

Congress bailed out the airline industry. Why won't it do the same for child care? ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Air travel has now surpassed its pre-pandemic level. Resorts and hotels are overflowing with guests again. Indeed, many parts of our economy are not only returning to normal, they're overwhelmed with success.

Except the part of the economy I'm invested in: early childhood education.

Eight years ago I started a child care program in Freeport, New York. We're proud of our educators, who've not only earned the Child Development Associate credential, but have proven they understand how to nurture the emotional, physical, intellectual and social development of children.

Early on in the pandemic, the federal government realized that stabilizing the early childhood sector was essential to seeing the country rebound. Yet when child care programs like mine finally received grant money late last year, it raised the amount of our taxable income. This caused financial headaches across the industry.

We're grateful the state gave a significant boost to providers like me whose students include families that qualify for public support. Yet there has been no new funding to defray the rising costs of food and supplies or increases in minimum wages. And our insurance policies have now doubled.

It was already difficult to continue as a viable business—our profit margins were so thin that we couldn't even offer benefits to employees, much less expand our services. Now, with rising inflation and human resource challenges, our business is in jeopardy.

Plenty of programs like ours on Long Island have already given up. I know of at least 20 that have closed due to financial burdens since the pandemic began. And with each closure, a number of families are suddenly scrambling for child care, with children denied the opportunity to learn and grow in a high-quality setting.

Our elected leaders in Washington, D.C., have an opportunity to fix the situation. There's an effort to invest robust, ramped-up funding in the existing federal child care program—the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program—which would quickly get funding to all 50 states and territories, strengthen the early learning workforce, expand the supply of quality child care facilities, and lower child care costs for families across the country.

The CCDBG program has served millions of children and families for decades. However, due to insufficient funding levels, CCDBG currently only reaches 11 percent of income-eligible young children and doesn't provide adequate reimbursement to providers.

Negotiations continue on Capitol Hill, and we in the early childhood sector are optimistic that our lawmakers can find some common ground. On this issue, which has bipartisan support, there is reason for hope.

It's absolutely essential to my community that this funding be expanded. Parents in Long Island—and, I'm sure, all over the country—can't go back to work until they find a child care solution for their children. And for so many parents and caregivers, with program closures, staffing shortages, and eye-popping costs, that is a near-impossible task as is.

During the worst months of the pandemic, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and other leaders in Washington gave \$50 billion of our tax dollars to the 10 major passenger airlines in the U.S. to help pay the salaries of 750,000 airline professionals. These funds were justified, Congress argued, because it would prevent the airlines from going bankrupt. And yes, in that case, Congress did the right thing, as evidenced by the success the travel sector is enjoying again.

It's time now for Congress to take a similar step for our early childhood educators, before it's too late.

Region: United States ^[3]

Tags: child care ^[4]

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