

We're all paying the high cost of child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

My son starts kindergarten this fall, and on his first day of school, my pocketbook will get fatter. That's because, right now, I'm paying \$10,128 a year to send him to a top-notch preschool and day care.

I can afford to pay the bill for high-quality child care - even if some months, that means we're living closer to the margin than I'd like.

But compared to other Michigan parents, who pay an average of \$9,724 a year for full-time, center-based infant care - about one-fifth the state median household income of \$48,273 - I'm well ahead of the curve.

And those numbers are per child. The median income assumes a family of four. It's also an average: High-quality care in competitive areas costs more; home-based care costs less. And yet, despite the thousands of dollars that parents pay, day-care workers are among the most poorly compensated, on average.

So when President Barack Obama, in his seventh State of the Union address, acknowledged last month that child care is expensive, that even middle-class families struggle with the cost, it was hardly news - not to me, and not to the millions of American parents who fork over gobs of cash to child-care centers each week.

What made Obama's take so remarkable is that he acknowledged, not just the economic and educational importance of high-quality child care, but its necessity: It's a "must-have," he said, not a "nice-to-have." It's a national economic priority.

Two hours earlier, Gov. Rick Snyder delivered his annual State of the State address, naming reform of Michigan's social service network as an essential task. It's not enough for state programs to address an immediate need, the governor said, it's crucial to provide a comprehensive array of services that can truly effect change in struggling Michiganders' lives.

If the governor hopes to make good on this promise, changing the way the state helps parents find and pay for high-quality child care should be his first priority.

Region: United States ^[3]

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