



CWLA 2021 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Lessons Learned from 2020: Reaching New Heights for Children and Families



HOT TOPIC

Enact the Child Care for Working Families Act

ACTION

- Enact comprehensive child care and early learning legislation to ensure affordable, high-quality child care that provides equitable access to all, including working middle class families and families living paycheck-to-paycheck.

In December 2020 and March 2021, Congress enacted important relief funding to preserve the nation's child care system. In 2021, Congress and the President must follow that action with a permanent and lasting expansion so that quality child care and early learning classrooms are available to all parents and families.

The pandemic has highlighted some of the shortfalls in key policy areas. One example is the child care system, which has been placed under severe strain not just because of the pandemic, but because of the fragile funding we provided before the pandemic took hold. In 2016, estimates indicated that 12.8 million children under six spent some time in a nonparental care arrangement on a weekly basis.

With a 2014 reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Congress made several important demands on the nation's child care system, including requiring greater access for families while raising standards for the quality of care. In 2018, Congress included a \$2.37 billion increase for CCDBG, the largest one-year increase in federal funding for child care in history. Those increases, however, were just a first step—especially in light of nearly two decades of lagging funding.

Before the 2020 pandemic, we were still attempting to address this shortfall. According to a pre-pandemic analysis

by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, data from 2016 showed that only 15 percent of eligible children under federal standards had access to child care subsidies. An additional review by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) showed that access varies significantly by state and by race. They found that only 15 percent of eligible Black children were served nationally based on federal eligibility parameters. In most states, Latino and Asian American children have far less access, with just 2 percent of eligible Asian American children and 4 percent of eligible Latino children served in CCDBG nationally.

Child Care for Working Families Act

Congress needs to take the next steps in child care expansion. Legislation has been introduced that will address the current early learning and care crisis by ensuring that no family under 150 percent of state median income pays more than seven percent of their income on child care. Families would pay their fair share for care on a sliding scale, regardless of the number of children in care. Families under 75 percent of the state median income will not have to pay anything at all. The legislation will also support universal access to high-quality preschool programs for all 3- and 4-year olds. Importantly, it will significantly improve compensation and training for the child care workforce to ensure that our nation's teachers and caregivers have the support they need.

The key principles for universal child care access:

- Provide for cost-sharing between the federal government and states to provide high-quality, affordable child care from birth through age 13.
- Provide incentives and funding for states to create high-quality preschool programs for low- and

moderate-income 3- and 4-year olds during the school day, while providing a higher matching rate for programs for infants and toddlers—who are often harder and more expensive to care for.

- Increase workforce training and compensation by ensuring that all child care workers are paid at least a living wage and parity with elementary school teachers if they have similar credentials and experience.
- Improve care in a variety of settings, including addressing the needs of family, friend, and neighbor care and care during non-traditional hours to help meet the needs of working families.
- Build more inclusive, high-quality child care providers for children, infants, and toddlers with disabilities, including by increasing funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

- Help all Head Start programs meet the new, expanded duration requirements and provide full-day, full-year programming.

Conclusion

Child care and early childhood education are critical to the future well-being of all children and to building a stronger foundation for all families. Congress created the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) in 1990 and reauthorized it 2014. Congress now has stepped in to help the child care industry survive the pandemic. And even before the COVID-19 crisis, states had begun to reduce some waiting lists, make improvement in service quality, and expand eligibility. But that is just a start. More is needed in funding and results. As we emerge from this crisis, it is now time to fully fund this important child and family support service.



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