s employment, which had begun to decline in the 1970s just as women’s employment trended sharply upward.<sup>38</sup> In recent years, unlike in most other economically advanced countries, women’s em-

ployment in the US has declined somewhat.<sup>39</sup> However, women continue to play a key role in the American labor force. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), they comprise a majority of the workforce in 12 of the 15 fastest growing occupations in the American economy.<sup>40</sup>

Given these shifts, women play a growing role in the economic viability of many households. In 2008, 38.1% of working women married to men earned more than their husbands, as opposed to just 18.7% in 1967. During the Great Recession that followed the financial crisis of 2008-2009, job losses hit male-dominated industries and occupations harder than female-dominated ones, which caused many families to rely more heavily on women's earnings. Recent decades have also seen growth in the number of families in which, apart from child support payments or other family supports, women are the lone earners.<sup>41</sup> In 1960, less than one of every ten children lived with a single mother. By 2010, around a quarter did.<sup>42</sup> Overall, 63.9% of mothers were breadwinners or co-breadwinners within their families as of 2010.<sup>43</sup>

**Figure 1: Gender Differences in Time Spent on Childcare**



*This chart depicts differences in "time spent caring for and helping household children" in households where the youngest child is under the age of 6, showing that mothers spend more time on childcare than fathers. The gap narrows when both mothers and fathers are employed, but it is still significant.*

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. 2009-13 American Time Use Survey. Retrieved from [http://www.bls.gov/tus/tables/a7\\_0913.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/tus/tables/a7_0913.pdf).

Despite their significant presence in the labor force, women continue to take on a greater share of caregiving for family members of all ages, including children (see Figure 1). In families where there is a child under the age of 6, mothers spend significantly more time on childcare than fathers. The difference, narrows when both the mother and father are employed outside the home, but it is still significant (and, given that paid caregivers are predominantly women, care responsibilities are often shifted in these cases onto other women).<sup>44</sup> The disproportionate share of childcare and other household responsibilities that women tend to shoulder has been dubbed the “second shift.”<sup>45</sup> Alongside these general patterns, it is important to recognize the growing phenomenon of stay-at-home fathers, which is discussed in the accompanying sidebar on “Work, Caregiving, and Gender Equality.” Also worth noting is recent evidence that same-sex couples share childcare and other domestic responsibilities more equitably than their straight counterparts.<sup>46</sup>

Working women also continue to face serious disadvantages in the labor market, including a well-documented gender pay gap.<sup>47</sup> They are paid less for doing the same work as men. And they are concentrated in industries and occupations that tend to pay less, all else being equal, than male-dominated industries and occupations—disparities that are due in significant measure to the gender-based devaluation of “women’s work.”<sup>48</sup>

Women’s labor market disadvantages are connected to their role as caretakers, and the inadequacies of the American childcare system. A recent poll found that 61% cited family responsibilities as a reason they were not employed, versus 37% of men.<sup>49</sup> The fact that women’s work lives are more likely to be interrupted by time spent caring for children, elders, and other loved ones is also a factor that influences discriminatory hiring and workplace practices against women in general, contributing to the gender pay gap.<sup>50</sup> And mothers face a “motherhood” penalty over and above the baseline gender pay gap.<sup>51</sup> Rather than being regarded as an essential activity that should be accommodated and supported by all major social institutions, caregiving is often treated as a detriment by employers at the same time that it receives inadequate public support.

A failure to sufficiently value women’s work and their role as caretakers also factors into the low pay of the female-dominated childcare workforce. Women accounted for 96% of the childcare workforce in 2014 (see Figure 2).<sup>52</sup> Their median wage was \$9.77 per hour.<sup>53</sup> According to scholars Paula England, Michelle Budig, and Nancy Folbre, “paid care work often involves the provision of services that women are expected to offer to their families out of love and obligation.”<sup>54</sup> The fact that unpaid care work tends to be taken for granted affects our collective sense of how much it should be valued when it is performed for pay.

**Figure 2: Median Hourly Wage for Childcare Workers and Other Occupations**

<b>Fast Food Workers</b>	<b>\$9.11</b>
<b>Cashiers</b>	<b>\$9.29</b>
<b>Dishwashers</b>	<b>\$9.30</b>
<b>Childcare Workers</b>	<b>\$9.77</b>
<b>Agricultural Workers</b>	<b>\$9.86</b>
<b>Nursing Aides</b>	<b>\$12.26</b>
<b>Bus Drivers</b>	<b>\$14.88</b>
<b>Construction Workers</b>	<b>\$19.72</b>
<b>Software Developers</b>	<b>\$45.23</b>
<b>Dentists</b>	<b>\$76.11</b>

*Despite the highly valuable work that they do, childcare workers are among the lowest-paid occupational groupings in the American economy. Their low pay stems in part from the gender-based devaluation of women's work.*

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. "May 2015 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates." Retrieved from [http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_nat.htm#00-0000](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#00-0000).

In trying to grasp the relationship between gender and childcare in America, it is also important to consider the contours of our political system. When women gained the right to vote in 1920, they challenged the notion that they were simply private beings, there to serve their husbands and care for their families. Alongside their growing economic participation, the rising political participation of women marked another tectonic shift in American society during the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century. For a long time after the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed, women voted at lower rates than men. By 1980, however, women were outvoting men in federal elections—a trend that has continued ever since then.<sup>55</sup> In the 2012 election, 71.4 million women (63.7% of those eligible) voted in the national election, versus 61.6 million men (59.5% of those eligible).<sup>56</sup>

Despite the power they wield at the ballot box, women remain grossly underrepresented within the corridors of government. As of 2012, women accounted for 17.0% of US Senators, 16.8% of members of the US House of Representatives, 23.6% of state legislators, 12.0% of state governors, and 8.0% of the mayors of the country's 100 largest cities.<sup>57</sup> These numbers

look even more startling when the US is compared against other countries. In 2014, the US ranked 98<sup>th</sup> in the world according to one measure of women's political representation, far behind the vast majority of its economically advanced peers.<sup>58</sup>

Women's underrepresentation in elective office has important implications for law and public policy in areas including childcare. For example, there is evidence that female state legislators are significantly more likely to take liberal positions on social welfare-related policy than their male counterparts, even after controlling for party affiliation and other factors.<sup>59</sup> And the presence of women in state-level legislative and executive positions is associated with more "women-friendly" policies, including measures supporting childcare access.<sup>60</sup> Comparing the US and other OECD countries, higher numbers of female legislators are associated with the development of stronger public supports for working parents, including more extensive parental leave provisions and public childcare supports for children under the age of two.<sup>61</sup>

Women's political representation matters for childcare. Childcare issues also appear to shape the conditions of possibility for women's political representation. In the US, women are just as likely as men to win elections. Their underrepresentation in elective office stems from the fact that fewer women run for office in the first place.<sup>62</sup> The 2011 Citizen Political Ambition Study, a survey of individuals deemed to have strong potential as political candidates, found that women are far more likely than men to be responsible for a majority of "childcare and household tasks." As in other sectors, this means that female potential candidates generally have to think about balancing work and family to a much greater extent than their male counterparts.<sup>63</sup>

## **Race, Motherhood, and Caregiving Hierarchies**

The broad narrative sketched above shows that women in general tend to be affected more adversely by inadequate childcare access, that the mostly female childcare workforce is underpaid due in part to the gender-based devaluation of their work, and that gender inequality and changing gender roles figure prominently in how the American childcare system has taken shape. As important as it is to emphasize common threads, however, it is also crucial to develop a perspective that is attentive to the full spectrum of women's experiences as mothers, childcare workers, and shapers of our public policies and social institutions. An "intersectional" perspective of the sort developed by legal scholar and critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw takes us beyond looking at the experience of women in general, giving us a lens for understanding more deeply the fragmentation and inequities of our childcare system.<sup>64</sup>

The male breadwinner/female caregiver model never captured the full range of women's experiences, even at earlier historical moments when it was widely regarded as the norm. Many women worked outside their homes long before

the general uptick in women's labor force participation during the decades following World War II. This included significant numbers of women who worked as domestic laborers in the homes of other families, often providing care for children other than their own. These women, largely new immigrants and/

## **The end of slavery brought change, but it was also marked by significant continuity.**

or women of color, often took on the harder tasks of domestic labor from the generally more privileged, largely white set of women whom they served.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, the notion that women were the "weaker" sex, unfit for the rigors of working outside their homes, did not fully apply to all women.<sup>66</sup> In 1900, non-white women were employed at a rate of 43.2% as opposed to just 17.8% for white women, and this gap had narrowed only slightly by the beginning of World War II.<sup>67</sup>

Black women in particular have a long history of providing care for other families. Under slavery, black families were forcibly torn apart. Black women, subjected to forced labor and worse, often played a key caregiving role for their "masters" even as their own children were sold away or forced to work alongside them from a tender age.<sup>68</sup> The end of slavery brought change, but it was also marked by significant continuity. Up until the start of World War I, the vast majority of black women employed in the South worked as farm laborers or domestic workers. And, as part of the Great Migration that began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, growing numbers of black women took up employment as domestic workers in other parts of the country, even when they had training and education that would have positioned them well for other kinds of work.<sup>69</sup>

Job discrimination, racist administrative practices, and unequal access to training education ensured that African American women and other women of color continued to serve as domestic laborers, while racial politics undermined their capacity to organize for improved conditions. During the Depression era, as described by ethnic and women's studies scholar Evelyn Nakano Glenn, many local officials tasked with assisting the unemployed to find work shuttled black as well as Latina women into domestic work while blocking off other options. In the South, most middle class white families of the time had at least black woman in their employ as a domestic laborer.<sup>70</sup>

Intent on preventing black women and men from building collective power and improving their conditions of work, white Southern Democrats in the US Congress mobilized successfully to exclude both domestic workers and farm workers from the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which established ground rules for unionization and collective bargaining, and the from the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which set wage-and-hour standards.<sup>71</sup> Today, domestic workers continue to be excluded from the NLRA. Although the FLSA was amended to include domestic workers in 1974, important exemptions re-



main—e.g., live-in domestic workers are not covered by overtime protections.<sup>72</sup>

Different groups of women of color and immigrant women have been tracked into domestic work in varying but parallel ways. According to Glenn, in San Francisco and Honolulu during the period leading up to World War II, “close to half of all immigrant and native-born Japanese women in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Honolulu were employed as servants or laundresses.” Japanese and Chinese women were often forced to serve as domestic laborers in the homes of their husbands’ and fathers’ plantation bosses. In the Southwest, many Chicana women worked as domestic laborers, and “[u]rban school systems...tracked Chicana students into homemaking courses designed to prepare them for domestic service.”<sup>73</sup>

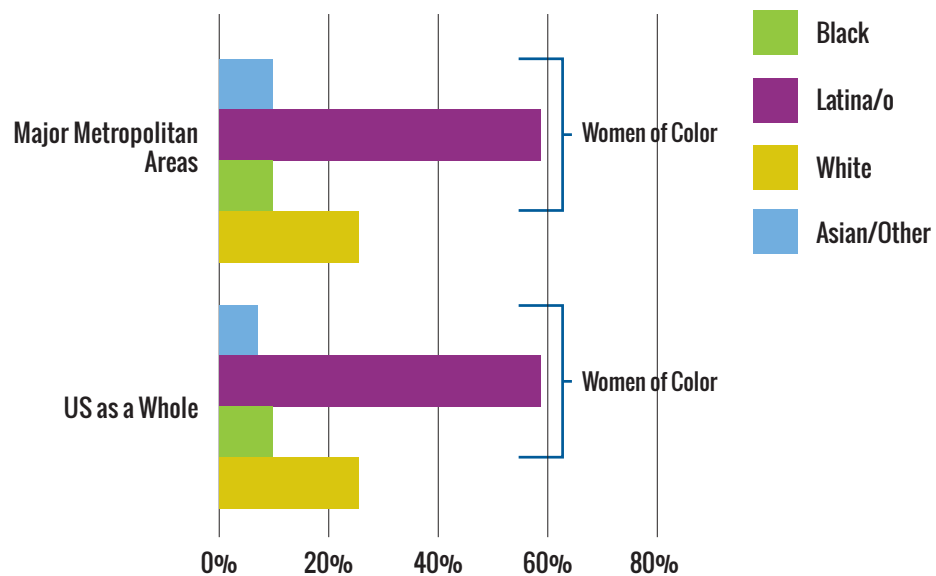
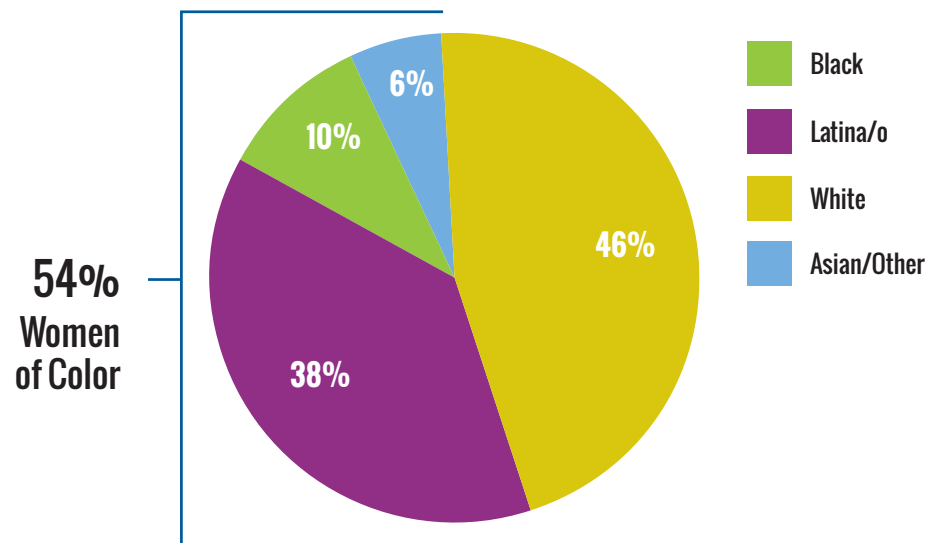
Today, a majority of domestic workers—nannies, housecleaners, and homecare providers—are women of color, and nearly half are immigrants (see Figure 3).<sup>74</sup> Even while providing other women with a reprieve from domestic responsibilities and the ability to balance work and family on their own terms, many nannies and other domestic workers struggle to make ends meet for their own families. The legacy of racial exclusion that is written into federal laws including the NLRA and FLSA continues to hamper their ability to organize and seek redress for unfair treatment. Many also face fresh forms of discrimination and exploitation based on race, gender, and immigration status. For example, a survey conducted by the National Domestic Worker Alliance showed that immigrant domestic workers earn particularly low wages.<sup>75</sup> This can be attributed in part to the notion among employers that even very low wages are a step up from what immigrants were earning in their home countries.<sup>76</sup>

The demographic profile of nannies and other domestic workers, their conditions of work, and the difficulties they face in organizing for improved conditions speak to broader experiences of women of color in the American economy. While white women earned 75 cents for every dollar earned by non-Hispanic white men in 2014, black women earned 60 cents and Latina women earned 55 cents.<sup>77</sup> Many groups of Asian American women also lag far behind non-Hispanic white men, with Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Nepali women coming in at 60 cents, 59 cents, 55 cents, and 54 cents, respectively.<sup>78</sup> Looking generally at the childcare workforce, there is evidence that women of color are particularly disadvantaged—e.g., a larger share of black, Latina, and Asian childcare workers use public support programs than white childcare workers (for more on this, see the section in Chapter Three on “Organizing for a More Equitable Childcare System”).<sup>79</sup>

A 2015 analysis by the National Women’s Law Center found that women of color are much more highly overrepresented in low-wage occupations than their white counterparts. White women account for 34% of workers in occupations with median wages of \$10.50 or less, as opposed to 31% in the workforce as a whole. This gap is far more pronounced for black women (11% in low-wage occupations versus 6% in the workforce as a whole);



**Figure 3: Ethnoracial Background of Domestic Workers**



*Historically, women of color and immigrants have comprised a large share of domestic workers. Today, as shown above, a majority of domestic workers are women of color (54%). Nearly half (46%) are foreign born.*

Source: Burnham, L., and Theodore, N. (2012). *Home economics: The invisible and unregulated world of domestic work*. National Domestic Workers Alliance.

