

# Child care and COVID-19: The top five actions Congress must take now <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The rapid spread of COVID-19 is reminding us just how interconnected we all are. It's also shining a light on the ways that our public and community infrastructure have long been lacking—especially when it comes to child care. As Melissa Boteach of the National Women's Law Center writes: "Child care is the long-neglected backbone of our economic and public health infrastructure." In response to the spread of the virus in the United States, child care centers and schools in most states have closed with immediate effect, and some will remain closed through the end of the school year. Our health and safety, and that of our communities, must come first. Yet, for the child care sector, this is like driving a tank over an already crumbling bridge—the already undervalued sector cannot withstand this pressure.

On the consumer side, parents—many of whom already have difficulty affording child care—are seeing their household incomes dry up. Parents Together conducted a survey of parents and found, not surprisingly, that families are struggling as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. Two-thirds say they have either lost income already or expect to soon; 80 percent are worried about having enough money to cover basic housing and food costs within three months. Nearly half worry they will run out of money within the next two weeks. Half of the respondents are specifically losing income so that a family member can stay home with kids.

At the same time, we know that those who work in child care—primarily women, and disproportionately women of color—are some of the lowest paid and most undervalued workers in the country. They often lack health insurance or savings. Today, because of the pandemic, many are losing their jobs, or worrying about losing their jobs. As Congress passes bailout packages, these workers must receive priority, including making sure nonprofits and other child care centers are included in small business grants and loans and are required to continue to pay their workers.

So far, Congress has done very little to support the child care sector, early educators, and the child care needs of families. The first legislative COVID-19 response package to directly address child care was the phase 3 bill, which includes \$3.5 billion in additional funding for the Child Care Development Block Grant to provide child care assistance to health care sector employees, emergency responders, sanitation workers, and other workers deemed essential during the response to the coronavirus—a drop in the bucket compared to what is needed.

## Here Is What Congress Must Do Right Now

Congress must do much more to ensure that families have the care they need, that child care workers have support, and that the child care sector survives, and ultimately thrives. What Congress must do to make this happen includes:

1. **Bail out families, child care workers, and the child care sector more broadly.** This requires an investment of \$100 billion to shore up the sector.
2. **Provide safe child care options for essential workers.** Government must cover the cost and ensure the availability of safe child care options for those on the front lines.
3. **Pass paid family and medical leave and paid sick days for everybody.** Families right now are torn between employment and providing child care; paid leave would give them some flexibility.
4. **Ensure unemployment insurance for caregivers.** Families who lose their jobs because of the need to provide their own child care must receive unemployment insurance benefits.
5. **Provide additional support for all families, regardless of citizenship or other factors.** This includes nutrition assistance, housing assistance, and direct cash assistance.

For a more detailed breakdown of the five calls to congress, see [here](#).

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** advocacy <sup>[4]</sup>

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