

Families shouldn't have to choose between child care and enough food to eat ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Paola Calvo had to choose between taking care of her 10-month old child and going hungry.

She went hungry.

She and her partner were giddy with excitement about the birth of their first child Sebastian, but they hadn't anticipated he'd be born with a cleft palate, a condition in which the roof of the mouth contains an opening into the nose. This disorder can result in feeding problems, speech problems, hearing problems, and frequent ear infections, and left the couple unable to enroll him in a regular childcare center because he required special medical attention. The lack of affordable options left Paola unable to work until Sebastian could have corrective surgery at 10 months old. That meant she and her partner had to burn through their savings in order to make ends meet.

She went to bed hungry more than once, worried about how that could hurt her nursing child.

These are the choices that working families face in their daily lives. Costs continue to rise and parents are devoting more time to work in order to make ends meet. It is no surprise then that couples are waiting longer to have children. They don't always want to, but it is a choice they have to make because of the financial constraints involved in raising a family in modern America.

Here's an idea for much needed relief for families: Affordable childcare.

The annual cost of putting two kids in a full-time childcare center, a necessity for lots of working class families, is more than the annual cost of rent in most states and infant care costs more than a year of public college in 31 states.

I am an immigrant in this country trying to make ends meet. I was undocumented, but am now working to be a citizen in my adopted home where I want to lay roots. At 25, I am at an age where many people start to think about these things, and it is discouraging to me to see hardworking friends struggle to start a family.

The system should encourage and protect those who want to do the right thing for families.

It wasn't always this tough for families in the United States. In the 1940s, we had a universal childcare program under the Lanham Act, which cost parents the equivalent of \$9 to \$10 dollars a day in today's dollars. The purpose of this act was to provide incentives for women to join the workforce during World War II, and it remains a more affordable childcare program than any available today.

In the 1970s, the country saw a resurgence of interest in the issue of childcare and a universal childcare system was nearly pushed through Congress. Unfortunately, President Nixon vetoed the bill before it could be enacted into law.

Now we find ourselves in 2016 and with greater urgency than ever before. We need a comprehensive childcare system that takes working class families into account.

The United States is increasingly falling behind the developed world on this issue. The lack of childcare does not only affect families, it also hurts employers. It costs businesses around \$3 billion dollars annually when parents who are forced to interrupt their work schedules because of unexpected issues related to childcare.

Julio Calderon and his girlfriend found themselves having to make the difficult choice between work and caring for their child. Julio is an undocumented Immigrant from Honduras who lives in Miami, Florida. He and his partner have been struggling to find affordable childcare for their six-month old baby. The least expensive option they found costs \$350 dollars a week, exceeding their rent.

Julio has been forced to put his university education on hold so he can work two jobs to make ends meet. They rely on family and babysitters. He wishes they had a more stable - and affordable - option. They both need to work to pay their bills, but too often find themselves having to choose between them who stays home with the baby.

We live in one of the wealthiest, most developed nations in the world, yet we have a system that has left the core of our society, our families, behind. Families should never have to choose between paying for child care and paying for enough food to put on the table.

Funding an affordable childcare system is not only a smart fiscal decision, but also a moral responsibility for a country that regularly cites family values as the core of its identity.

Families like Paola's and Julio's have to fight twice as hard to help their families thrive.

Paola found full-time work as a communications manager with the Florida Immigrant Coalition, an immigrant rights group. Now her partner is home taking care of their son.

"For a country with supposed high family values, the support my family needed in our time of need was simply just not there," Paola says.

We can't afford to leave any more families behind.

-reprinted from The Huffington Post

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/16/06/families-shouldn%E2%80%99t-have-choose-between-child-care-and-enough-food> [2]

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<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/health>