

Child care, up in smoke [US] ^[1]

Editorial

Author: New York Times

Source: New York Times

Format: Article

Publication Date: 8 Jul 2004

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Welfare reform has been widely hailed as a smashing success, but it can't continue that way without child care subsidies for both recipients and the working poor. Faced with their own budget problems and inadequate federal subsidies, many states have taken steps to cut child care budgets. In many places, that means denying services to children who are entitled to care under federal guidelines. With no safe places to leave their children, low-income parents are far more likely to lose their jobs & end up back on welfare.

At the moment, only about 15 percent of the eligible children actually receive federally subsidized day care. In California, the waiting list has nearly 300,000 children.

Yet the House of Representatives, when writing legislation to extend the current welfare reform system, included only \$1 billion in new child care money. That would actually make the backlog worse, cutting as many as 400,000 children from day care by the end of this decade.

Thanks to longtime child care advocates like Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine, the Senate reached a bipartisan agreement on a provision that would add \$6 billion in child care subsidies over the next five years - a figure that comes closer to covering the actual national need. But that good work became moot when the Senate collapsed in bickering over the welfare bill as a whole.

Meanwhile, faced with anemic federal support, the states have begun to dismantle the child care programs that make it possible for low-income parents to work outside the home. They are turning away eligible children, cutting payments to child care providers and abandoning plans for enrichment programs that would prepare young children for school. While Congress fiddles, child care goes up in smoke.

- reprinted from the New York Times

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