Hispanic women (15% versus 7%); Asian, Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander women (4% versus 3%); and American Indian, Alaska Native women (.8% versus .4%).<sup>80</sup> By virtue of working hourly job at higher rates than white women, women of color are also more likely to face problems such as erratic scheduling that make it difficult to earn a steady income.<sup>81</sup>

The disadvantages experienced by women of color stem at least in part from the combined effects of race and gender in creating barriers within the labor market and ensuring that the work done by women of color is particularly undervalued. These realities pose a challenge for contemporary feminist politics. To the extent that racial hierarchy helps well-off women to balance work and family through the cheap labor provided by others, confronting racism is essential to any project that aims to resolve this troubling contradiction and fully overturn the devaluation of women's work.<sup>82</sup>

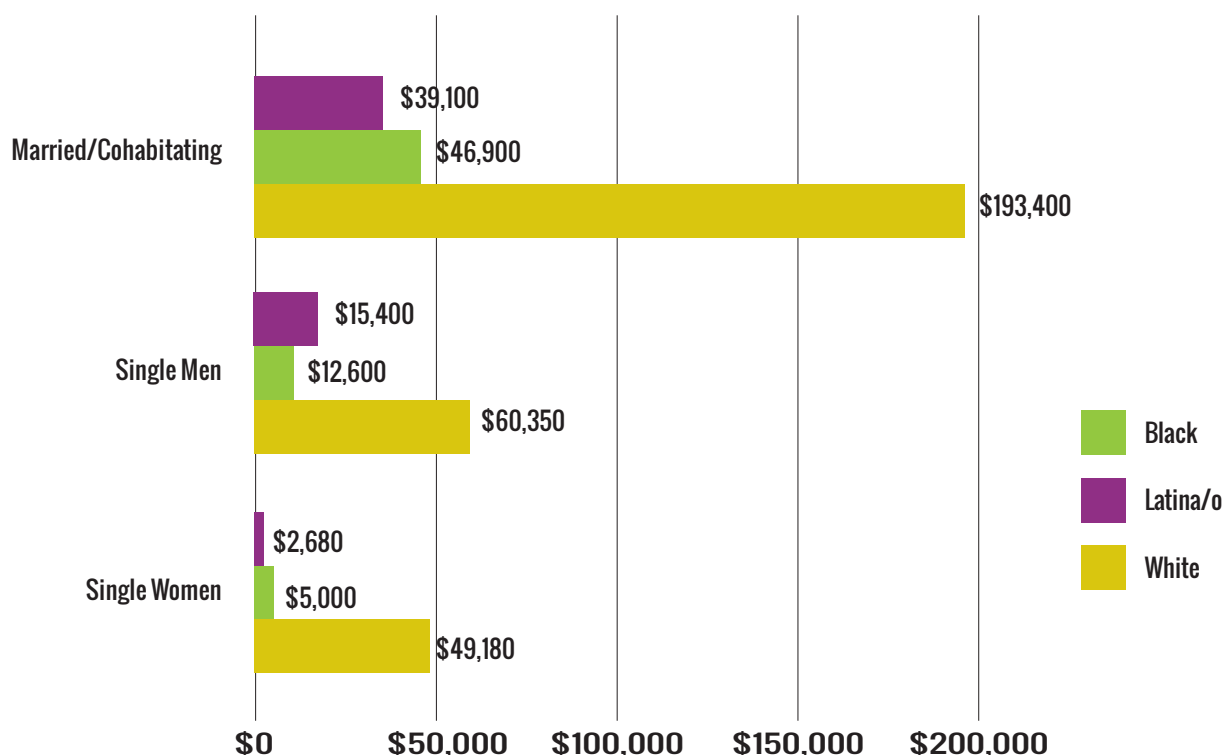
Women of color also face particular challenges in being able to care for their own children. Low-paying, poor-quality jobs make it difficult to support a family and afford the childcare they need. Black and Latina women are significantly more likely than white women to be the lone and/or primary earners in their households, adding to difficulties of balancing work and care while making ends meet.<sup>83</sup> As seen in Figure 4, black and Latina women are also generally at a significant wealth disadvantage.<sup>84</sup> Wealth serves as a buffer against uncertainty, and low levels of wealth mean that they often have virtually no cushion to fall back on if the need ever arises.

Historically, while women of color have often served as caregivers to others, there are important ways in which they have been excluded from public supports enabling them to provide care for their own families. "Maternalist" reformers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century sought to ensure that mothers—particularly single mothers—would be able to care for their children, and the US was an early adopter of related public programs, starting with the development of mother's pensions in the early 1900s.<sup>85</sup> In practice, however, these supports have not been equally available to all women who need them. Women of color and divorced or never-married mothers were routinely denied assistance because they were considered unworthy.<sup>86</sup>

After the modern American social welfare system crystallized in the 1930s, case workers proceeded to deny benefits to women of color at significantly higher rates than white women.<sup>87</sup> In line with the differential construction of womanhood, white women were more often deemed worthy of answering their calling as mothers on a full-time basis, while black women and other women of color were seen as being better-suited for laboring outside the home. In the 1960s, the welfare rights movement led by economically disadvantaged black mothers around the country challenged the discretionary power of caseworkers to deny benefits and pushed for legislators to increase overall benefit levels.

Although the welfare rights movement won some important victories, there was a significant backlash to come, paving the way for a large-scale transformation of the social welfare system under President Bill Clinton in 1996.<sup>88</sup>

**Figure 4: The Wealth Gap Facing Black and Hispanic Women**



*This chart shows differences in median household wealth for people aged 18-64 in 2007. In addition to facing significant wage gaps, black and Hispanic women also confront significant wealth gaps relative to other groups. Given that black and Hispanic women with children are also more likely than other parents to be the sole earners in their households, this often poses particular challenges in making ends meet.*

Source: Chang, M. (2010). "Lifting as We Climb: Women of Color, Wealth, and America's Future." Oakland, CA: Insight Center for Community Economic Development. Retrieved from <http://www.mariko-chang.com/LiftingAsWeClimb.pdf>.

During the 1970s and 1980s, President Ronald Reagan famously cast black single mothers as "welfare queens" who were taking advantage of government support.<sup>89</sup> This highly distorted portrayal ignored many basic facts—e.g., the higher labor force participation rates of black versus white women.<sup>90</sup> Drawing attention away from the ongoing realities of structural racism, including labor market discrimination, underinvestment in urban schools, and the unequal application of criminal justice, it sought to pin blame for poverty and urban blight on the choices of low-income black women and men.

Race and racial politics have also contributed to a fragmentation of America's system of paid childcare. As noted above, conservative opposition to evolving gender roles and norms played a part in Nixon's veto of the Comprehensive Child Development bill of 1971. Fresh off the Civil Rights movement, opposition to shifting race relations and the push for school

desegregation also entered into his calculus and that of the team he had around him. Nixon adviser Patrick Buchanan voiced these racial anxieties in surprisingly candid terms. “What we don’t want,” Buchanan said at the time the childcare bill was being debated, “is a national system of daycare centers where the clowns at HEW [the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] can set down their guidelines as to...what the racial make-up of each center ought to be.”<sup>91</sup>

If Nixon’s veto of the Comprehensive Child Development bill turned back America’s best chance thus far at constituting childcare as public good for all who need it, the use of a “block grant” approach to federal funding during his tenure helped to further fragment the American childcare system.<sup>92</sup> By promoting a devolution of control over the use of resources from the federal to the state and local level, the use of block grants set the stage for wide variation in the availability of quality childcare for low- and middle-income families.<sup>93</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three, state and local discretion can be and frequently is marshaled for progressive purposes. Too, often, however, the outcome has been precisely the opposite. As any discerning student of American history knows too well, the doctrine of “state’s rights” has been used as cover for state and local leaders to block attempts at promoting racial equality, and this is starkly evident in our childcare landscape.

Mississippi serves as a good example of how state discretion has been used to limit childcare access via federal block grant subsidies rather than expanding it to benefit the maximum number of families possible. Mississippi is one of the poorest states in the country, and African Americans are highly overrepresented among low-income residents of the state. With large numbers of low-income parents seeking out work that will improve the economic fortunes of their families, the scale of the need for childcare is great.<sup>94</sup> Yet, according to testimony delivered by Carol Burnett of the Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative to the US Commission on Civil Rights, the number of families that are served by Child Care and Development Block Grants has declined sharply in recent years, reaching less than 15% of eligible Mississippi families.<sup>95</sup>

Mississippi’s Department of Human Services (DHS) has created significant administrative hurdles for those seeking subsidies. It has also used a substantial portion of CCDBG funds to implement measures aimed at tracking and surveilling subsidy recipients even though evidence of fraud in the system is scant. Notwithstanding the careful use of race-neutral language in describing its policies and practices, the tilt of the DHS’ administrative apparatus is quite clear. Rather than enabling those who need childcare assistance to gain access, it casts suspicion and questions their worthiness at every turn.<sup>96</sup> In December of 2015, the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the US Commission on Civil Rights issued an advisory memorandum reviewing allegations of racial bias in the state childcare system, finding that the DHS “has imposed a number of discretionary requirements which may unnecessarily

restrict the families in greatest need from accessing quality, affordable child care—primarily in low-income communities of color.”<sup>97</sup>

Women of color have a significant stake in transforming America’s childcare system, and, in important ways, they hold significant power to help drive this change. In recent years, women of color have been at the forefront of advocacy efforts aimed at extending access to quality childcare and improving job quality for childcare providers (for more on some of these efforts, see the sidebar in Chapter Three). Despite a long history of barriers to exercising their right to vote, women of color also wield considerable influence at the ballot box.<sup>98</sup> In the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections, black women had a higher voting rate than any other comparable demographic group (70.1%). API and Latina women voted at lower rates than white women, but at higher rates than men of the same ethno-racial background. And, due to demographic trends, the power of women of color at the ballot box is only rising. As noted by Maya Harris, women of color accounted for 74% of the growth in eligible women voters between 2000 and 2014.<sup>99</sup>

Still, women of color continue to face considerable obstacles in the political arena. They are even more underrepresented in government than their white counterparts. For example, in 2012, despite comprising 36.3% of the female population in the US, women of color accounted for just 20.1% of female state legislators and 14.9% of female state executives. There were no women of color in the US Senate and only two serving as mayors of the nation’s 100 largest cities.<sup>100</sup> Women of color are also underrepresented—even more so than their white counterparts—in the leadership ranks of corporations, unions, NGOs and other organizations that shape the political process. Given the role of money in our political system, low-income women of color face particular challenges exercising voice in the political arena, and amplifying their voices is crucial to changing the conversation around childcare and a host of other important issues of our time.

Addressing the ways in which gender and race continue to shape our labor market and social policy landscape is essential to developing a childcare system that works better for everyone. Mothers have much to gain from improved access to quality childcare, but so do fathers seeking to balance work and family. Low-income women of color have a particular stake in improving the affordability and accessibility of childcare, but so do low-income white women who suffer as well from the ways in which racism and racial politics have been used to fragment and weaken our childcare system. Given the role that a robust and inclusive childcare system can play in boosting short- and long-term outcomes for parents, children, and our sizable childcare workforce, we all have a stake in transforming our childcare landscape. As this chapter has shown, constituting childcare as a universal public good requires coming to grips with inequalities that are deeply rooted in American society. Only by confronting these realities head on will it be possible to forge a childcare system that better serves us all.

# WORK, CAREGIVING, AND GENDER EQUALITY

Feminist scholar Nancy Fraser offers a vision of what gender equality might look like in relation to issues of work and family.<sup>101</sup> Taking the male breadwinner/female caregiver model as a point of departure, she describes two common alternatives perspectives before articulating a third approach that, in her view, lays a stronger basis for achieving gender equality.

- The **“caregiver parity”** perspective assumes that women are different from men in being more apt to take on greater childcare responsibilities, and suggests that an understanding of this difference should guide policy and organizing in the direction of placing greater value on caregiving. The act of mothering and caring for elders and other dependents should be duly recognized and rewarded. One implication that often follows from this perspective is that the unpaid care work done by women should be compensated, and this idea is reflected in the social policy of many European societies.

The caregiver parity view challenges the idea that the caregiving roles which women often perform should be regarded as a detriment. But it also runs certain risks. Seeing caregiving as an “essential” women’s role, and configuring policy and organizing to support this role, can end up narrowing the range of options open to women. It often leaves unaddressed dynamics of gender inequality within the labor market, including the ways in which women’s caregiving roles translate into labor market disadvantage.

- The **“universal breadwinner”** perspective asserts that men and women are much more similar than we commonly think, and suggests that policy and organizing should be geared toward providing women with equal opportunities to pursue breadwinning activities. Rather than trying to accommodate women’s differences, this view tends to focus on ensuring that women and men are treated the same within the arena of paid employment. A common aim of this view is to challenge the gender pay gap, including occupational segregation and the ways in which women are paid unequally for doing the same work as men.

Although the universal breadwinner perspective helps to challenge the second class status of women in the labor market, it, too, tends to suffer from certain blind spots. A narrow version of this view fails to recognize that accommodating differences—e.g., not penalizing mothers for taking leave—can be an important means of ensuring equal treatment. More broadly, it often neglects the need for change beyond the confines of the

labor market. Even if women and men are treated equally at work, the fact that women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of household labor needs to be addressed.

- A “**universal caregiver**” view takes the best of both of these perspectives while avoiding the pitfalls of each. It asserts the value of caregiving and breadwinning, and seeks to forge a set of conditions under which women and men are able to share equally in both. The aim of this perspective is not to dictate an equal sharing of caregiving and breadwinning in every instance. Instead, the goal is to ensure that both men and women are able to choose how they balance caregiving and breadwinning activities. For single parents, this means creating a system that values their caregiving work while removing barriers to full economic participation.

Moving toward this kind of model in practice is a matter of culture change and well-designed social policy. In Sweden, for example, working parents are entitled to 480 days of parental leave for each child, which includes two months that the father must use or lose—a policy innovation that has helped to promote a more equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities between men and women.<sup>102</sup> The US has seen a well-documented increase in the number of stay-at-home fathers in recent decades, and reforming parental leave and other policies would help to ensure that both mothers and fathers are better able to choose how they balance breadwinning and caregiving responsibilities.<sup>103</sup>

Given contemporary political realities, the possibility of moving towards a universal caregiver model in the American context might seem rather distant. But the model remains useful as one guidepost around which efforts to promote gender equality might be oriented.



# CHAPTER TWO

## DEFINING THE PROBLEM

*The childcare needs of parents are great, and there is a large workforce of center-based providers, family providers, and nannies seeking to meet these needs. Although there are public programs that help to extend childcare access to low- and middle-income families, public underinvestment leaves many parents without the childcare they need, often propelling them into a vicious cycle of inadequate childcare access and poor job quality. A lack of public support also relegates most providers to low-paying and insecure jobs, often struggling to make ends meet. And it prevents most children from being able to access care of the highest quality.*

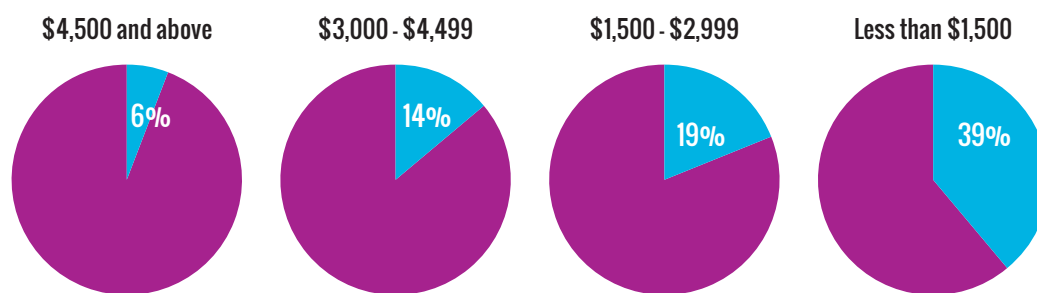
*The news is not all bad, however. As detailed in Chapter Three, there are important efforts at the local, state, and federal level that seek to transform these realities. Before looking toward possible solutions, however, it is important to first understand the problems facing both parents and providers. This chapter explores the fragmentation and complexities of the childcare system that have led to its failure to adequately meet the needs of contemporary America.*

### Childcare Needs and Different Forms of Care

As of 2015, there are some 19.8 million children under the age of 5 in the United States, and about a third of these are in some form of paid childcare.<sup>104</sup> Public education is widely available for older children. However, despite the existence of public supports, including the growth of public pre-K programs, care and education for children under 5 is largely treated as a private responsibility rather than a public concern.<sup>105</sup> Securing stable, quality childcare arrangements is a key priority for working parents—usually the single most important factor in their attempts to strike a desired balance between work and family.

