

Child care workers are in the Fight For 15 ^[1]

Opinion

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EXCERPTS

I've spent 17 years working in the child care industry. I started out in my own home, and am now the director of Kiddiversity in St. Louis.

The joy I feel providing children with a safe space to learn, grow and become healthy citizens is endless. Unfortunately, the subsidies that pay for quality child care are not endless. Because child care facilities such as Kiddiversity are underfunded, it also means my child care providers are underpaid. Child care workers are essential, yet they often struggle to support their own families. We need higher government subsidies for child care facilities like mine in order to provide quality care without making it too expensive for families. This is why on April 14, I will be joining low-wage workers across the country to demand living wages and union rights for workers across various industries, and to call for higher subsidies for child care.

This movement started with fast-food workers fighting for \$15 an hour and the right to form a union. While I supported this fight, I didn't realize just how connected it was to my own struggle. Corporations like McDonald's set the standard for many other successful businesses. Even though it's a billion-dollar corporation, workers earn minimum or slightly above minimum wage.

Many of the parents whose children I care for are low-wage workers. They qualify for free or subsidized child care, often struggling to pay the amount that comes out of pocket. Even though the subsidy I receive doesn't cover the actual cost of providing quality child care, I can't raise my prices, because I would be leaving these families with no other option than to rely on a substandard form of child care.

Not only does McDonald's pay low wages, they avoid paying their fair share of taxes. Taxes that could be used to fund essential services like the one I provide. About \$146 million in tax money in Missouri goes to public assistance for fast-food workers. By paying workers a living wage that allows them to support themselves and their families, we free up \$146 million that could go toward giving my child care providers living wages, incentivizing higher education, and so much more.

A new report by the Economic Policy Institute found that a national investment that caps families' child care expenditures at 10 percent of their income could help more parents join and stay in the workforce, boosting national GDP by about \$210 billion and putting \$3.18 billion into the Missouri economy each year. Fixing our broken child care system and paying child care providers at least \$15 an hour would directly raise wages for 60 percent of the workforce. Making child care affordable would also save the average Missouri family thousands of dollars a year, freeing up money to spend in the local economy on housing, food and other necessities.

On April 14, the day before tax day, I ask everyone in Missouri to think about where they want their tax money to go. Do you want to subsidize a billion-dollar corporation's bad practices, or do you want to make sure that every child has access to quality care? In order to make our city, our state and our country stronger, we need jobs that pay fair wages and a safe place for our children to learn and grow while we're at work.

Region: United States ^[3]

Tags: childcare workforce ^[4]

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