

Fourteen arrests at California protest in support of child care reforms ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Fourteen women were arrested for blocking an intersection in front of California's State Capitol building in Sacramento on Wednesday in an act of pre-planned civil disobedience supporting a proposed law that would examine standards for daycare in the state and allow workers to unionize.

That measure, SB 548, passed in the California Senate by a vote of 25-12 hours after the arrests. It now moves to the state Assembly.

"If we can't take care of our kids how can we do everything else?" said Gilda Valdez, one of those arrested. "The governor has to understand: if we are not taking care of our kids we are not taking care of California."

California has about 65,000 childcare providers. Many of those are home-based operations where caretakers have little formal training in early childhood education and work long hours for low wages. SB 548 would commission a best-practices study for improving such facilities and issue recommendations on how to enhance the opportunities for learning for both kids and providers.

"SB 548 recognizes the difficult decisions faced today by parents in low-income jobs that pit keeping their kids safe against keeping their jobs," said the bill's author, senate president Kevin de Leon. "With this bill we are investing in job-readiness for parents who need quality childcare to hold on to tough jobs, and at the same time lifting up the women who do the critical work of educating our children at the youngest ages."

None of the women detained by police were childcare providers, according to organizer Roberto De La Cruz. Under California licensing requirements a childcare worker could be fired for an arrest, he said. So event organizers including the union SEIU – also a major force behind the fast food workers' movement – asked activists, friends and family to stand in for providers.

"They took the arrest for them and to me that's one of the most courageous things you can do," said De La Cruz.

Police were informed prior to the event that the women would block the intersection and were prepared to be taken into custody, he said. Dozens of police were on hand to handle those arrests, which took place in an organized and orderly fashion. The women were asked to stand up one by one, placed in plastic wrist restraints and led to a waiting van.

The women were cited under a vehicle code for obstructing traffic and released, according to Sacramento police department spokesman Doug Morse.

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