Childcare in America is expensive. Nationally, the average cost of center-based childcare in 2013 was nearly \$11,666 per year, according to National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies.<sup>106</sup> A 2015 report by the Economic Policy Institute found that infant care, which is particularly expen-

**Figure 5: Variation in Relative Spending on Childcare by Family Income**



*This chart shows income-based differences in relative monthly spending on childcare. The data are for families with mothers present and children under the age of 15 in the year 2011. Although families with lower incomes pay less in absolute terms, these costs comprise a much greater share of their total income.*

Source: Laughlin, L. (2013). "Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2011." U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p70-135.pdf>.

sive, costs more on average than in-state college tuition in 33 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>107</sup> These costs have also been rising rapidly. An analysis by the Brookings Institution of data comprising the Consumer Price Index found that, between 1990 and 2013, childcare prices grew at twice the rate of the median wage.<sup>108</sup> This is true despite the fact that wage rates for childcare workers remain extremely low—a problem discussed at greater length below.

Childcare costs pose particular challenges for many low-income families. For families with a mother present and monthly income of \$4500 or above, childcare costs comprised 6% of total monthly income as of 2011. For families with a mother present and a monthly income of less than \$1500, these costs accounted for 39% of total income (see Figure 5). Lower income families tend to pay less in absolute terms, but these costs account for a much greater proportion of their total income.<sup>109</sup> For many low- and middle-income families, finding affordable childcare is a key factor in achieving basic economic security.

Due in large part to the high cost of childcare, families on the lower end of the income spectrum are significantly more likely to rely on unpaid arrangements with grandparents or other friends and family than higher-income families.<sup>110</sup> The instability of these arrangements can often create difficulties for parents—e.g., if the care provider becomes ill or finds a new job.<sup>111</sup> Those providing care may also find that doing so constrains their own employment and career prospects—a spillover effect of inadequate childcare access that warrants greater attention.

Parents who obtain paid childcare services use a range of different kinds of arrangements, which can be divided into three basic categories (see Figure 7)<sup>112</sup>:

## Figure 6: Different Forms of Childcare

**Childcare centers** offer services in an institutional setting – i.e., one outside the homes of parents or providers.

**Family childcare** refers to services that are offered from within the homes of providers (who may also hire others to assist them).

**Nannies** offer childcare services within the homes of parents (or, in some cases, other caretakers such as grandparents).

**Childcare centers** capture this biggest segment of the childcare market. Of children under age five who are in childcare that is not provided by a relative, more than two-thirds are in organized care facilities (see Table 1a).<sup>113</sup> Some of these are daycare centers which operate year-round and are largely private, serving children ages 0-4. Others are preschools, operate according to the school calendar, and can be either public or private, generally serving children ages 3 and 4. As of 2012, there were around 120,000 childcare centers in the US.<sup>114</sup>

Overall, data from the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) show that parents in higher income brackets are more likely to use childcare centers (see Table 1b). Given the high cost of center-based childcare, this does not come as a surprise. Focusing just on those who pay for childcare, parents in different income brackets are equally likely to use center-based childcare (see Table 1c). As discussed below, government programs including Head Start help to offset the cost of childcare for many low-income families.

**Family childcare** refers to a range of childcare services that are offered from within the homes of providers, including “regulated” and “unregulated” arrangements. Many family providers care for their own children at the same time that they offer services to other parents.<sup>115</sup> Regulated family childcare is subject to more stringent licensing procedures that are set by states and determine the maximum number of children and hours for which providers are allowed to offer care. Unregulated family childcare providers—also known as “family, friend and neighbor,” or “FFN” providers—generally provide care to fewer children, though regulations vary by state.<sup>116</sup>

Family childcare arrangement often furnish parents with a lower-cost alternative to center-based care, and they also cater to the needs of those with non-standard work schedules—e.g., those parents who work the second or third shift.<sup>117</sup> Among those who pay for care, the SIPP data show that usage

of family childcare is similar across the income spectrum, apart from a lower rate among the top 10% (see Table 1c). However, this dataset does not include paid relatives in the category of family providers, and there is evidence suggesting that low-income families are more likely to rely on paid care by relatives.<sup>118</sup>

**Nannies** provide care to a significant number of parents in their own homes (or, sometimes, as in the case of “nanny share” arrangements, in the homes of friends or family members with children). While large numbers of parents hire babysitters to care for their children on occasion, nannies provide care on a regular, often full-time basis. In some cases, nannies live in the homes of the families for whom they provide services. Around a tenth of parents who pay for childcare enlist the services of a nanny.

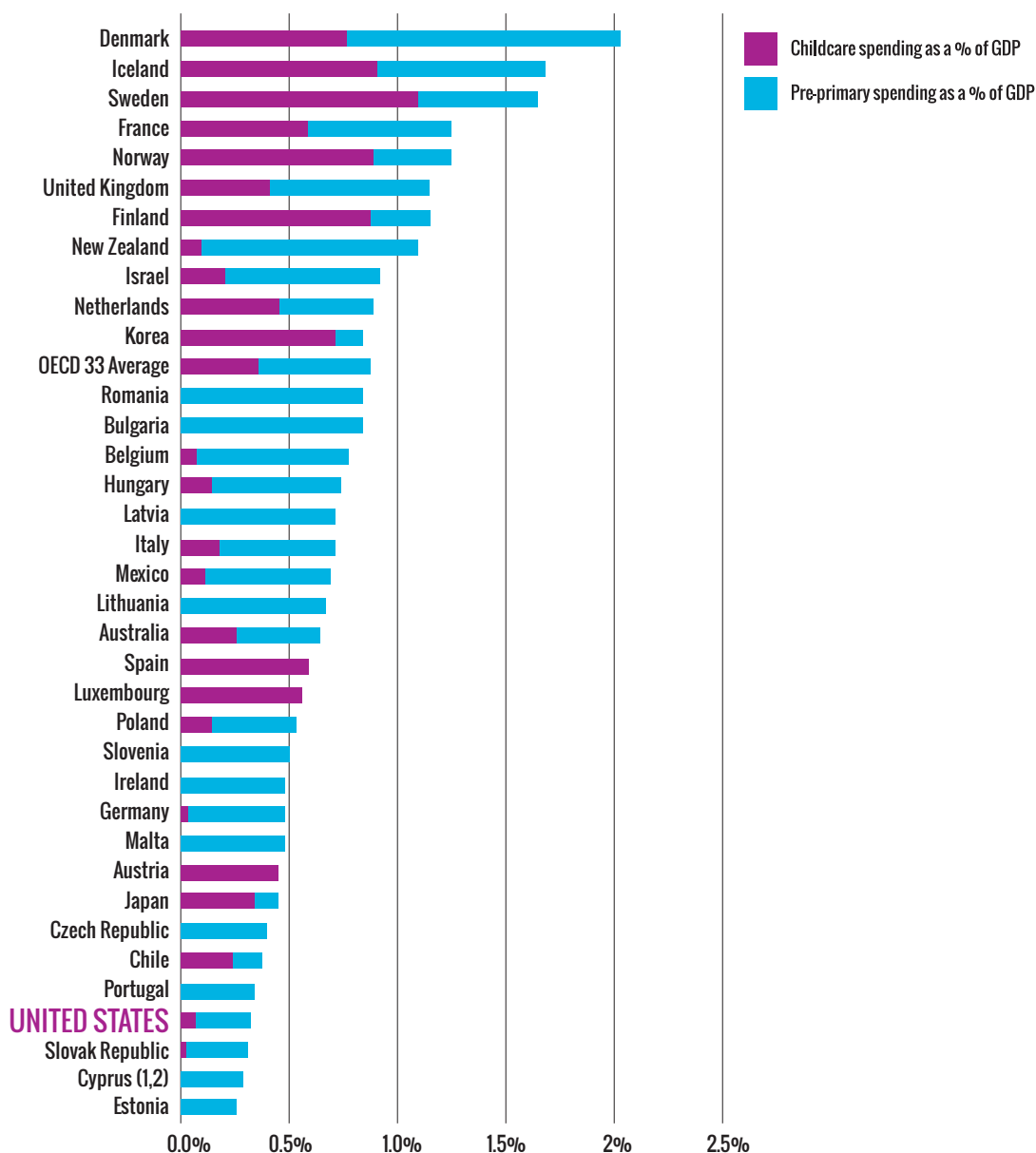
Parents with higher incomes are significantly more likely to hire nannies, which is often beyond the means of those without significant economic resources. While there are public programs that help some families on the lower end of the income spectrum to access center-based and family childcare, these programs do not support the hiring of nannies.

## Public Childcare Supports

There are three main forms of government financial support for childcare: public early education programs, subsidies, and tax benefits.<sup>119</sup> With total expenditures that amount to tens of billions of dollars per year, many public programs help to extend access to families on the lower end of the income spectrum. Still, all too many parents have unmet childcare needs. Viewed in the context of overall spending on public primary and secondary education, which totaled nearly \$600 billion in 2013, childcare spending is low. As seen in Figure 8, the US continues to rank far behind most of its peers in public spending on childcare and early education.<sup>120</sup> Despite the important programs that are in place, childcare in America is still far from being the universally accessible public good that it should be.

- **Public early education programs** provide center-based childcare, often extending access to families that would not otherwise be able to afford it. Head Start is by far the largest publicly funded early education program, with nearly a million children served in 2014, and some \$8.5 billion in total public expenditures, most of it coming from the federal government.<sup>121</sup> Founded in 1965 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “Great Society,” Head Start programs aim to improve educational and life outcomes for low-income children.<sup>122</sup> Head Start centers primarily serve children from families below the federally defined poverty line, and there is research showing that enrollment has positive effects on children’s cognitive, socio-emotional, and health outcomes.<sup>123</sup> Unlike the childcare subsidies discussed below, access to Head Start does not depend on parental engagement in training, education, or paid employ-

**Figure 7: Childcare & Pre-Primary Spending as a Share of GDP**



*Public spending on childcare and pre-primary education is far lower in the US than in most of its peer countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Data in this chart reflects "all public financial support (in cash, in-kind or through the tax system) for families with children participating in formal daycare services (e.g., crèches, day care centres and family day care for children under 3) and pre-school institutions (including kindergartens and day-care centres which usually provide an education content as well as traditional care for children aged from 3 to 5, inclusive)."*

Source: OECD Family Database, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF3\\_1\\_Public\\_spending\\_on\\_childcare\\_and\\_early\\_education.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF3_1_Public_spending_on_childcare_and_early_education.pdf).

ment. Still, there are a number of ways in which Head Start programs provide incomplete access for low-income parents. The fact that the poverty line is set at a very low level—around \$17,000 for a family of three—means that a large number of low-income families do not qualify. Moreover, states are not legally required to serve all children who do qualify, and a recent survey by the Government Accountability Office found that 90% of Head Start centers had waiting lists.<sup>124</sup> Head Start programs also tend to be limited in scope to part-day care for 3- and 4-year-olds. Many centers do extend care beyond these parameters, serving younger children and providing services for longer hours, but this expanded access is highly uneven.<sup>125</sup> Pre-K programs at the state and local levels also play an important role in the childcare landscape. Many extend center-based daycare to families across a variety of income levels, though most also use some form of income eligibility to determine enrollment. . As of 2014, there were a total of 53 state-funded pre-K programs in 40 states and the District of Columbia, with total state spending of over \$5.5 billion.<sup>126</sup> <sup>127</sup> Local-level pre-K funding is more difficult to quantify, but likely amounts to around one-tenth of state-level funding.<sup>128</sup> In 2015, there were 13 states that required localities to providing matching funds.<sup>129</sup> Local efforts can also be bolstered by state and federal support. In 2014, the New York state legislature approved \$1.5 billion over five years to support New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio’s pre-K program, through which his administration seeks to provide a full day of center-based care for all four-year-olds in the city who need it.<sup>130</sup>

- **Childcare subsidies** are another important form of public childcare support. The Childcare and Development Block Grant program, which was created in 1990 and provides states with childcare grants, is the primary source of subsidized childcare, with \$7.4 billion in joint federal and state expenditures and nearly 1.5 million children served monthly in 2013.<sup>131</sup> Funding for block grants comes from the Child Care and Development Fund and, to a lesser extent, from Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) , the central legislative piece of welfare reform in 1996. The workings of CCDBG subsidies are closely tied to the logic of welfare reform and the goal of moving people from welfare to work, as access to subsidies generally depends on proof of employment or enrollment in a qualifying training or education program.<sup>132</sup> Unlike Head Start or pre-K programs, childcare subsidies are used in relatively equal measure to serve children in different age ranges from birth all the way up to 12 years of age, and they can be used to fund center-based as well as family childcare.<sup>133</sup> Access to childcare subsidies is also available to parents of higher income levels than Head Start—up to 85% of the state median wage, according to federal rules. However, as reported by the National Women’s Law Center, a large number families that are eligible for CCDBG subsidies often remain on waiting lists, and eligibility thresholds vary widely across different states.<sup>134</sup> Accord-



ing to a September 2015 report by the Center for Law and Social Policy, the number of children served by CCDBG subsidies in 2013 was at its lowest level since 1998.<sup>135</sup> There is also significant variation in co-payment levels and other program parameters, with many states requiring out-of-pocket payments that push the limits of affordability even for those who receive subsidies.<sup>136</sup>

- **Tax benefits** enable parents to deduct a portion of what they spend on childcare from their taxable income. The Childcare and Dependent Tax Credit (CDTC) allows families to deduct between 20 and 35 percent of their childcare spending, while the Dependent Care Assistance Program allows employees of participating companies to funnel a portion of their income into a tax-free account dedicated to paying for childcare. In 2006, CDTC tax benefits that were used to pay for childcare amounted to \$3.2 billion and DCAP benefits totaled \$600 million. More than half of all states currently provide additional care-related tax benefits that can be used to help pay for childcare.<sup>137</sup> Unlike public early education programs and childcare subsidies, tax benefits tend to flow to families with higher incomes. Because care-related tax benefits are generally non-refundable, lower income families that do not pay any income tax are not eligible, with middle- and upper-income families making between \$75,000 and \$200,000 tending to receive the largest benefits.<sup>138</sup> However, there are some state level care-related tax benefits that target lower income families by setting income eligibility limits at significantly lower thresholds.<sup>139</sup>

## A Vicious Cycle for Parents: Poor Job Quality and Inadequate Childcare Access

By allowing so many parents who need childcare to fall through the cracks, the existing childcare system in the US contributes to a vicious cycle for many families on the lower end of the income spectrum (see Figure 8). Inadequate childcare access makes it difficult to secure good jobs, while low-paying, unstable jobs prevent parents from being able to access the childcare they need. As long as many parents must shoulder part or all of the costs of securing the childcare they need, issues of job quality will figure prominently in efforts to expand childcare access, and vice versa.

There are a number of Job Quality issues that contribute to childcare access difficulties for many parents. These include the following:

- **Low wages** are clearly a key factor for many parents when it comes to childcare affordability. While the rich have gotten richer, wages for workers at the bottom and middle of the distribution have stagnated since the 1970s.<sup>140</sup> And those at the bottom are now significantly worse off relative to the median when compared to America's peers.<sup>141</sup> Together with rising costs and inadequate public supports, low wages are another important factor explaining why childcare accounts for a large share of many family budgets.



