

How each presidential candidate would address the outrageous cost of childcare ^[1]

Childcare in the U.S. is outrageously expensive. We took a look at the presidential hopefuls' plans to change that.

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EXCERPTS

In November, the first all-female panel of debate moderators asked Democratic presidential candidates how they would address steep childcare costs and the lack of federal policy on paid parental leave—issues that have historically gotten little to no attention on the debate stage. Between 1996 and 2016, just six of 4,000 questions during primary debates touched on paid leave and childcare, according to an analysis by Time's Up.

But childcare has become prohibitively expensive for families across the socioeconomic spectrum. Childcare costs have skyrocketed since the 1970s, as more and more women have entered the workforce. Across many states, the price tag of childcare now exceeds the cost of college tuition and even mortgages; in expensive metropolitan areas such as New York City, the annual cost of full-time daycare can be more than \$16,000. With Super Tuesday just weeks away, we're digging into the presidential candidates' positions on key issues that affect working Americans. Today, we're taking a look at how the candidates left standing plan to make childcare and early education more affordable.

Elizabeth Warren

Warren was the first candidate to release a plan for universal childcare. A year later, she remains one of the only 2020 hopefuls with a comprehensive proposal (which she has already introduced in Congress). Her plan would provide access to childcare and early education by creating a network of options through partnerships with local providers, from preschools to daycare facilities, including in-home centers. Though these facilities would be locally operated, they would have to comply with federal guidelines to ensure a standard of care is met—and the workers providing care would be paid like public school teachers. For millions of kids, childcare and preschool would be free of charge: Under Warren's proposal, the government would foot the bill entirely for families earning less than 200% of the federal poverty line. Families that earn more would still have access to affordable, subsidized care, with costs capped at no more than 7% of their household income. As for funding, the program is projected to cost an estimated \$700 billion over a period of 10 years. Warren says those costs will be covered by the wealth tax—or "ultra-millionaire tax," as she calls it—that she plans to impose on families with a net worth of more than \$50 million. (Warren's campaign estimates the ultra-millionaire tax would bring in \$3.75 trillion in additional government revenue over the next decade, but this is a matter of debate; other analysts claim the tax would raise significantly less.) The program would not require enrollment.

Pete Buttigieg

In November, Buttigieg released a proposal to address the outsize costs of childcare. Like Warren, Buttigieg hopes to build on Head Start, a federal program that covers early childhood education for low-income families. His campaign estimates that costs would be at par with Warren's proposal—about \$70 billion per year—and would cover early learning and childcare for low-income families from birth to age five. For families above the poverty line, childcare costs wouldn't exceed 7% of their income. Buttigieg also intends to provide cost assistance to families with school-age kids, to help subsidize after-school care and summer programs. To help pay for his proposals, Buttigieg has said he would raise capital-gains taxes on the top 1% and repeal Trump's tax cuts for corporations and high-income households.

Bernie Sanders

Sanders, too, is in favor of universal childcare and pre-kindergarten programs. But as in the 2016 election, Sanders hasn't elaborated or explained how he intends to pay for the program. In 2011, Sanders had sponsored the Foundations for Success Act. The bill never reached a vote—but the goal was to provide childcare and early education for all children, from when they were six weeks old through kindergarten.

Joe Biden

While Biden has pledged his support for affordable childcare, he hasn't gone into much detail. Biden has, however, stated his support for a childcare tax credit, and his education plan promises pre-kindergarten for all children. "When I'm President, parents will get up to \$8,000 in tax credits to offset the cost of childcare," he recently told Fortune and Time's Up. "All 3- and 4-year-olds will be able to attend high-

quality, universal pre-kindergarten at no cost, and after-school programs and community centers will have additional funding to serve kids when school isn't in session."

Amy Klobuchar

Last year, Klobuchar introduced the Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act, which seeks to expand workforce training and create more childcare facilities. To subsidize childcare costs, Klobuchar wants to cap expenses at 7% of household income for families that earn up to 150% of their state's median income. She would also work with states to ensure childcare workers and teachers are paid like elementary school teachers. As for preschool access, Klobuchar supports building out state programs for kids from low to moderate-income households.

The Other Democrats

Tom Steyer has said little on the subject of childcare, beyond what he shared recently with Fortune and Time's Up. "If we're going to enable women to continue in their careers, then we're going to have to subsidize that at the federal level," he said. Steyer has also advocated for universal pre-kindergarten. Tulsi Gabbard is a proponent of what she calls a universal basic income—to give new parents the option of staying home or going back to work, she says—and expanding universal pre-kindergarten. Michael Bloomberg has promised to increase access to affordable childcare and invest more in the Child Care and Development Fund, which offers assistance to low-income families that need childcare because of work or school commitments.

Donald Trump

As part of the fiscal 2020 budget, the Trump administration made a \$1 billion investment to increase access to childcare in underserved communities (and a similar proposal is in the 2021 budget, to expand childcare options further). In 2018, President Trump signed off on a \$2.4 billion boost in funding for the Child Care and Development Fund and upped the tax credit from \$1,000 to \$2,000 per child; the latter, however, doesn't necessarily extend to low-income families who don't earn enough to qualify for the full benefit. (Bill Weld, who is still running against Trump, has not chimed in on childcare policy.)

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