

# Celebrate Labor Day by giving workers affordable child care <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

As I was lying in the hospital bed shortly after giving birth to my first child, I thought to myself, "I finally understand why they call it 'going into labor'—giving birth is really really hard work." A further sign that I did not yet realize what I was in for, and was still accustomed to the independence of my pre-baby life, I remember thinking to myself, "I can't wait to get a good night's sleep tonight." Almost five years and another kid later, I'm still waiting for that good night's sleep.

In many ways, the physical and emotional work of childbirth is a sort of baptism by fire—it is hard and intense. So is caring for children after birth. Most any parent or child-care provider will tell you that taking care of kids is, yes, one of the most rewarding jobs in life, but also one of the most exhausting.

Though we rarely think of it in these terms, child care is indeed labor—labor that is both physically and emotionally demanding. It is also work that involves the thing that many of us care most about in the world—our family. Given that, you'd think that we would value child care more than any other kind of work in the world, and that it would be a national priority. Surprisingly though, it often feels like the opposite is true. Accessing affordable, quality child care in this country is one of the most vexing challenges many working families face in this country.

The average cost of child care in the U.S. is over \$11,000 per child per year (and it's even higher for infant care). Child-care costs have risen drastically in recent years relative to other costs for families. So much so that women's participation in the workforce has dropped for the first time in decades, largely because of these rising costs. Once families do the math, they realize that, in the short term, it makes more financial sense for a parent to stay home rather than break even or worse.

Yet, it doesn't have to be this way. We give a lot of lip service in this country to family values. We should have policies that value families, starting with widely available, affordable, quality child care. As long as we don't, we all—kids, parents, employers and child-care providers—lose out.

Studies have found that the first five years of a child's life are critical to their social and emotional development, as well as their potential to be good students and citizens later in life. All children deserve the opportunity to succeed, which means they all deserve to be cared for in safe, nurturing, educational environments.

Furthermore, parents who can go to work with the peace of mind that their children are in good hands are more productive employees, meaning bigger and steadier profits for their companies. That's why successful companies like Costco and Google provide care for their employees' kids—it's good for their bottom line.

Child-care providers also play a crucial role in driving our economy. Many of them are parents themselves, and the overwhelming majority of these workers—most of whom are women—earn near-poverty wages for one of the most important jobs of all: ensuring the well-being and healthy development of our children. They need to make a living wage so that they, too, can afford to provide for their families. Just as important, their pay should reflect the importance of their work.

Candidates running for office would be wise to take note of the increasing popularity of affordable child care among voters. A national poll of voters conducted last month by Anzalone Liszt Grove for Make It Work found that 75 percent of voters favor passing laws to ensure families have access to quality, affordable child care alongside other measures like paid family leave and paid sick days, and that a majority of voters are more likely to support a candidate who backs such a plan. It's clear that voters want the government to do right by working families on this issue.

So this Labor Day, as we celebrate the American worker, let's not forget the parents who work hard to ensure their children have quality care, and the child-care workers who provide that care. We all have a stake in making sure the next generation has a bright future, and it's time to bring quality child care within reach for all parents.

-reprinted from CNBC

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** affordability <sup>[4]</sup>

labour market <sup>[5]</sup>

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