

Let's not talk about family leave without talking about child care

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EXCERPTS

Ivanka Trump testified before Congress regarding paid family leave. Paid family leave is an important start but it will not solve the challenges that most U.S. families have in caring for their children. After all, what happens to families after 6 or 12 weeks of leave? Caring for infants requires greater national support for our childcare.

Our current system of care for children harms mothers, childcare providers and ultimately, children. Trump's tax bill increased the child tax credit from \$1,000 to \$2,000, a mere drop in the bucket for families often paying ten times that for a year of infant care and since it is a non-refundable credit, only applies to those with higher incomes anyway.

Childcare is not and should not be considered "a woman's issue." However, women are disproportionately affected by our lack of a national system to address childcare. Women with children earn 71 percent of what fathers earn. Having children affects women's treatment in the workforce and without proper support, it is difficult for many women, other than the very rich, to remain in the paid labor force and receive salaries on par with their male counterparts.

As President Trump has readily agreed, the cost of childcare is a huge financial strain that many families struggle to afford. Though proposed tax benefits may be helpful to some families, they go a long way from addressing the core problem that we face with childcare in the United States.

If we want qualified well educated people to care for our children, we need to be able to pay them a living wage. We have not been able to find a way to industrialize childcare and make it more productive.

In order to ensure that parents can afford care and that providers receive a living wage, we, as a country need to subsidize childcare. No doubt, this will be expensive and cuts against the grain of lower taxes and less state and federal spending. However, if we as a nation want to be competitive in the future, we need a well-educated public and this education needs to begin early.

Childcare employees are some of the lowest paid people in the country. Forty six percent receive either Medicaid or food stamps. A 2016 report by the Berkley Center for the Study of Child Care Employment highlights the poverty of childcare providers as well as the limited training many receive. It describes new supports for childcare providers across the country as "optional, selective and sporadic."

The median hourly wage of childcare providers in 2014 was \$10.31, 39 percent less than that of all other workers. Few receive employer based health insurance (15 percent) and even fewer receive pension contributions from their employers. Many of these women face a loss or reduction in health benefits if the Affordable Care Act is revoked. Many have limited or no sick leave.

Dr. Corey Shdaimah and I recently completed focus groups throughout the State of New York with Childcare providers. Our research indicated that though most providers have good intentions, they were limited by the realities of their industry.

They need more financial support in order to provide the best care for America's children. Though we did not ask their incomes, we were struck by financial challenges that the home-based providers reported, many struggling to participate in trainings or fund fingerprinting of new workers (a federal requirement) that can cost between \$50-200.

Subsidizing care is not a new idea. In fact, much of the industrialized world provides both childcare (and health care) as a basic right. We could learn from Sweden, France, England, and many other nations throughout the world. The last time this was considered on a national scale in the United States was during the Nixon administration when it was vetoed. It is time to add childcare to our nation's priorities and to work toward putting universal childcare back on the national agenda.

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