

Raising children is expensive. Some parents want it on the ballot

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Driven by a national shortage of workers and facilities, the costs of day care and preschool are rising at nearly twice the pace of inflation, devastating household finances for low- and middle-income families.

The average cost of care for two children is more expensive than the average rent in all 50 states and the average mortgage payment in 45 states, according to a report by the nonprofit Child Care Aware of America.

And these runaway costs influence how parents of young children – especially mothers – plan to vote in November.

Nearly 9 in 10 parents surveyed by Care.com said a political candidate’s position on child care access and affordability would help determine their vote.

Parker says she’s one of them. She signed a petition to make child care one of the questions asked during the first presidential debate in June. Republican candidate and former President Donald Trump never mentioned child care in his answer, which he mostly used to slam then-Democratic candidate President Joe Biden.

Biden, who has since been replaced on the Democratic ticket by Vice President Kamala Harris, argued for increasing the child care tax credit but mostly sparred with Trump.

“I was so deflated, I stopped watching,” Parker said. “Why isn’t this a priority?”

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More than half of women voters who live with a child under the age of 18 said they worry “a lot” or “some” about affording child care, according to a poll from nonprofit health policy research and polling firm KFF.

“I have been surprised at how little this has been discussed this election cycle when we know it is one of the most important issues for our businesses and for our parents,” said Brenda Shields, a Republican state representative in Missouri who is sponsoring a child care tax credit bill and a longtime advocate for making safe and reliable child care more widely accessible and affordable.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation estimated that states across the country lose billions of dollars in economic activity because of breakdowns in the child care system.

“Infrastructure, it’s not just roads and bridges,” Shields said. “We have to think about child care as infrastructure.”

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