

Campus child care made it possible for this young parent to graduate college. Now Trump wants to ax the program. ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Starting St. Louis Community College at Forest Park with an infant daughter and 2-year-old son posed some challenges for Ssire Ivy. While family and friends offered to help out from time to time, it was not a permanent solution. Although Ivy applied for Missouri's child-care program for low-income parents, her application was still being processed on her first day of school.

A few weeks into classes, Ivy learned about the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS), a federal program that assists low-income college students with child-care costs. She signed up immediately, and in a matter of days her children were enrolled in an accredited child-care center near her home.

"If you don't have a place you can take your kids, you can't go to school," said Ivy, 27, who is set to graduate on May 20 with an associate degree in office information systems. "You can't take your children with you and have them sit in the hallway while you're in class. You really have to have somewhere safe where they can go. And this program provided that."

Child Care Access Means Parents in School is one of several higher education programs that President Trump is proposing be eliminated in his first full budget, according to documents obtained by The Washington Post. The \$15 million program provides colleges and universities with funding to support or establish campus-based child care for student parents whose earnings are low enough to qualify them for federal Pell grants.

"This is a program that is absolutely essential for opening doors to higher education for student parents," said Colin Seeberger, strategic campaigns adviser at Young Invincibles, an advocacy organization. "Cutting aid to student parents makes one wonder whether the administration understands the challenges that today's students actually face."

As the number of parents in college has grown from 3.2 million to 4.8 million in the last 20 years, resources for the campus child-care program have been stretched thin, according to the Institute of Women's Policy Research. Demand for child care is high, but the percentage of public institutions with centers on campus is dwindling. And without support from the federal government, advocates worry that student parents will be left in the lurch.

"It's such a tiny portion of the education budget, but these kinds of supports are crucial, and we should be building on them," said Barbara Gault, vice president and executive director at IWPR.

An institute survey of nearly 100 administrators at campus child-care centers found that 95 percent of centers at two- and four-year colleges maintained a waiting list with an average of 82 children. Barely half of four-year state colleges and universities provide child care, compared with 55 percent in 2003. The decline is steeper at community colleges, where only 44 percent of schools offer services, down from 53 percent 14 years ago, according to IWPR.

While most states have some form of child-care subsidies for low-income families, many of those programs have rules that make it difficult for college students to access care. Eleven states require students to be employed to be eligible for child-care subsidies, IWPR researchers found. Three of those states — Arizona, Kentucky and Washington — say parents must work at least 20 hours a week, which could make it more difficult for them to complete a degree on time.

Even if students are able to overcome those hurdles, the time it takes some states to approve applications can present more challenges. Ivy said she was accepted into Missouri's child-care program at the end of her first semester in college, several months after she had applied. The state's program is far more flexible than many others and welcomes parents attending school, but for Ivy, the time it took to enroll could have derailed her classes.

"It was tough the first few weeks because even though I had someone watching my kids, it was putting a strain on our relationship. And I'd already burned through all of my family at that point," Ivy said.

Ivy said many of her classmates at St. Louis Community College were also working parents just like her. And just like her, she said they have

also struggled with the cost of child care. Working part time while pursuing her degree helped cover the costs of Ivy's rent-subsidized apartment and other living expenses. But throwing the cost of child care into the mix was more than Ivy and her fiancé could handle. The campus child-care program covered three out of four weeks worth of care, leaving Ivy on the hook for \$250 to send both children to day care, an expense she was able to cover through the state-based program.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, the average cost of infant care in Missouri is \$719, while child care for a 4-year-old pencils in around \$776 a month. Child-care costs vary widely from state to state, but remain one of the largest expenses for many families.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton named campus child care a priority in her \$350 billion higher education proposal. She identified the Child Care Access Means Parents in School program as the best vehicle for helping student parents and pledged to increase the program budget from \$15 million to \$250 million a year, with an offer to match the money that states or colleges contributed. Clinton anticipated the investment would yield 250,000 child-care slots.

Since taking office, Trump has proposed beefing up the Child and Dependent Care Credit, which lets working parents deduct up to \$2,100 from their taxes for child-care costs, a proposal that student advocates have said does little to address the immediate needs of low-income student parents.

In the full White House budget, the Trump administration said "subsidizing expenses associated with child care is not consistent with the Department's core mission."

Seeberger of Young Invincibles argues, "Walking away from families facing some of the greatest financial strain who are trying to get ahead, would seem to be an abdication of the values that the Department of Education and our government have long stood for."

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