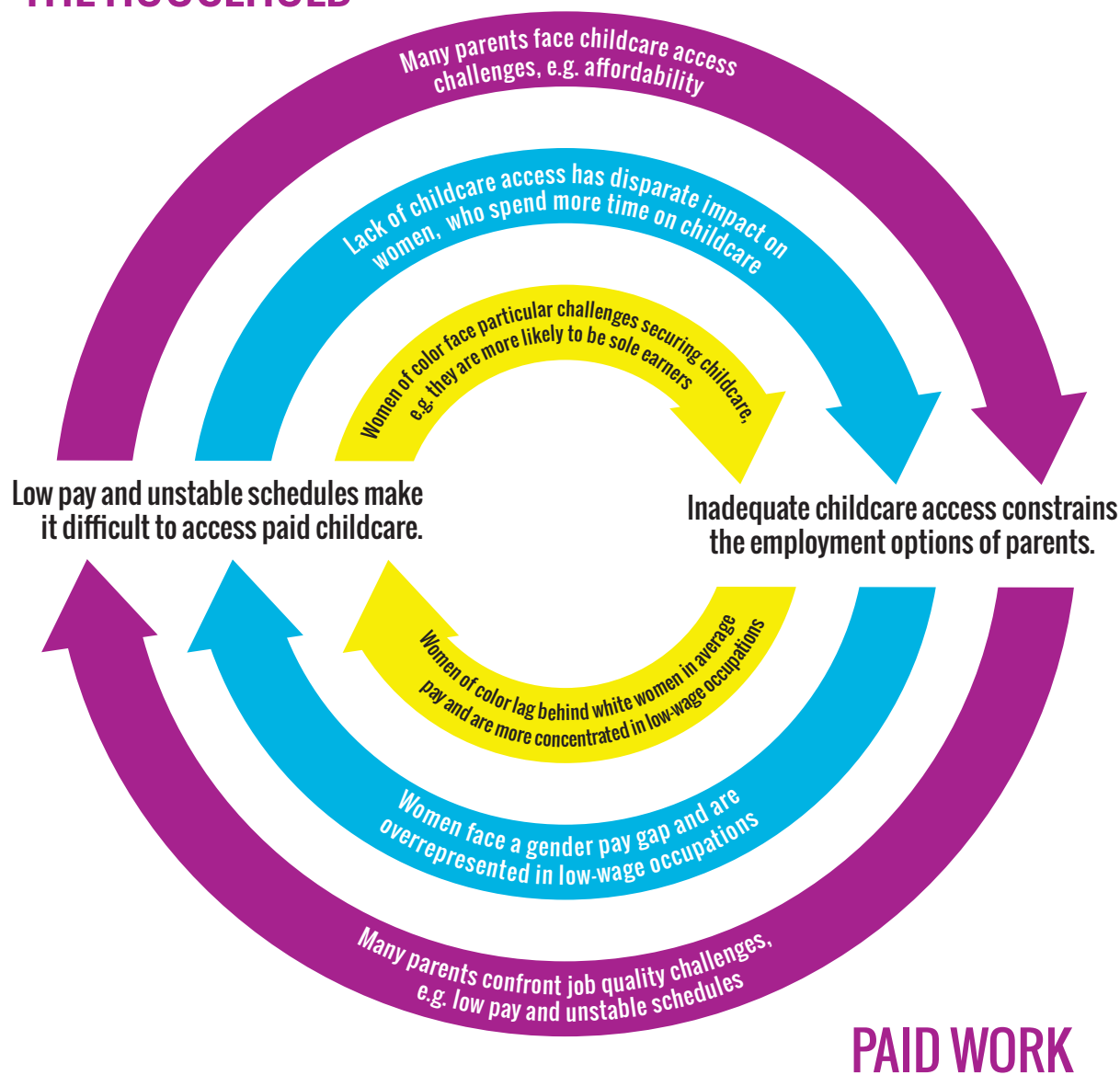
- **Unstable and non-standard schedules** also pose childcare access barriers for many parents. In retail and other industries, practices such as on-call scheduling and a lack of advance notice have intensified with the use of new scheduling technologies.<sup>142</sup> These developments contribute to the challenges many parents face in making childcare arrangements—e.g., is it worth arranging care on a day when one is on call but not guaranteed any paid working hours? Working outside the usual “9 to 5” timeframe can also present difficulties for many parents.<sup>143</sup> A 2015 report from the Urban Institute found that this and other forms of non-standard employment increase the likelihood that parents will have to rely on multiple arrangements to address their childcare needs.<sup>144</sup>
- **Inadequate leave provisions** make it difficult for many parents to provide care for their own children. First, many working parents do not have access to family and medical leave to provide care after childbirth or when their children have serious illnesses. Currently, only 12 percent of workers in the US are given paid family leave by their employers, and around 60% are eligible for a limited amount of unpaid leave. A recent report found that inadequate leave provisions forced nearly a quarter of mothers to return to work within two weeks of giving birth.<sup>145</sup> At the same time, a growing number of new mothers are leaving the labor force entirely.<sup>146</sup> Secondly, a lack of paid sick days (which can generally be used to care for sick family members) makes it difficult for many parents to care for sick children without making an economic sacrifice. As of 2015, nearly two out of three private sector worker in the US lacked access to paid sick leave.<sup>147</sup>

Drawing on the discussion earlier in the chapter, we can also identify some of the key **CHILDCARE ACCESS** issues that affect the ability of many parents to secure quality jobs.

- **High childcare costs** affect the employment decisions of many parents. Particularly for parents with low levels of savings and relatively low earnings potential, overcoming the cost of childcare can be a huge barrier to securing employment and pursuing training and education. And the “cliff effect” whereby government benefits are significantly reduced or even lost once one surpasses a certain income threshold can often force parents into impossible choices—e.g., forego a promotion or new job that would boost one’s income, or relinquish access to childcare benefits?<sup>148</sup>
- **Limited scope of care** poses a problem for many parents. This includes limits to the age at which children are eligible for services. For example, as noted above, the baseline level of Head Start coverage is for children ages three and four, and the landscape of Early Head Start programs that extend coverage to children of younger ages is highly uneven. Limits in the months in the year and hours during the day when services are available also create challenges for many working parents, and limited hours pose particular problems for the large of numbers parents with non-standard schedules.<sup>149</sup>

**Figure 8: The Vicious Cycle of Poor Job Quality and Inadequate Childcare Access**

## THE HOUSEHOLD



*Poor childcare and employment options create a vicious cycle for low- and middle-income families. Women experience this vicious cycle more acutely, with women of color confronting additional challenges.*

- **Unstable childcare arrangements** impact the ability of many parents to secure and hold down on a job. For instance, those relying on paid or unpaid friends or family members are often in a bind when, say, those friends or family members become ill. Procedures for accessing government benefits can also contribute to the instability of care—e.g., when access to subsidies depends on proof of employment or training, the administrative burden involved in accessing care, which often includes having to frequently reapply for benefits, prevents many parents from accessing or continuing to access services.<sup>150</sup>

Childcare access issues also have an impact on whether parents are able to obtain the education and skills that might enhance their future career prospects.<sup>151</sup> According to a 2013 report by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, nearly a quarter of all college students and more than a third of low-income and first-generation college students have dependent children. Graduation rates among low-income students are 25% lower among those with children than those without children, and the IWPR report finds that on-campus childcare options are declining. Given its implications for parents’ employment prospects and their ability to invest in training and education, childcare access should clearly be seen as an important workforce development issue.

## **Job Quality Issues Facing Childcare Providers**

In addition to considering the vicious cycle of poor job quality and inadequate childcare access facing many parents, it is important to address the job quality problems confronting many providers of care. The fact that many child-

**The fact that many childcare workers can barely make ends meet and provide for their own families also has negative effects on our economy, and raises issues of basic fairness.**

care workers can barely make ends meet and provide for their own families also has negative effects on our economy, and raises issues of basic fairness. Childcare workers also face barriers to organizing collectively to improve their conditions, though recent years have

seen a number of notable organizing victories. And, when childcare workers are able to organize into unions, they enjoy significant gains. A recent study showed that unionized childcare workers enjoy a significant wage premium

over their non-union counterparts. They are also nearly twice as likely to have health insurance and more than three times as likely to have a retirement plan.<sup>152</sup>

- **Low pay and poor benefits** – Chapter One touched upon the extremely low wages of childcare workers. CENTER-BASED PROVIDERS caring for children ages 0 to 4 earn far less than their primary and secondary school counterparts. They are also less likely to have health insurance and other benefits.<sup>153</sup> Lower wages can be explained in part by the fact that early education workers tend to have lower levels of education attainment than primary and secondary educators, but a significant earnings gap remains even after controlling for these differences.<sup>154</sup> According to a recent survey, nearly half of all center-based early educators worry about “having enough food for family,” and nearly three quarters worry about “having enough to pay my family’s monthly bills.”<sup>155</sup> Because of their low levels of pay, center-based childcare providers rely on public support programs at a far higher rate (46%) than US workers in general (25%).<sup>156</sup>

Nationally representative data on working conditions for FAMILY CHILDCARE PROVIDERS is not as readily available as data on center-based providers, but there are a number of state and local studies that point to generally poor wages and benefits.<sup>157</sup> Wages are often at levels below the average for all childcare workers, and, because family providers are generally regarded as independent contractors, they tend to be responsible for their own benefits.<sup>158</sup> Family providers serving low-income parents often face a particular squeeze as they try to accommodate the financial constraints of their clients while making ends meet for themselves.<sup>159</sup>

According to the 2012 *Home Economics* report, 70% of domestic workers make less than \$13 dollar per hour, while only 4% receive employer-provided health insurance, and less than 2% receive retirement or pension benefits.<sup>160</sup> Among NANNIES, there is a particularly large wage differential between US- and foreign-born workers, with the latter earning more than two dollars per hour less on an hourly basis. Many nannies, particularly those who are foreign-born, are employed on an informal basis, which leaves them more vulnerable to wage theft, verbal and physical abuse, and a range of other problems, often with little recourse to challenge their unfair conditions.<sup>161</sup>

- **Organizing challenges** – Most CENTER-BASED PROVIDERS are employed in private for-profit or not-for-profit centers.<sup>162</sup> Like private sector workers in general, they face significant challenges forming unions. The fragmentation of the workforce into relatively small workplaces is one factor that makes it especially difficult for childcare workers in private centers to unionize, though some have managed to do so.<sup>163</sup>

Institutionally-based childcare providers in public early education programs, including Head Start and public school-based pre-K programs, have higher unionization rates than those in private centers. They also

have significantly better pay and benefits.<sup>164</sup> While pay and benefits for Head Start and pre-K workers still lag behind those of primary and secondary school educators, their compensation relative to other childcare workers points to the difference that more robust public investment could make for the childcare and early education workforce.

The fact that FAMILY PROVIDERS work out of their homes and are generally regarded as independent contractors has made unionization difficult.<sup>165</sup> However, in recent years, family providers in several states have won the right to unionize and bargain collectively, winning benefits and higher wages. Building on a foundation laid in the homecare industry, these unions have successfully argued that, due to the role of public funding in the compensation of family providers, state governments are the relevant bargaining partner.<sup>166</sup>

Unions of family providers face ongoing challenges. Low public reimbursement rates continue to exert downward pressure on wages. The right to organize and bargain collectively has been achieved through executive action by governors and/or state legislation, and, in a number of states, these hard-fought victories have been reversed.<sup>167</sup> The Supreme Court's *Harris v. Quinn* decision also has important implications for these unions, allowing providers who reap the benefits of a union contract to opt out of paying union dues.<sup>168</sup> Despite these challenges, family providers in several states continue to fight for their right to unionize and earn a decent living.

NANNIES and other domestic workers are excluded from the National Labor Relations Act (see Chapter One for a more extensive discussion of the story behind this exclusion), which is a major legal-institutional barrier to unionization.<sup>169</sup> Even if they try to organize through a non-National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election, nannies face questions about who the relevant bargaining partner would be. Unlike other home-based workers such as family childcare providers and homecare providers, the care delivered by nannies is not generally supported by government funding.

In spite of this challenging organizing terrain, a movement of worker centers anchored by the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) has pushed for improved conditions for nannies and other domestic workers. This movement builds on decades of activism, including the groundbreaking organizing efforts of black domestic workers going back to the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>170</sup> As of November 2015, worker center-led coalitions in six states have achieved passage of domestic worker bills of rights that assert basic legal rights.<sup>171</sup> At a smaller scale, a number of nanny worker cooperatives have formed around the country, bringing benefits for their members that include more consistent working hours.<sup>172</sup> Even as they continue to grapple with the challenges of promoting and enforcing improved norms and standards among a highly dispersed community of employers, these worker centers and worker cooperatives have made important strides in building collective power for nannies and pushing for improved job quality.

## Childcare Quality and its Links to Provider Job Quality

Although there are programs that support access to childcare for families of modest economic means, access to highest-quality childcare services is still determined to all too great an extent by parents' ability to pay. A study by the National Institute of Child Health Development found that only one in ten childcare centers were providing services that were deemed to be of "high quality" from the standpoint of promoting good developmental outcomes among children, and there is ample evidence showing that higher-income families are able to access these services.<sup>173</sup>

Most states have rating systems that seek to promote higher-quality care.<sup>174</sup> Usually, they cover both childcare centers and family childcare homes.<sup>175</sup> In many cases, public subsidies are linked to ratings, but often with little support for centers aiming to ascend the ratings ladder. A lack of access to subsidies often makes it more challenging to pay childcare workers decent wages, and, as noted below, low pay and other job quality issues tend to undermine childcare quality. While much of the evidence linking job quality and childcare quality comes from studies focused on center-based settings, many of the findings are relevant to other kinds of childcare as well.

- **Low levels of training and education** have a negative effect on childcare quality. Specialized training in child development, and, particularly, having a college degree, are associated with better child development outcomes.<sup>176</sup> However, outside of public pre-K programs, most states have no minimum requirements for the credentials of childcare workers, and there is significant geographic variation in the training levels of center-based workers.<sup>177</sup> Private centers tend to have the lowest average levels of training. For Head Start centers, there is a federal requirement that at least half of all teachers have a higher education degree in early childhood education or a related field of study.<sup>178</sup>

Poor compensation and a lack of career and wage ladders also plays an important role in shaping the educational decisions of childcare workers, as low levels of pay and benefits even for those with substantial credentials reduce incentives for investing in the additional education and training. Programs such as TEACH Early Childhood Project and Child Care WAGE\$ have boosted educational attainment for childcare workers in North Carolina and other states, but these workers have not seen increases in their levels of pay.<sup>179</sup> Until the pay structure changes, incentivizing childcare workers to invest in education and retaining the most highly trained and educated providers will remain an uphill battle.

- **High turnover rates** among childcare workers undermine childcare quality. There is evidence showing that, even after controlling for other factors, childcare centers with lower turnover are more likely to deliver high-quality services.<sup>180</sup> However, average turnover rates for center-based



childcare workers far exceed those of other primary and secondary school educators.<sup>181</sup> High turnover disrupts the bonds that children form with teachers, leading to lower cognitive development outcomes. It has also been shown to impose significant costs on childcare centers while having a corrosive effect on staff morale.<sup>182</sup> Over time, as Marcy Whitebook and Laura Sakai put it in a 2003 paper, “turnover begets turnover.”<sup>183</sup>

Studies of center-based childcare workers have pointed to low wages as a primary cause of high turnover.<sup>184</sup> Poor benefits have also been a factor.<sup>185</sup> While turnover rates tend to be lower among more highly educated center-based childcare workers, they are more likely to cite low wages as a reason for leaving their jobs. Low levels of compensation thus have a particularly negative impact on efforts to retain the most qualified center-based childcare workers.<sup>186</sup>

- **High student-to-teacher ratios** detract from childcare quality. Indeed, childcare is a prime example of an activity in which increasing the ratio of customers (parents and their children) to providers (childcare workers) severely affects the quality of the service being rendered. Higher student-to-teacher ratios have been shown to have a negative effect on child development outcomes, but many childcare settings have ratios that exceed accepted thresholds.<sup>187</sup> For example, while many experts in the field agree that there should be one caregiver for every three infants between the ages of 6 months and 18 months, more than two-thirds of infants in this age range are not in childcare settings that follow this guideline.<sup>188</sup>

Maintaining low student-to-teacher ratios in childcare settings requires resources. Given that reducing turnover and creating incentives to invest in training are both connected with higher wages, achieving these aims might be seen as conflicting with the goal of reducing student-to-teacher ratios. Indeed, in a context of inadequate resources, how is it possible to boost wages and increase the number of providers? As shown in the next chapter, it is important not to accept this zero-sum logic. Improving job quality for a larger number of providers while at the same time expanding childcare access for all families requires a far more substantial level of overall investment in the American childcare system.



