

Democrats make last-minute push to unionize California child-care workers ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Democratic legislative leaders have launched a last-minute push to allow unions to organize child-care providers who work out of the home.

Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez and Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg have drafted legislation that would deliver a major victory to labor allies who have been fighting for years for the right to organize the more than 40,000 family child-care providers operating in California.

Assembly Bill 101, sponsored by the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees and the Service Employees International Union, would affect both licensed family child-care providers, who can care for children in their homes, and certain license-exempt providers, including grandparents, relatives and neighbors receiving state subsidies to care for one family.

Supporters say low wages and limited benefits have forced some home-based child-care providers to leave the profession, limiting access to care for working families. Budget cuts to programs that help cover the cost of caring for children from low-income families have exacerbated providers' troubles.

"We don't want to keep holding those folks hostage, because working parents depend on them to work," John Vigna, a spokesman for Pérez, said. "In order to sort of help mitigate some of the chaos and ensure some more stability for them, we want to give (providers) a seat at the table." That seat would likely come at a cost to the state. Starting in 2014, unionized child-care providers could negotiate to increase reimbursement rates for state-subsidized child-care assistance, which have been frozen at 2005 levels due to budget constraints. Dues would come out of those subsidies, a setup one child-care advocate cautioned could limit options for low-income families who receive state aid.

"If providers really don't want to pay those fees or dues, they may say, 'I don't want to take child-care subsidy children,'" said Donita Stromgren, policy and member services director for the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network,

Still, Stromgren said the move could be a win for providers and advocates who want to see home-based sitters stay in business.

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