

# New aid for ballooning child-care costs <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The annual cost of day care for infants in most states now exceeds a year of public college tuition, an issue that has become a significant problem for the nation's labor force. Because day care devours at least 30 percent of a minimum-wage worker's earnings in every state, getting the job training necessary to move up the income scale is effectively impossible for many parents.

The potential for surging child-care costs to stifle workforce development has prompted the Labor Department to step in, offering \$25 million in grants next year to programs that make it easier for parents to find quality care while they attend college or learn a new trade.

Labor Secretary Thomas Perez announced the grants on Thursday, noting that some will go to providers that offer off-hours or short-notice care for student or trainee parents. Others will support centers that offer job skills training and child-care, for example, in the same building.

Eligible programs with at least three employees could each receive up to \$4 million, starting in January.

"I meet a lot of parents who don't have a family safety net to help them out with child care," Perez said. "They don't have the time to get the training they need to get a better job because they're stuck in their current job to pay for the child care."

When child care stays out of reach for parents, research shows they sacrifice job opportunities, drop out of the workforce or settle for unsafe arrangements.

Last year, for instance, a homeless mother in Arizona was arrested for leaving her kids in a car while interviewing for a job. A mother in Texas was arrested in July for telling her kids to wait in a mall food court while she interviewed for a job in the building. Both women told police they were desperate for work and unable to find last-second care.

The annual cost of day care for infants has soared nationwide: Parents can expect to pay \$14,500 in New York, \$16,500 in Massachusetts, \$11,628 in California and \$12,500 in Illinois, according to Child Care Aware of America, a national research group that promotes quality care.

While the burden is tough on middle-class families, it's especially unmanageable for parents straddling the poverty line. To cover a year of full-time infant care in Hawaii, the state with the median minimum wage (\$7.75), a worker would have to spend every paycheck from January until September. Those in New York and Massachusetts, where costs are higher, would have to set aside 80 percent of their annual incomes to fund the expense.

Data doesn't tell us how many U.S. parents are enrolled in job-training programs, juggling bedtime stories with night classes. But we know that more than a quarter of American undergraduates are raising children, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research. That's about 4.8 million degree seekers who are responsible for much more than their grades.

For these students, studies show the cost of day care is a barrier to graduation. Fifty-nine percent of a sample of Mississippi mothers who dropped out of community colleges told researchers that access to more stable, affordable care could have kept them in school.

Day care, meanwhile, continues to slowly vanish from U.S. college campuses. Fifty-three percent of two-year schools and 55 percent of four-year schools offered the service in 2003, according to the IWPR, compared with 46 percent and 51 percent in 2013.

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

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

mother's labour force participation <sup>[5]</sup>

cost <sup>[6]</sup>

students <sup>[7]</sup>

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