# CHAPTER THREE

## MOBILIZING FOR CHANGE

*How can progress be achieved in improving childcare jobs and making good quality childcare available to all families that need it? This chapter focuses on two reform priorities. First, organizing and policy frameworks need to be revised to fully address issues of job quality, childcare access, and childcare quality, and the important connections that exist across these issue areas. Second, the resource base devoted to resolving these issues needs to be expanded.*

As shown in previous chapters, problems of job quality, childcare access, and childcare quality are closely connected. However, existing conceptual maps and templates for action often place them in separate silos. A central aim of this report is to help bring these issues within a shared framework, showing how seemingly disparate movements and initiatives might align around common goals.

The previous chapter showed that job quality for childcare providers can play an important role in improving childcare quality, reducing turnover, and providing added motivation for the delivery of better services. To the extent that the closing of achievement gaps is often cited as a desired outcome of better childcare quality, issues of childcare access also come to the fore.

Chapter Two also showed that improved job quality is important for childcare access and vice versa. Coordinated efforts to address both sets of issues simultaneously can help to address the vicious cycle in which many middle- and low-income families are caught. Issues of childcare access constitute a point of convergence between the larger arenas of childcare and worker advocacy, providing a key nexus for the development of coalitions that span the real divide which exists between these two worlds (see Figure 10).

Despite the positive connections linking issues of childcare access, childcare quality, and job quality, there are also important tensions that derive in large measure from existing resource constraints. Improving job quality for childcare providers—including their generally low wages and poor benefits—is important as a matter of basic fairness. But, what does this mean for low- and middle-income families that are already struggling to afford childcare?

How can efforts to improve job quality for childcare providers and efforts to enhance childcare access for those who can least afford it be squared?

Within the childcare advocacy arena, efforts that focus single-mindedly on enhancing childcare quality can sometimes cut against the aim of achieving widespread childcare access. Of course, high-income and low-income children alike deserve the best childcare possible. However, given the inadequate resources devoted to childcare, measures linked to improving quality can prevent those most in need of publicly supported childcare from receiving services. Trying to improve both childcare quality and childcare access can seem like a zero-sum game.

Deftly reframing the issues and highlighting shared interests can help to overcome these tensions, but it is crucial to address the larger resource constraints under which these kinds of tension points emerge in the first place. Devoting greater public and private resources to enhancing childcare access and ensuring decent job quality in childcare and other sectors of the economy would go a long way towards easing these tensions and transforming the American childcare system.

How, then, to develop new forms of organizing and advocacy that cross existing silos? How can the resources needed to achieve these objectives be mobilized? This chapter highlights current fault-lines and challenges. But it also showcases innovative approaches and initiatives involving government, private employers, and childcare and worker organizations that are moving us ahead, pointing the way towards a more robust and equitable childcare system.

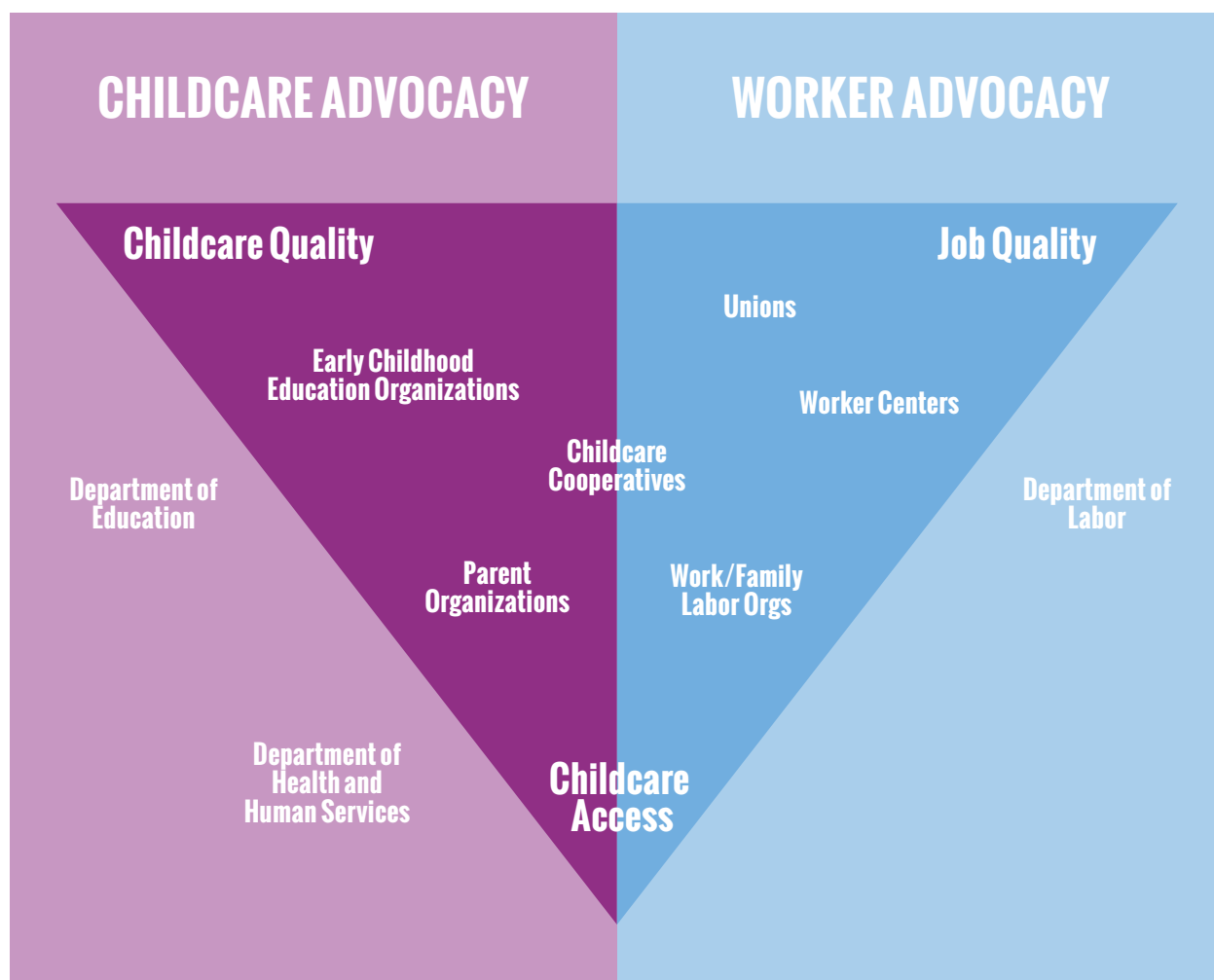
## **New Pathways in Childcare and Worker Advocacy**

There is a large constellation of organizations working on issues of childcare quality, childcare access, and job quality. This report has provided a window into various parts of this universe, and Figure 9 maps where different kinds of organizations tend to be situated in relation to each of these issue areas. Changing the frame—making stronger connections within and across different issue areas—can be accomplished through the work of individual organizations that build new capacities which cut across traditional boundaries. It can also occur through the forging of new coalitions and alliances.

Many organizations are expanding their capacities within the universe of childcare and worker advocacy:

- As discussed in the accompanying sidebar, the Vermont Worker Center began as an organization focusing on workplace issues but has since widened its frame to include healthcare and childcare access, and was a key player in the coalition that won expanded pre-K in the state of Vermont.<sup>189</sup> The Center for Frontline Retail, the Garment Worker Center, and the Restaurant Opportunities Center have all stepped up their efforts to address issues of childcare access after it became clear, through surveys

**Figure 9: Mapping the Policy and Organizing Landscape**



*This diagram maps the landscape of childcare and worker advocacy. Different kinds of organizations tend to orient themselves in various ways around issues of childcare access, childcare quality, and job quality. This picture is meant to depict general patterns and tendencies, and it no doubt fails to capture the particular identities and agendas of many individual organizations.*

*Progress can be made in all of these areas when organizations enlarge their agendas and/or forge connections with others that are operating in different parts of the map. Breaking out of established silos and changing the frame in this way is crucially important. So, too, is pressing for an expansion of resources. Indeed, it is only with a much greater commitment of resources that certain questions—e.g., how to improve childcare affordability for parents while raising pay for providers?—can be fully answered.*

and worker engagement, that this was a key issue for their members.<sup>190</sup>

- By the same token, many organizations that are anchored in the world of childcare advocacy have taken on issues that would traditionally fall under the rubric of worker advocacy. The OLÉ Education Fund is leading the fight to raise the minimum wage in the city of Albuquerque.<sup>191</sup> The Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative has a major project focusing on workforce capacity building in childcare centers that primarily serve low-income people. In line with the organization's long-standing mission,

**Within the childcare advocacy arena, the most significant dividing line to overcome is between organizations that focus attention on improving childcare quality and those that focus on broadening childcare access.**

an important aim of the project is to ensure that low-income families are receiving quality childcare services. But MLIC-CI is also seeking to foster conditions under which the work of childcare providers will be more respected and valued.

With regard to coalition building, there is important work that needs to happen *within* the worker and childcare advocacy arenas—for example, among childcare

workers. Center-based providers, family childcare providers, and nannies all face distinct challenges stemming from differences in the settings where they work, the kind of work they do, the sorts of skills they bring to the table, and their demographic profiles.<sup>192</sup> Such differences can make it challenging to form coalitions that span the full spectrum of the childcare workforce.

Still, as noted in Chapter Three, there are common interests among different kinds of childcare workers. Most are underpaid.<sup>193</sup> The vast majority are women.<sup>194</sup> And, whether they are center-based providers, family childcare providers, or nannies, low levels of pay stem at least in part from the gender-based devaluation of caregiving work.<sup>195</sup>

- In Illinois, organizing efforts have gradually come to knit together the different segments of the childcare workforce. Illinois was the first state to authorize collective bargaining among family childcare providers, including regulated and unregulated providers. Despite the *Harris v Quinn* setback noted in Chapter Two, SEIU continues to represent these workers and is

currently involved in efforts to organize Head Start and pre-K workers.<sup>196</sup> The union has also worked with NDWA and other organizations in an effort to pass a Domestic Worker Bill of Rights in Illinois. In late May of 2015, the Bill was passed by the state House of Representative and moved to the state Senate for consideration.<sup>197</sup> And, in Illinois and elsewhere, the “Fight for \$15” campaign—which started among fast food workers, but has since extended to other industries—has brought childcare workers into a shared struggle for dignity and higher pay.<sup>198</sup>

Within the childcare advocacy arena, the most significant dividing line to overcome is between organizations that focus attention on improving childcare quality and those that focus on broadening childcare access. Few, if any, organizations that focus on one of these sets of issues would discount the importance of the other. Indeed, the larger aim of the childcare advocacy movement is to ensure high-quality childcare for all children. However, given the inadequate resources devoted to childcare, efforts to improve quality can cut against efforts to expand access, and it is important to highlight efforts that seek to address this tension directly.

- In Mississippi, MLICCI has been working in coalition with other groups to challenge aspects of the state’s quality rating system that place an undue burden on childcare centers serving low-income families, seeking to increase the resources available for centers to meet these requirements and to reform the system to focus on capacity-building rather than punitive sanctions.<sup>199</sup> In doing so, MLICCI is trying to reconcile and eliminate the tension between childcare quality and childcare access, finding ways for all Mississippi families to receive quality services.

In addition to underscoring the need for coalition building within the childcare and worker advocacy arenas, a key aim of this report is to highlight the need for stronger links *between* these worlds. Efforts that effectively bridge the divide between these worlds are crucially important to a larger project aimed at improving childcare quality, childcare access, and job quality simultaneously.

- The “PEOPLE for the Kids” coalition in New Mexico brings together OLÉ’s Working Parents Association, the American Federation of Teachers’ New Mexico Early Educators United, and the Quality Early Learning Association, which includes preschool owners and directors.<sup>200</sup> A study put out by the coalition found that, between December 2010 and July 2014, 173 childcare centers shut down across the state, with nearly a third of the closures coming in the city of Albuquerque. Meanwhile, between 2011 and 2014, the average number of children receiving childcare subsidies in New Mexico declined by 23.5%. There is a clear link between the two trends, as lower numbers of children in childcare together with declining reimbursement rates are causing many childcare centers that serve low-income children to shutter their doors. Between 2011 and 2014, the proportion of childcare centers that accept children with subsidies dropped from 83% to 69%.<sup>201</sup>

In response to these realities, the PEOPLE for the Kids has been pushing for increased funding that would expand access to those who need it while allowing childcare centers to remain open and provide decent wages to their workers. Towards this end, it has lobbied to restore a higher tax rate on the richest New Mexicans, to close a corporate tax loophole that allows out-of-state corporations to avoid paying state taxes, and to allocate part of the state's Permanent School Fund to early education.<sup>202</sup> The political environment is challenging, but the coalition has already broken new ground in mobilizing a diverse coalition of parents, workers, and owners around these goals.

- In California, Parent Voices is part of the steering committee of the Stronger California Advocates Network, a historic collaboration of advocate coalitions that have deep experience working with communities in coordination with California's Legislative Women's Caucus.<sup>203</sup> The Network comes together to advance four key pillars affecting women: building economic security by addressing poverty and helping women build assets to sustain them throughout their lives; improving access to affordable and quality childcare; ensuring fair pay and job opportunities; and supporting family friendly workplaces. The Network has pushed forth a comprehensive agenda and currently there are four bills awaiting the Governor's signature.

Many of these examples show that responding to a context of constrained resources can help to mobilize different groups around shared interests. These coalitions and the common frames that they develop can in turn help to garner support for an expansion of resources in the future. The next two sections turn attention to the resource question, looking at the potential role of the private and public sector in helping to address job quality and childcare issues.

## Engaging with Employers

Given the lack of a comprehensive public childcare system in the US, employers currently have an important role to play in whether their employees are able to access the childcare they need. In 2014, according to data from the National Compensation Survey, 36% of those employed by private sector employers had access to dependent care reimbursement accounts through which they could allocate up to \$5000 in pretax income to pay for childcare, eldercare, or the care of a disabled dependent.<sup>204</sup> One in ten of those employed by private sector employers had access to "workplace-funded childcare," defined as a "a workplace program that provides for either the full or partial cost of caring for an employee's children in a nursery, day care center, or a baby sitter in facilities either on or of the employer's premises."<sup>205</sup>

Union members are somewhat more likely to enjoy childcare benefits than their non-union counterparts. Data from the 2014 National Compensation Survey show that 44% of private sector union members had access to



dependent care reimbursement accounts, as opposed to 35% of private sector non-union members. Private sector union members were also more likely to have access to workplace-funded childcare (16%) than those not in a union (11%).<sup>206</sup> According to a report by Families and Work Institute, “19% of unionized workers, compared to 10% of non-unionized workers have [child care] resource and referral services.”<sup>207</sup> The following are examples of child care benefits as well as care-friendly scheduling practices at unionized companies:

- SEIU 1199 conducted a survey in 1989 and found that that 80% of its members thought the union should seek to push for a childcare benefit in the next round of bargaining. In 1991, the union successfully negotiated a childcare fund that provides benefits for members’ children from birth until the age of 17.<sup>208</sup> Through the fund, union members with children can receive weekly childcare subsidies, access to 1199’s own childcare center, or subsidized slots in other centers that the Fund purchases.<sup>209</sup> The model has been replicated in the Bay Area, where UNITE-HERE has set up a similar fund.
- Members of the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union (of which Ms. Foundation grantee the Center for Frontline Retail is an affiliate) have contract provisions that promote more stable schedules. At the Bloomingdales and Macy’s flagships store in Manhattan, RWDSU members are able to schedule their shifts well in advance relative to industry norms, which, according to members, helps enormously in making childcare arrangements.<sup>210</sup> As described in the accompanying sidebar, the RWDSU together with the Center for Frontline Retail and other allies have also successfully lobbied for access to public childcare subsidies for members working in the Herald Square retail corridor, and are pushing to do the same in other retail areas around the city.
- Costco pays significantly higher wages than its chief competitor, Walmart-owned Sam’s Club, and also has more worker-friendly scheduling practices.<sup>211</sup> According to a report by the Center for Law and Social Policy, “all part-time Costco employees receive their schedules at least two weeks in advance and are guaranteed a minimum of 24 ‘core hours’ per week.”<sup>212</sup> Costco also has in place a Dependent Care Plans that allow employees to set aside pre-tax dollars to pay for qualifying childcare care and elder care.

