

Elizabeth Warren just introduced her child care plan in Congress

[1]

Her new legislation aims to make affordable, universal childcare a reality.

Author: North, Anna

Source: Vox

Format: Article

Publication Date: 17 Jun 2019

AVAILABILITY

Access online [2]

EXCERPTS

Sen. Elizabeth Warren's (D-MA) universal child care plan was one of her earliest and most ambitious policy proposals as a 2020 presidential candidate. Now she's bringing it to Congress.

On Tuesday, Warren introduced the Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act, which reduces child care costs to families while improving both quality and caregiver pay. Rep. Debra Haaland (D-NM) and several co-sponsors introduced companion legislation in the House.

The bill would create a network of federally funded but locally run child care centers around the country and ensure that no family spends more than 7 percent of its annual income on child care. It would also set quality standards for the facilities based on existing federal programs like Head Start, and require that child care workers be paid on par with public school teachers.

"Access to affordable and high-quality child care and early education should be a right for all families rather than a privilege for only the rich," Warren said in a statement on Tuesday. "Our legislation would give all parents the opportunity to choose the right child care and early learning opportunities for their kids."

The bill is similar to legislation introduced by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) earlier this year that would expand federal subsidies for child care. Both Warren's plan and Murray and Scott's bill have been praised by child care experts. Both will also likely have a difficult road in the Republican-controlled Senate. But they're a reminder that universal child care, barely on the radar even a few years ago, is rapidly becoming a major part of the policy conversation in the run-up to 2020.

The legislation aims to make child care accessible and affordable for every family

The Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act is essentially Warren's child care plan in legislative form. Here's some of what it would do:

- The bill directs the federal government to partner with cities, school districts, tribal organizations, and other local entities to create a network of child care options for families, including child care centers and smaller family daycare homes. The goal is to help address the lack of child care options in many areas — some families today face months- or even years-long waiting lists to get their kids into day care, and some rural areas have no facilities at all.
- Families earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty line would pay nothing for child care under the bill. No family would pay more than 7 percent of its annual income. Families today typically spend between 9 and 36 percent of their annual income, according to Warren.
- Providers would be required to meet quality standards in line with those required by Head Start, focusing on early learning and social and emotional development. Currently, many daycare facilities aren't meeting the caregiver-to-child ratios and other standards experts say are best for kids.
- The bill requires child care workers to be paid on a par with public school teachers with similar credentials. Right now, child care workers make an average of \$10.82 an hour, about a third of what elementary school teachers make.

Implementing the plan wouldn't be cheap — it would cost \$70 billion a year, according to an analysis by Moody's Analytics. Warren has proposed to pay for it with a tax on the very wealthiest Americans.

Haaland, who joined the House in 2018 as one of the first Native American women elected to Congress, says the bill would help parents who are held back in their careers due to the lack of affordable child care.

"I know what it's like to struggle to make ends meet as a parent — I cleaned at my daughter's preschool so she could have early learning opportunities — that's not who we should be as a country," she said in a statement. "The bill Senator Warren and I are introducing today is a bold and comprehensive proposal to remove barriers so moms and dads can take those extra classes at the university or community college, or work to get that promotion without the burden of childcare on their shoulders while ensuring children have the care they need

early in life.”

The bill has been endorsed by a number of advocacy organizations, including the National Women’s Law Center and the child care research group Zero to Three.

For families seeking child care today, “the cost can be just prohibitive and the quality can also be troubling,” Patricia Cole, senior director of federal policy for Zero to Three, told Vox. “We get reports from families who struggle every day because they are leaving their kid in a situation they are not quite certain about.” The Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act is about “giving parents the choices they want and babies and toddlers the quality they need to feed their growing brains,” Cole said. “This is the foundation they’re going to lay all their learning on.”

Warren’s bill is not the first legislation aimed at creating universal or near-universal child care to be introduced in Congress. Earlier this year, Sen. Murray and Rep. Scott introduced the Child Care for Working Families Act, which would ensure that families earning less than 150 percent of their state’s median income spend no more than 7 percent of their income on child care. That bill also includes provisions for ensuring program quality and boosting caregiver pay.

The main difference between the Murray-Scott legislation and the bill introduced by Warren and Haaland today is in implementation. Warren and Haaland’s bill would create a new network of child care options, while the Child Care for Working Families Act would expand the existing federal child care subsidy system.

After consulting with child care experts and advocacy groups, Murray “believes that using the system we have” — and funding it adequately — is better than creating an entirely new system, an aide to the senator told Vox. Currently, funding for child care subsidies is sufficient to serve only about 15 percent of families who are eligible based on income, according to the Urban Institute.

However, Murray is “really happy to see Sen. Warren and the other presidential candidates talking more about child care,” the aide said.

Child care experts have championed both bills. “We’ve tried to not get so much into a comparison,” Cole said. “It’s just about augmenting the conversation that we need to be having.”

That’s a conversation that’s grown louder in recent months. In 2016, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders talked about child care but didn’t make it a major campaign focus. But this year, multiple presidential candidates have released plans that provide for child care or universal preschool, and others have expressed support for child care legislation in Congress. Once treated as a side issue, access to affordable care for young children is poised to become a major campaign topic.

Warren described her presidential campaign to the New York Times magazine this week as “this moment of being able to talk about these ideas, and everybody says, ‘Oh, wait, I better pay attention to this.’” She continued, “We’ve moved the Overton window on how we think about taxes. And I think, I think we’re about to move it on child care.”

The fact that there are now two pieces of comprehensive child care legislation in Congress may be a sign of that movement.

Related link:

Region: United States [3]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/06/elizabeth-warren-just-introduced-her-child-care-plan-congress>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/06/elizabeth-warren-just-introduced-her-child-care-plan-congress> [2]

<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/6/18/18683527/elizabeth-warren-universal-child-care-bill-congress> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865>