

Unionizing home-based providers to help address the child care crisis ^[1]

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Introduction

As children grow and develop, child care workers play a vital role in fostering learning and providing support in a safe and nurturing environment. High-quality child care jobs, where workers are valued and respected, benefit both workers and the children and families they serve. Child care workers are also essential to the broader economy, as children need to be cared for in a safe place when parents go to work, school, training, or meet other needs. But child care workers cannot provide adequate care if they can't take time off when they're sick, must care for too many children at once, or receive such low wages that they can't feed their own families, among other issues.

Unfortunately, the United States has historically undervalued the child care workforce and failed to foster healthy labor conditions in this industry. In addition to more federal and state investments, strong unions for child care workers are part of the solution. This brief walks through some of the history and current landscape of the child care workforce, including which states have collective bargaining policies in place for home-based child care providers, who fall outside the traditional employer-employee bargaining model and lack a mechanism for collectively organizing and advocating for themselves. It also outlines how such policies benefit workers, families, and the economy, sharing successes from across the nation. State policymakers, child care advocates, and labor leaders can use these lessons to develop similar collective bargaining rights for these vital workers.

Conclusion

American society can't function without an accessible and affordable child care system. Key to creating and maintaining that system is valuing and supporting child care workers, especially through state legislation to ensure that home-based providers can unionize and collectively bargain. For far too long, child care providers have had their passion for educating young children weaponized against them to artificially keep their working conditions harsh and their compensation inadequate. Home-based child care is fundamental to providing access for the most vulnerable families, particularly those who work non-standard hours, speak languages other than English, have infants and toddlers, and live in child care deserts.

Unionization of home-based providers is a necessary counter to our nation's historical underinvestment—when compared to the overall workforce—in jobs performed disproportionately by women, immigrants, and people of color. To win much-needed structural change and large-scale investment in the child care industry will take a shift in power and the mass organizing of child care workers. Union power is a key part of that equation.

Region: United States ^[5]

Tags: home child care ^[6]

unionization ^[7]

marginalized families ^[8]

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