Unfortunately, examples such as these are more the exception than the rule. Low-wage workers are especially unlikely to enjoy employer-sponsored childcare benefits. Only 5% of those in the bottom decile of earners have access to “workplace-funded childcare,” as opposed to 19% in the top decile—this despite the fact that low earners are in much greater need of assistance.<sup>213</sup> Given trends of declining unionization, how can low-wage workers and their allies push for improved childcare assistance, and, more broadly, for pay, benefits, and other conditions that make it possible to support a family? Highlighting the efforts of high-road employers—those that prioritize socially



responsible practices including fair treatment of their employees—is important.<sup>214</sup> In some cases, worker-friendly employer practices are encouraged and indeed compelled by engagement with unions and worker organizations.

**Absences caused by childcare issues cost American businesses billions of dollars each year, and the existence of childcare supports has been shown to reduce employee absences as well as turnover.**

In others, employers take the high road as a matter of principle. Of course, employers that choose to do so recognize that treating their workers better makes good business sense. Absences caused by childcare issues cost American businesses billions of dollars each year, and the existence of childcare supports has been shown to reduce employee absences as well as

turnover.<sup>215</sup> Underscoring the potential win-win dynamics of employer-supported childcare can help to make the business case for pursuing the high road in this area.

- Through its High Road Programs, Restaurant Opportunities Center United has been engaging with restaurant owners who are committed to treating their workers fairly. This includes owners who reject the tipped minimum wage and pay a higher wage to all of their employees.

Recently, ROC United has also been engaging this set of employers about issues of childcare access, which is still an area where more work is needed even among the most progressive employers in the industry. Many restaurant owners and managers face childcare challenges of their own, which has provided a helpful basis for advancing this conversation.

In addition to efforts that promote what high-road employers are doing, the past few years have seen the emergence of innovative approaches aimed at holding low-road employers accountable to their employees and the communities in which they are situated. A recent report published by Americans for Tax Fairness found that “Walmart’s low wage workers cost US taxpayers an estimated \$6.2 billion in public assistance including food stamps , Medicaid and subsidized housing.”<sup>216</sup> Recent efforts have sought to turn the tables on Walmart and other low-road employers by arguing that they should pay a price for their poor employment practices:

- OLÉ Education Fund is involved in a campaign in New Mexico to levy a tax on big box retailers that pay less \$15 per hour to their workers. The revenues would be used to fund expanded childcare access. A similar effort is underway in Connecticut, where the revenues would be used to help fund childcare as well as healthcare access.<sup>217</sup>

As these bills work their way through the legislative process, they have served as a conversation changer with respect to the role and responsibility of private employers in providing childcare benefits and the legal and policy levers that might help to change corporate behavior. In addition to compelling low-road employers to contribute resources that would help to extend childcare, they would incentivize these employers to treat their own employees more fairly.

In Connecticut, campaigners have already won an important victory related to this effort: the establishment of a 13-member Low Wage Employer Advisory Board comprised of employer and worker representatives that is tasked with advising relevant public agencies on “matters related to the implementation of the low wage employer fee, public assistance usage among working residents of the state, improvement of the quality of public assistance programs affecting such residents, wages and working conditions for the workforce delivering services to low-wage working families and reliance of large businesses on state-funded public assistance programs.”<sup>218</sup>

Government employees often enjoy more extensive childcare-related benefits than those working in the private sector. State employees are twice as likely as private sector employees to have dependent care reimbursement accounts (72% versus 36%), and more than twice as likely to have workplace-funded childcare (27% versus 10%).<sup>219</sup> The US military’s childcare system, through which upwards of 22,000 providers care for some 200,000 children, has received particular acclaim for extending access to quality childcare while offering decent pay and working conditions to providers.<sup>220</sup>

- In 1989, Congress passed the Military Child Care Act, whereby childcare is furnished to military personnel through child development centers and family child care homes.<sup>221</sup> Military parents pay fees on an income-based sliding scale.<sup>222</sup> With stringent training requirements and other quality control measures, nearly all military centers have been accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), as opposed to just 10% of civilian centers.<sup>223</sup> And providers are paid according to the “General Schedule” wage scale for government workers, which means they earn significantly more than most other childcare workers.<sup>224</sup> For all of these reasons, the military childcare system has been cited as a blueprint for what a more comprehensive and equitable US public childcare system might look like.

## Transforming the Role of Government

In addition to its role as an employer, how else might government play a part in improving childcare access, job quality, and childcare quality? The highly decentralized nature of the American political system, which gives significant discretionary power to state and local government, demands a two-pronged approach. First, it is important to raise the floor nationally. Achieving deep and wide-ranging reform at the federal level tends to be challenging, of course, and generally has to be seen as a medium- to long-term political project. In the meantime, as discussed below, it is important to increase federal resource allocation and target achievable reforms on specific issues, while framing these as part of a longer-term reform agenda.

Second, it is important to lobby for reform and an expansion of resources and regulatory powers at the state and local levels. Because money for a range of social services is disbursed at the state or local level, this includes lobbying for resources on a short-term basis, from year to year. But it also entails pushing for deeper and more lasting institutional and policy changes at the state and local level. Here, as touched upon in Chapter One, the decentralized nature of the US system is a double-edged sword. It allows retrograde actors in state and local government to block progressive reform, and to drag their feet in the use of federal resources and the implementation of federal programs. But it also leaves room for policy and institutional reform and experimentation that, as sociologist Joel Rogers has put it, pushes the boundaries of “progressive federalism.” Building on the discussion in Chapter Two, this section outlines key changes in law and policy that would help to mark progress in the areas of childcare access, job quality, and childcare quality.<sup>225</sup>

### Childcare Access

Recent developments have shown how levels of funding devoted to extending childcare access are subject to changing economic conditions and the winds of political change. CCDBG funding declined in the wake of the 2008-9 financial crisis, with most states serving fewer children through the program in the years afterwards.<sup>226</sup> The 2013 federal sequester that cut funding across a range of government programs resulted in some 57,000 children losing access to Head Start—more than 1 out of 20 of all children served by the program.<sup>227</sup> The CCDBG Reauthorization Act of 2014—the first in nearly two decades—provided a much-needed funding infusion and Head Start enrollment levels also recovered that year.<sup>228</sup> But many children and parents were and still are worse off for having been denied access to needed childcare services. Changes at the state level also have a big impact. In California, the governor and the state legislature lowered the eligibility threshold for CCDBG subsidies from 75% of the state’s median income to 70% of the state median-income in 2011, making many low-income families ineligible for assistance.

Given these realities, advocates are compelled to devote much of their energy to preserving and trying to increase, bit by bit, current levels of childcare support. It is also important, however, to build towards a longer-term progress that would make childcare in America a universal public good. President Obama's fiscal year 2016 budget proposal would increase CCDBG funding over the next 10 years by \$82 billion; enable all Head start programs to operate all day, for a full school year in FY 2016; support state efforts to build high-quality pre-K programs; increase childcare tax credits; and expand a range of childcare grant programs aimed at low-income families and children with special needs.<sup>229</sup> Even with this new infusion of funding, the US would still lag behind other OECD countries in childcare and early education. But it would be a step in the right direction.

The following are key changes that would help to extend childcare access to more families, moving us in the direction of making childcare the broadly accessible public good that it should be:

- **Make childcare affordable for all families** – Too many families that are unable to afford the childcare they need are ineligible for benefits. Too many that are eligible are relegated to waiting lists. And too many that receive benefits have to make co-payments that are unaffordable. As discussed in Chapter Two, there is significant geographic variation in this policy and funding landscape. For example, in 2014, eligibility thresholds ranged from 33% of the state median in Kentucky to 85% of the state median in North Dakota, and co-payment levels ranged from \$43 in Wyoming to \$473 in Hawaii.<sup>230</sup> At the same time that state and local efforts seek to expand access to more families, it is important to improve federal standards and requirements that would boost access.
- **Broaden the scope of coverage** – Many public early education programs—including most Head Start programs—only cover 3- and/or 4-year olds, and childcare services often fail to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce—e.g., the particular childcare needs of the growing numbers of people with non-standard schedules. Childcare services need to be extended to children of all ages. Half-day services should be made full-day, as they have been in many programs at the state and local level, and as was recommended in 2015 in proposed changes to Head Start performance standards.<sup>231</sup> The needs of those working outside of normal business hours must be addressed. “Blending” and “braiding” of funding from different sources has been used to extend Head Start services in several states. As of September 2012, there were nine states that “extend the day or year of existing services” by providing supplemental state funds or enacting rules making it easier to combine Head Start funds with funds from other sources.<sup>232</sup>
- **Improve the stability of coverage** – Unstable childcare arrangements pose challenges for many families, and the configuration of public pro-

grams often contributes to these difficulties by placing a large administrative burden on recipients, forcing them to constantly reapply for benefits. The 2014 CCDBG Reauthorization enhanced the stability of coverage for those receiving subsidies through the program. In many states, families previously had to reapply every few months. The new law mandates maintaining eligibility for an entire year regardless of “temporary changes in participation in work, training, or education activities” and changes in income up to the federal maximum threshold.<sup>233</sup> Now, the focus must turn to ensuring that the new rule is properly implemented at the state level and addressing other administrative burdens that make it difficult to obtain and maintain access.

This regulatory change with respect to the duration of eligibility for CCDBG subsidies underlines the importance of the federal government not just as a provider of resources but a maker of rules. The story of how this rule change was folded into the 2014 law also highlights the potential gains that state-level advocates can make by engaging with the federal policymaking process. Parent Voices, OLÉ and other childcare advocacy organizations operating primarily at the state level were players in a coalition that pushed for the new eligibility policy to become not just a recommendation, as it was in the bill’s original formulation, but a requirement. By helping to raise the federal floor in this important way, they helped to bring about meaningful change in their own states and in the overall national landscape.

## Job Quality

Recent events, including the financial crisis of the 2008-9 and the Great Recession and Occupy movement that followed in its wake, have focused attention on rising inequality and America’s low-wage economy.<sup>234</sup> By and large, this growing discussion has not led to significant policy change at the federal level. However, in a number of areas related to job quality, there are important developments at the state and local levels. Achieving further progress in the areas noted below would help to improve working conditions for childcare providers and other low-wage workers. Given the currently fragmentary nature of our public childcare support system, it would also help many low-wage workers who are parents to better afford and access the childcare they need.

- **Raise wage levels** – Nearly three quarters of eligible voters favor raising the minimum wage, including a majority of Republicans.<sup>235</sup> However, a proposal by the Obama administration to raise the federally mandated minimum wage from \$7.25 per hour to \$10.10 an hour did not make it out of Congress in the 2014 legislative session. According to a recent tally, twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia have set their minimum wage above the federal level, with DC, Washington, and Oregon leading the way at \$10.50, \$9.47, and \$9.25, respectively.<sup>236</sup> This includes several states—among them, Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota—where the legislatures are Republican-controlled but voters have



approved ballot initiatives raising the minimum wage.<sup>237</sup> Minimum wages levels have also been raised to significantly higher levels in several local areas, including Los Angeles (\$15 by 2020-21), San Francisco (\$15 by 2018), and Seattle (\$15 by 2018-21).<sup>238</sup> In January 2016, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a plan to raise wages for 50,000 city employees and contract workers.<sup>239</sup>

- **Mandate fair scheduling** – The “Schedules that Work Act” would require that workers in retail, food service, and cleaning receive at least four hours of pay if they are scheduled to work four hours or more, as well as two weeks advance notice of their work schedules.<sup>240</sup> At least fifteen states have introduced legislation related to reporting pay, call-in pay, the “right to request” flexible, predictable, or stable schedules, and other scheduling issues.<sup>241</sup> At the time this report was completed, none of these laws had passed at the state or federal level. However, in November 2014, San Francisco passed the first-in-the-nation statute dealing with a broad set of scheduling issues—a measure that requires retail chains meeting certain requirements to provide two weeks of advance notice for any changes in the schedules of their employees.<sup>242</sup> Building on this success at the local level, efforts are currently underway in California to enact scheduling legislation at the state level.
- **Expand leave requirements** – Family/parental leave and paid sick day policies need to be reformed to better enable parents to care for their children. Existing levels of unpaid parental leave for the birth of a child are far lower in the US than in most other countries, and the US is one of only three countries worldwide that does not guarantee *paid* maternity leave for the birth of a child.<sup>243</sup> The Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act introduced in the US Congress would provide partial income replacement for people taking family and medical leave, covering workers in companies of all sizes.<sup>244</sup> Sixteen states and the District of Columbia do have medical and parental leave standards that exceed the federal minimum for eligible employees, including several that have enacted partial wage replacement for eligible employees who take time off to care for a new child or a sick relative.<sup>245</sup> There is also a growing movement pushing for paid sick days legislation enabling workers to take paid leave when they are sick or need to care for a sick child or other family member. At the federal level, the Healthy Families Act would mandate that firms with 15 or more employees provide an opportunity to earn seven days of sick leave on an annual basis (and seven unpaid days for firms below the 15 employee threshold).<sup>246</sup> As of July 2015, paid sick days laws were established or soon to be in effect in four states, the District of Columbia, and 19 localities around the country.<sup>247</sup>

It is also critically important to push for changes in law and policy that would challenge labor market discrimination. For example, the Paycheck Fairness Act would build on existing legislation to address the gender pay

gap, and eliminating the exclusion of domestic workers from federal legal protections would address a legacy of racism that continues to affect domestic workers of all backgrounds.

## Childcare Quality

As part of efforts to reform America's childcare system, issues of childcare quality have received growing attention in recent years. With the ability to access high-quality childcare still determined to a great degree by how much parents are able to pay, extending access to high-quality care to all families would help to reduce achievement gaps and the boost the prospects of our next generation. The 2014 CCDBG Reauthorization devoted some funds to ensuring that childcare providers are able to provide "developmentally appropriate services" to the children for whom they are caring.<sup>248</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, there are several ways in which stronger investments in the childcare workforce would help to improve the quality of childcare services:

- **Expand access to training for childcare providers** – Higher educational attainment and childcare-specific training will better enable America's childcare workers to provide high-quality services. There are programs at the state and local level that seek to expand access to education and training for childcare providers. To date, publicly funded programs have largely focused on center-based settings, but resources should also flow into expanding training opportunities for family providers and nannies. Access to higher education is clearly important, but so, too, is providing other forms of training in child development and other relevant topics.
- **Raise pay for childcare providers** – A recent poll found that a majority of voters believe that early educators are paid too little.<sup>249</sup> And, in the summer of 2015, members of Congress led by the Congressional Progressive Caucus announced a plan demanding \$15 per hour for childcare workers.<sup>250</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, improving pay and benefits for childcare providers is crucial to improving childcare quality. Increasing pay would create incentives for investing in education and training. It would also help to reduce turnover—another key factor in childcare quality. An evaluation of the Washington State Child Career and Wage Ladder Pilot Project, which was designed to assess the implications of linking wage increases to education milestones, found that centers with career/wage ladders attracted more highly educated new employees and was better able to retain them.<sup>251</sup>
- **Enhance the attention that students receive** – Particularly in center-based settings, student-to-teacher ratios often far exceed guidelines recommended by childcare experts. Currently, state requirements on student-to-teacher ratios and maximum class size for children age 0-4 vary widely. Rules for public pre-K programs are more likely to mandate ratios and class sizes that fall within recommended thresh-



olds, but, in many states, this is not the case for other institutionally-based childcare settings.<sup>252</sup> Stronger and more uniform rules are needed to ensure that children age 0 to 4 are receiving the attention and care they need and deserve.

As noted throughout the report, efforts to improve childcare quality as well as job quality for childcare providers must always be understood in relation to concerns about childcare access. To the extent that recent organizing to increase the minimum wage would improve pay for many childcare providers, with follow-on implications for childcare quality of the sort noted above, some advocates have raised concerns about how childcare access for low-income parents would be affected. As long as government childcare reimbursement rates remain at existing levels, a significant increase in the wages of childcare workers could effectively raise costs for many low-income parents and/or make it difficult for many childcare centers that serve low-income families to remain open.<sup>253</sup>

Again, this only becomes a zero-sum game in the context of currently insufficient levels of public childcare funding. Indeed, a recent study analyzing the impact of minimum wage increases on childcare access in California recommends increased funding to affected childcare centers in order to offset higher wage costs.<sup>254</sup> Faced with the tensions that often emerge amid scarce resources, it is important to maintain a clear focus on the broader context and the larger change that is required: an investment in America's childcare system that elevates it from the patchwork it currently is to the national priority that it ought to be.

# APPENDIX: ORGANIZING FOR A MORE EQUITABLE CHILDCARE SYSTEM

As part of an initiative devoted to strengthening the connections between childcare and worker advocacy, the Ms. Foundation has supported a cohort of organizations that are working to build a better, more equitable childcare system in the United States. Many of these organizations confront, on a daily basis, the gender and racial inequalities that were sketched in Chapter One. They address, in various ways, the problems of childcare access, job quality, and childcare quality that were laid out in Chapter Two. And they are helping to transform the landscape of childcare and worker advocacy in ways that are suggested here in Chapter Three. Even as they pursue very immediate policy and organizing targets, the work of these organizations points towards a different future for America's childcare system.

Several Ms. Foundation grantees are childcare advocacy organizations, or organizations with significant childcare portfolios. Childcare issues have received increased media attention in recent times, due in part to highly publicized interventions highlighting women's challenges balancing work and family, and choosing between "leaning in" and "opting out."<sup>255</sup> While raising important concerns, these discussions often fail to capture the difficulties facing women and families at the lower end of the income spectrum, which is where a number of Ms. Foundation grantees have spent many years focusing their attention.

"Rarely, if ever, do we ask how those women without high wages, paid leave, affordable child care, or flexible schedules, who don't have the choice to 'balance' work and family—that is, most women—juggle their desperate need to earn money with caring for their children," says Caroline Frederickson, author of *Under the Bus: How Working Women are Being Run Over*.<sup>256</sup> Indeed, recent work shows that, even when low-income women wish to devote more time to caregiving, they find it much harder to do so than their more economically advantaged counterparts.<sup>257</sup>

Women of color and immigrant women often encounter an added layer of difficulties around accessing childcare and achieving basic economic security. Low-income immigrant parents do not have access to many public benefits for which would otherwise qualify.<sup>258</sup> And, as noted above, black and Latina mothers, in addition to being more likely than white women to have low incomes, have lower levels of accumulated wealth and are more likely to be the sole earners in their households.

Drawing attention to the broader set of constraints facing low-income families, including large numbers of women of color and immigrant women, is part and

parcel of the advocacy work done by many Ms. Foundation grantees that are working towards expanded childcare access. So, too, is challenging the idea that legitimate families have to look a certain way. The ultimate goal is to ensure that that all parents—rich and poor; gay and straight; coupled and solo parenting; black, white, and brown—can access the childcare they need.

- **California Childcare Care Resource and Referral Network**, founded in the 1970s, is the country's oldest statewide childcare and resource and referral organization in the US. It is home to **Parent Voices (PV)**, a parent-led, parent-run grassroots organizing project fighting to make quality child care



accessible and affordable for all families. Parent Voices utilizes innovative community organizing, advocacy, and leadership development strategies to provide its members with an effective forum to develop their own ideas and solutions to the challenges they face in accessing quality, affordable childcare.

Parent Voices has achieved important successes over the years. In 2012, for example, PV was a key player in a coalition that prevented the elimination of

32,500 childcare slots and \$577 million in funding cuts.<sup>259</sup> Recognizing the importance of work scheduling issues for many of its members, PV was involved in a coalition that passed the first-in-the-nation work scheduling-related statute in the city of San Francisco in 2014—a measure that requires retail chains meeting certain requirements to provide two weeks of advance notice for any changes in the schedules of their employees.<sup>260</sup> Among the organization's objectives in 2016 are pushing for 20,000 new childcare subsidies that offer parents maximum flexibility, an updating of income eligibility guidelines based on more recent economic data, and scheduling legislation similar to the San Francisco measure at the state level.

The majority of PV's members are low-income women of color, and, for many, childcare challenges loom large in the struggle for basic economic viability. Eloise Rossiter, whose story is briefly recounted at the beginning of the report, is a member of PV. Her involvement in the organization, including the delivery of testimony at the White House and the Department of Health and Human Services as part of a delegation organized by the Ms. Foundation, has provided her with a platform for seeking to change a system that constrains her options and those of many others like her.



- **The Mississippi Low Income Childcare Initiative (MLICCI)** is a state-wide grassroots community organization of childcare providers, parents, and community leaders. MLICCI's mission is to enhance the quality of care

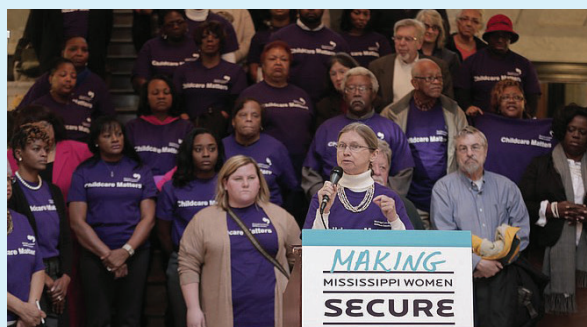


for all low-income children in Mississippi, and to advocate for improved childcare policies and greater public investment in childcare subsidies for low-income families.<sup>261</sup>

MLICCI was at the forefront of a campaign in 2013 that opposed the Mississippi Department of Human Services' plan to award Xerox Corporation with \$31 million out of the

state's CCDBG fund to build a finger scanning system that would monitor recipients of childcare subsidies.<sup>262</sup> MLICCI won its lawsuit, which marked an important victory in challenging conditions. The Mississippi DHS testified during the case that the agency needed the finger scanning system in order to prevent what the agency described as rampant fraud despite having delivered other testimony that there was no evidence of fraud.

MLICCI and its constituents heard the agency's concerns about fraud as being motivated by racialized notions of low-income African Americans intent on "gaming the system." The reality of the situation is that large numbers low-income working parents remain on waiting lists. As MLICCI subsequently argued



in testimony delivered before the US Civil Rights Commission, the use of precious resources for this program could have been used instead to serve 7928 of the 9000 children on the state's childcare waiting list.

In its advocacy work around childcare access, the MLICCI confronts a long history of racism in the state. In 1965, the state's elected leadership opposed Head Start because the program was accused of being a "civil rights front." As late as 1970, the state opposed using federal funds for childcare services that would largely benefit black children and families. Today, racism and racial stereotyping continue to play an important role in Mississippi politics and the allocation of public resources for childcare. MLICCI continues to work with providers and parents in the subsidy program, the vast majority of whom are African American, to increase public childcare funding so that more eligible children can be served, parental access to and retention of childcare subsidies can be improved, and the financial viability of providers can be enhanced.<sup>263</sup>



- **The OLÉ Education Fund** is a grassroots community organization comprised of working families in New Mexico. OLÉ works to “strengthen New Mexico communities through social advocacy and economic reform, using



issue-based campaigns to ensure that working families are playing a critical role in shaping New Mexico’s future with a united voice.”<sup>264</sup>

For several years OLÉ has been lobbying to allocate a small share of New Mexico’s Land Grant Permanent Fund (LGPf) to pay for childcare. Also known as the Permanent School Fund, the LGPF draws

largely on tax revenues from oil- and gas-rich state-owned land to provide upwards of half a billion dollars each year to the state’s public schools and universities, along with some other beneficiaries.<sup>265</sup> OLÉ has argued that 1.5% of the LGPF would enable nearly every child in New Mexico to enjoy access to early childhood education. Since 2011, OLÉ has been part of a large coalition that has introduced a constitutional amendment aimed at accessing the LGPF for this purpose. Each year, the amendment has been blocked in the state Senate, but OLÉ continues to work on building support for the measure.<sup>266</sup>

In 2015, OLÉ launched another campaign aimed at funding childcare through a different source. The Pre-school Fair Share bill that OLÉ’s Working Parents Association introduced in the New Mexico Legislature would mandate that any corporation with over \$1 billion in global revenue pay \$1 into a state preschool fund for each hour they pay an employee in New Mexico less than \$15 per hour.<sup>267</sup> This measure also stalled in the Senate during the 2015 legislative session. However, both within New Mexico and nationally, the effort has been an important conversation changer, and similar efforts are afoot elsewhere.



In addition to its childcare advocacy, OLÉ has been involved in key worker advocacy efforts within New Mexico. In 2011, it led a successful fight to raise the minimum wage in Albuquerque. Since then, OLÉ has been engaged in efforts to ensure that the minimum wage standard is enforced by Albuquerque’s city government.

- **The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham** works to encourage the full participation of women and girls in the Greater Birmingham Alabama communities by creating opportunities for educational, emotional,



social, and personal growth and empowerment. As part of these efforts, the Women's Fund also conducts research to inform its own grant making and to serve as a resource for non-profits, policymakers, and other leaders in the Birmingham area.

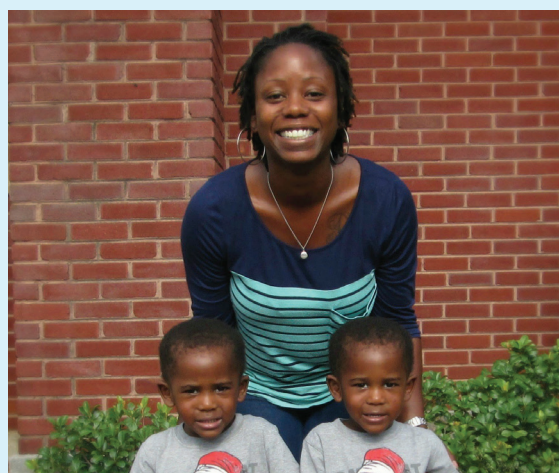
A recent report commissioned by the Women's Fund found that "[a] lack of quality affordable child care and extremely low income requirements for federal subsidies leaves many women trapped in part-time

work or limited in their careers, restricting their ability to earn."<sup>268</sup>

For many mothers, especially low-income single mothers, a lack of childcare makes it difficult to secure and retain employment, or to even make it to the stage of going in for an interview. Recently, as part of its "Changing Attitudes" campaign, the Women's Fund engaged Birmingham area employers in a conversation about the challenges posed by a lack of childcare access.

The Women's Fund has also been involved in a coalition pushing for increased state funding to boost enrollment in Alabama's "First Class" pre-K program.<sup>269</sup>

At a smaller scale, it has collaborated with a local community college, a childcare center, and a chain of pharmacies to develop a "two-generation" pilot program aimed at preparing low-income women for careers as pharmacy technicians while providing high-quality early education for their children.<sup>270</sup>





Another set of Ms. Foundation grantees are worker justice organizations that have increasingly pushed for improved childcare access through interventions at the workplace and beyond. As discussed in Chapter Two, inadequate public support for childcare means that childcare access is heavily shaped by employment-related conditions for many parents. Low-wage workers often find it especially difficult to afford the childcare they need, and face a host of other childcare-related challenges. They are less likely, for example, to have access to paid leave through their employers.<sup>271</sup> Many are forced to return to work soon after giving birth as a result.<sup>272</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, women of color face particular labor market disadvantages that affect their ability to access childcare. They tend to be concentrated in low-paying occupations and are less likely to make it into managerial positions, with average hourly rates of pay that lag far behind those of white women.<sup>273</sup> Because they are particularly likely to be hourly employees, they are more susceptible to scheduling-related challenges.<sup>274</sup> While all women face labor market disadvantages, women of color often experience “double jeopardy.” For example, black women encounter an even bigger wage penalty from working in predominantly female occupations than white women, and they derive a smaller wage premium from seniority and work-related experience.<sup>275</sup>

Immigrants are also overrepresented in the low-wage workforce, confronting a range of work and childcare-related challenges that are linked to their immigration status. Low-wage immigrant workers experience especially high rates of wage theft.<sup>276</sup> Given the fact that they are ineligible for many public benefits, this has a particularly large impact on their ability to afford childcare and make ends meet for their families. In the farm industry, the domestic work industry, and others, immigrant women often face high rates of sexual harassment.<sup>277</sup> Compounding these and other problems experienced by immigrant workers, concerns about jeopardizing their status in the country often serve as a barrier to seeking legal recourse.<sup>278</sup>

Several Ms. Foundation grantees are working to address these kinds of challenges, dealing with concerns that are particular to their industries while also addressing shared problems such as low wages, wage theft, and requirements that workers remain past their shifts—issues that make it difficult, in turn, to access childcare.<sup>279</sup> All of these organizations are working in various ways to address the vicious cycle of low-paying, unstable jobs and inadequate, unstable childcare access facing their members, helping to transform the landscape of America’s low-wage economy.

- **The Garment Worker Center (GWC)** organizes among Garment Workers in Los Angeles County, California, where there are some 45,000 people working in this industry—most of them immigrant women from Asia



and Latin America.<sup>280</sup> As part of its worker education efforts, GWC hosts worker-led “Know Your Rights” workshops about wage rights, health and safety in the workplace, and collective organizing.

While workers in many other industries experience underemployment and inadequate working hours, many in the garment industry face problems of overwork, spending long hours on the factory floor. This often leads to physical exhaustion and safety issues. It also poses specific kinds of challenges around locating and affording adequate childcare. Facing difficult choices, some working mothers in the garment industry have resorted to taking their children to work.<sup>281</sup>

A particularly high number of garment workers in the LA area are non-citizens. Citizenship status issues make many garment workers reluctant to challenge unfair treatment in the workplace. They also pose barriers to accessing childcare. Garment workers are often ineligible for childcare services because of their citizenship status, and many do not access the services for which they are eligible—e.g., only 1% access Head Start programs even though a much larger number qualify.<sup>282</sup>



In addition to pushing for expanded childcare access to non-citizens, a key component of GWC’s worker education efforts is to ensure that members are aware of the childcare and other benefits for which they are eligible, and to help them navigate the process of accessing these benefits.

- **The Center for Frontline Retail** is an organization of retail workers in the New York City area. Members are primarily women, immigrants, and people of color. The organization pushes for better wages and working conditions in the retail industry through services, education, advocacy, and civic leadership.



Irregular schedules are a particular problem in the retail industry that create childcare challenges for many CFR members. Large numbers of workers receive little advance notice of their schedules, are forced to be on call without receiving any guaranteed hours, and are sent home early without being paid

for their scheduled shift.<sup>283</sup> In response, CFR, together with its partner organization, the Retail Action Project (RAP), has launched a “Just Hours” campaign in New York and joined a national “Fair Workweek” initiative.<sup>284</sup>

Women and people of color in the retail industry are generally under-represented in managerial positions. They often receive the least favorable shifts and are generally more likely to experience scheduling-related problems, making it more difficult to secure childcare, which leads to problems with making it to work on time. In this way, discrimination pushes many women and people of color into the vicious cycle described in Chapter Two. The Just Hours and Fair Workweek campaigns also seek to highlight these problems.



CFR has pushed for expanded childcare access for retail workers in New York City. In 2015, the organization, together with its allies, won an expansion of childcare subsidies in the Herald Square area, one of New York City’s most important retail corridors. The organization plans to push for a further expansion of subsidies in the Herald Square area along while extending the subsidy zone to include 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and downtown Brooklyn.



- **The Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC)** is a national restaurant workers' association that seeks to improve working conditions and treatment of its members, who are largely women, immigrants, and people of color. The organization has a three-pronged strategy that includes organizing around workplace fairness campaigns, promoting "high road" restaurants, and consumer advocacy that leads to policy change.

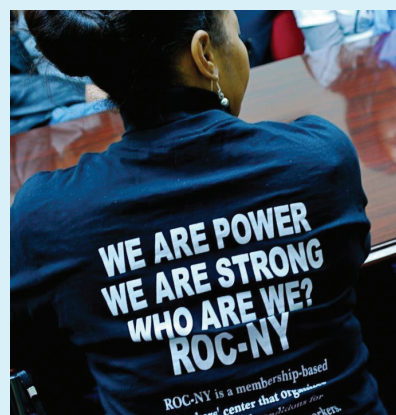
As reported in a 2012-13 ROC survey of restaurant workers in five cities, more than half of restaurant workers who are mothers reported that



paying for childcare was a concern. Nearly one half of mothers also said that childcare issues prevented them from working the most lucrative shifts, and one out of five reported that they had lost a childcare provider because of work scheduling-related issues.<sup>285</sup>

Almost half of mothers in restaurant industry are women of color, a quarter are Latina, and 30% are immigrants. Women, people of color, and immigrants face discrimination that compounds their efforts to provide for themselves and their families. A recent study supported by ROC found that people of color confront significant bias when applying to high-end restaurants, even when they have the same credentials as whites. Largely white managers are more likely to question the stated credentials or people of color, and less likely to hire them.<sup>286</sup>

Recently, ROC has also stepped up its efforts to secure childcare access for its members. This has included exploring the idea of developing a childcare cooperative that serves the needs of restaurant workers while providing good-quality jobs for providers. It has also entailed efforts to press high-road employers to offer childcare supports, providing an example that others in the industry might follow.



- **The Vermont Workers' Center** is a statewide grassroots member-run organization dedicated to organizing for the human rights of women and families and low-wage workers in Vermont.<sup>287</sup> The organization began its



life working alongside unions and community members to support a range of worker organizing efforts as well as the Vermonters for a Livable Wage campaign, which has pushed for increase to the Vermont state minimum and tipped minimum wage standards.<sup>288</sup>

VWC has supported a range of organizing and bargaining efforts among teachers, nurses, bus drivers, homecare providers, and child-

care workers. VWC was centrally involved in winning collective bargaining rights for the state's family childcare providers, and the American Federation of Teachers narrowly lost a bid to represent these workers (see Chapter Two for a more extensive discussion of organizing among family providers).<sup>289</sup>

Over the years, VWC came to realize, as noted in an organizational history on its website, that "many of the problems facing working people transcended the workplace."<sup>290</sup> Since 2008, through its Healthcare is a Human Right Campaign, VWC has been pushing for publicly financed, universal



healthcare in the state of Vermont. In 2011, VMC helped to push through passage of a first-of-its-kind state law committing Vermont to providing healthcare as a public good, and the organization has since been engaged in making sure this goal becomes a reality.<sup>291</sup>

As part of its "Work with Dignity" campaign, VWC has been an ally partner in the Vermont Early Childhood Alliance's efforts to secure universal pre-Kindergarten in Vermont. In 2014, Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin signed a bill authorizing universal pre-Kindergarten statewide. The law requires that every child between the ages of 3 and 5 will have access to pre-K education.<sup>292</sup> Initially slated to take effect in the 2015-2016 school year, implementation has been postponed to 2016-2017 to allow local school districts to budget for the new program. Vermont has received two federal grants—one for \$37 million, and another for \$33 million—to support the program.

Finally, several Ms. Foundation grantees have been centrally involved in efforts to improve job quality for childcare providers, many of whom experience childcare access challenges of their own even as they provide care for other families. As touched upon in Chapter One, childcare workers are overwhelmingly women.<sup>293</sup> They tend to earn very little, generally finding themselves among the ranks of America's low-wage workforce.<sup>294</sup> And gender-based devaluation of caregiving work is an important reason why they receive such low wages.<sup>295</sup>

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that black and Latina women are overrepresented in the childcare workforce.<sup>296</sup> Black, Latina, and Asian/Pacific Islander childcare workers are also more likely than their white counterparts to use public support programs, which is suggestive of greater economic disadvantage.<sup>297</sup> Looking specifically at the center-based childcare workforce, there is evidence that centers staffed by a higher proportion of people of color tend to pay less.<sup>298</sup> Childspace Cooperative Development, Inc., profiled below, is a network of daycare centers that works to promote deliver high-quality services while improving conditions for providers, many of whom are low-income people of color.

As described in Chapter Two, family childcare providers offering services to other low-income families often face particular challenges. Following the enactment of welfare reform in 1996, many low-income women—including large numbers of women of color—became family childcare providers.<sup>299</sup> With low reimbursement rates and barriers gaining access to public subsidies even as they try to accommodate the needs of their low-income clients, these providers often find it difficult to make ends meet for their own families.<sup>300</sup> All Our Kin, another Ms. grantee organization, has devoted itself to improving working conditions for family providers and enhancing the quality of care they are able to deliver.

Chapter One discussed the history that led large numbers of immigrants and women of color to take up employment as domestic workers, the role of racial politics in excluding domestic workers from basic legal protections, and the ongoing discrimination that many domestic workers continue to experience.<sup>301</sup> Several Ms. Foundation grantee organizations are engaged in efforts to improve job quality for nannies and other domestic workers. As seen in their work and that of other organizations, domestic workers and their allies have found ways to challenge these conditions, demonstrating once again the change that is possible through collective mobilization.



- **Childspace Management Group** is a Philadelphia-based group of childcare centers. Two of Childspace's childcare centers serve primarily low-income clients, and many Childspace workers come from low-income backgrounds themselves.<sup>302</sup> A key goal of Childspace is to improve standards for its workers, some of whom become members of the organization's worker cooperative arrangement. Low reimbursement rates for clients receiving subsidies make it difficult to pay above-market wages. However, an analysis conducted by Childspace found that its workers are able to secure steadier shifts than childcare workers at other centers serving low-income clients, in addition to receiving better health benefits. Childspace is



also involved in broader advocacy around improving conditions for childcare workers, and has organized workshops to inform family providers who serve low-income clients about how to access public funding.

Childspace workers tend to remain in their jobs longer than other in the industry, which has a positive effect on the quality of the services that Childspace Centers are able to offer. Childspace centers have also qualified for additional public funding by meeting quality benchmarks established by the state's star rating system. One factor in meeting these benchmarks is the educational background of the center staff, and Childspace encourages workers to pursue additional education. However the organization's leadership team notes that the low wage premium for pursuing additional education places them as well as their workers in a bind. In line with the discussion in Chapter Two, the lack of a wage premium not only discourages Childspace workers from pursuing additional education, but means that those who do must often shift to teaching in other settings serving higher-income families in order to earn a decent payoff for their educational investment. This structural problem imposed by the lack of funding in the childcare system needs to be addressed.



Childspace is committed to extending high-quality childcare to low-income parents, but low reimbursement rates for clients receiving public subsidies continue to make it challenging to do so. At the same time that it addresses these day-to-day challenges within each of its childcare centers, Childspace also lobbies for increased public funding in Pennsylvania and beyond. According to the organization's leadership, only this change in the overall funding landscape will truly ease the tensions involved in trying to extend access to high-quality childcare while providing good quality jobs for childcare workers.

- **All Our Kin, Inc.** is a Connecticut-based nonprofit that trains, supports, and sustains family child care providers, helping to expand access to high-quality childcare while improving conditions for providers. AOK's innovative Tool Kit Licensing Program supports family providers as they go through the state's child care licensing process, bringing them into a professional community of family child care providers. A recent evaluation comparing 28 randomly selected AOK-affiliated providers and 20 other randomly selected providers found that



the AOK affiliates scored significantly higher on the nationally recognized Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale.<sup>303</sup>

Operating in a context of high inequality, including the city of Bridgeport, part of the metro region with the highest income disparities in America, AOK's Tool Kit Licensing program helps to increase the supply of childcare for low-income families and communities of color that are in the greatest need.<sup>304</sup> Connecticut lost nearly 34% of its family childcare programs between 2000 and 2011. But, in New Haven, another city that AOK serves, the number of licensed family childcare programs actually increased by 74% during that time period. AOK providers offer high quality, culturally appropriate care that is also flexible and affordable, helping low-income parents to find and maintain employment.

In addition to extending access to high-quality family childcare, AOK's work helps to connect providers with one another. Its Family Child Care Network offers educational mentorship, professional development, advocacy and leadership opportunities, and a set of relationships with other family child care providers.<sup>305</sup> There is also evidence that AOK's efforts help to improve working conditions for providers, with nearly 73% of Tool Kit participants reporting earnings of at least \$5,000 more in the first year after licensure.



Apart from its direct work with providers, AOK is involved in advocacy

that sheds light on the unique place of family child care in the broader childcare landscape. It has fought to make family providers an integral part of Connecticut's early childhood system, positioned itself as a leader in high-profile national initiatives such as the Early Head Start-Family Child Care Partnership, and used external evaluations to demonstrate the macroeconomic benefits of investment in childcare . All of these efforts seek to build a case for increased investment in home-based child care programs not just in Connecticut, but across the country.

**Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice** is a 10-year-old organization of Nepali-speaking new immigrants based in Queens, New York. Adhikaar's membership spans a range of low-wage occupations. Many



are nail salon workers, and the organization's long-standing efforts to improve conditions in the industry bore fruit in 2015 with an important legislative victory in the state of New York. Following an exposé in *The New York Times*, Adhikaar helped to lead a coalition of groups that pushed legal changes aimed at combating wage theft, simplifying the training process for nail salon workers, and giving the state great-

er authority to shut down nail salons that violate basic labor and licensing regulations. In July 2015, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed these changes into law.<sup>306</sup>

A majority of Adhikaar's members are domestic workers. This includes many live-in nannies who are on call at all hours of the day and expected to do a range of household tasks over and above the childcare services they provide. Adhikaar was a key player in a coalition pushing for a Domestic Worker Bill of Rights in New York, which became the first state to pass such a bill in 2010. The law gives domestic workers a right to overtime pay, a day of rest every seven days, and three days of paid rest each year after working for the same employer—provisions that are especially pertinent to the challenges facing live-in domestic workers.<sup>307</sup>



The fact that many Adhikaar members are new immigrants is a key fac-



tor in the marginalization that many of them confront. Language barriers make it difficult to find work outside the South Asian community, and lead members to accept work at lower wage rates than those of other domestic workers who are proficient in English. Many Adhikaar members are well-aware of their rights but afraid to assert them, fearing reprisals that would jeopardize their status in the country. Adhikaar also devotes significant programmatic energy to pushing for immigration reform.

Recently, Adhikaar has stepped up its involvement in efforts to expand childcare access for its members. This includes workshops aimed at helping members to navigate the process of accessing childcare and other government services, and advocacy around making government services linguistically and culturally accessible to the South Asian community. In New York state, the nail specialty license is now available in Nepali and Tibetan as well as Vietnamese. Adhikaar has also sponsored nanny trainings aimed at enabling members to provide higher-quality childcare services, seeking to boost the employability of trainees while also enabling them to provide higher-quality childcare services.

- **Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA)** is a Bay Area-based organization of Latina domestic workers. In 1989, Maria Olea and Clara Luz Navarro were hired by a research team at San Francisco State University to conduct



interviews about the challenges confronting women in their community. What they found were pervasive experiences of domestic violence, poverty, isolation, and violations of basic rights, but also a firm resolve among those they interviewed to press for improved conditions. MUA was born shortly thereafter and, 25 years later, it is an organization with 20 staff that reaches thousands of Latina immigrant throughout the San Francisco Area each year.<sup>308</sup>

Like members of Adhikaar, members of MUA face a range of challenges related to their ethnoracial background and immigration status. Many members of MUA have low levels of English proficiency and formal education, which limits their employment prospects. According the 2012 report *Home Economics*, Latina domestic workers are paid particularly low wages, and this is borne out in the experience of MUA members.<sup>309</sup> Many MUA members are paid far below the minimum wage and are not paid at all for their overtime hours. Recognizing that domestic workers' immigration status is a key factor in abuse and exploitation in the sector, MUA members push for a wide range of measures at the local, state, and

federal levels focused on protecting immigrant rights and demanding a pathway to citizenship.

In 2013, MUA together with a coalition of allies achieved passage of a Domestic Worker Bill of Rights in California that mandates overtime pay for domestic workers. MUA, which anchors the California Domestic Workers Coalition, has been involved in a major effort to mobilize large numbers domestic workers in this and other initiatives aimed at raising standards in the industry, and set a goal of organizing 10% of all domestic workers in California by 2017.<sup>310</sup>

Through its Caring Hands Workers Association, a job training and placement program for nannies as well as home care providers and housecleaners, MUA seeks to enable its members to “achieve dignified and just employment while providing tools for them to be leaders in their own lives and their community.”<sup>311</sup> An important aim is to ensure that members who go through the training program are able to provide higher quality services to their clients while receiving higher levels of compensation for their work.



- **Centro de los Derechos del Migrante (CDM)** is the first transnational workers’ rights law center based in Mexico that focuses on US workplace rights.<sup>312</sup> The organization fights for improved working conditions for internationally recruited migrant workers, many of whom



come to the US to work as domestic workers. In 2013, the case of an Indian nanny who moved to the US to work for an Indian diplomat in New York City shone a light on the abuses that can occur in such cases.<sup>313</sup> Many worker centers including Adhikaar and Mujeres deal with these kinds of abuses, and, in some cases, they have won significant damages through legal cases filed on behalf of their members.

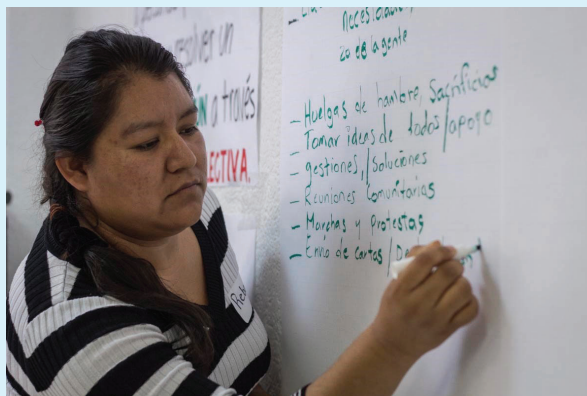
CDM seeks to transform the broader international recruitment system in which labor abuses and human rights violations take place.

Recruited nannies and other recruited workers often face huge barriers to reporting abuse and legal violations, given that their visas generally

link them to a single client family and their status in the country depends on continued employment. This has resulted, according to one report, in a system racked with “fraud, discrimination, severe economic coercion, retaliation, blacklisting, and in some cases forced labor indentured servitude, debt bondage, and human trafficking.”<sup>314</sup>

In response to these conditions, CDM has developed a “From the Ground Up” campaign aimed at transforming the temporary visa system and introducing greater transparency into the recruitment process. The organization leads the International Labor Recruitment Working Group (ILRWG), a coalition that includes a number of unions, NGOs, and worker centers. CDM has directed its efforts at changing law and policy at both the state and federal level. In California, CDM was part of collective advocacy effort that culminated in the passage of a new law addressing many abuses in the temporary visa system—the first such law in the country.

In late 2014, CDM launched an online crowdsourcing platform that promotes enhanced transparency and accountability among international recruitment agencies. By visiting [Contratados.org](http://Contratados.org), recruited migrant workers can review and rate specific recruiters and employers and share their firsthand experiences, in real time, with other migrant workers across the US and around the world. Many nannies have already contributed reviews, and, going forward, CDM plans further outreach and education campaigns to increase and sustain the involvement of recruited workers in [Contratados.org](http://Contratados.org).<sup>315</sup>





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## Executive Summary

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## Chapter Two: Defining the Problem

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## Chapter Three: Mobilizing for Change

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