



Statement of Nina Perez, National Director of Early Learning, MomsRising

**United States House Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Worker and Family Support Ways**

May 27, 2021

“Hearing on Universal Paid Leave and Guaranteed Access to Child Care”

Thank you, Chairman Davis and Ranking Member Walorski, as well as members of the Worker and Family Support Ways and Means Subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify.

I’m Nina Perez, the National Director of Early Learning at MomsRising, an organization with more than a million members, including members in every state, working to increase family economic security, decrease discrimination, and to build a nation where everyone can thrive.

In my role at MomsRising I have the incredible honor of partnering with other mothers and caregivers to demand that all families have access to a comprehensive care infrastructure, including high-quality, affordable child care and paid family medical leave. The issue of child care is deeply personal to me. My own mother was pushed out of the workforce because she couldn’t find affordable child care and in the last two years sacrificed herself again by moving away from the community she had lived in for over 50 years to care for my daughter when I was unable to find child care. So for two generations, our child care system has failed my family. And that was before the pandemic. When COVID-19 hit, like so many others, we lost our child care for close to a year in order to keep my parents safe until vaccines rolled out. To say it was a struggle is a massive understatement.

And my family was lucky. Lucky that our employers were flexible, and lucky that Congress enacted the Emergency Pandemic Leave Program. But the challenges mothers share with us at MomsRising paint a vivid, disturbing picture of the harm caused by decades of underinvestment in our child care infrastructure.

Moms like Amanda, a MomsRising member in New Hampshire who has a 5-year-old daughter and a 3-year-old son with special needs. When the pandemic hit, her children's child care program closed and her son lost access to in-person therapies and services, dramatically increasing Amanda's caregiving responsibilities and her stress. Her employer was not

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accommodating, and she was forced to leave her job of 13 years that she loved in order to meet her kids' needs.

Amanda's not alone. One recent study finds that [1 in 3 caregivers report being forced to reduce hours or leave the workforce altogether](#) because of child care - with Black, Indigenous and women and moms of color affected the most. To put this in perspective, women were half of our paid labor force at the start of the pandemic but now [workforce participation for women has plummeted to 1988 levels](#). These were much-needed jobs. Women in the United States are key breadwinners in most families.

Even before the pandemic, mothers like Whitney in Washington state told us that she desperately needed child care for her 5-year-old daughter and infant son, but couldn't find or afford it. She and her husband made it work by working 'opposite shifts.' And while the shortage of licensed child care in the United States is bad in general, a recent study from CAP found that there is [only enough licensed child care to serve 23 percent of infants and toddlers](#) like Whitney's son. That means there is not enough licensed care for 77% of our youngest kids. We also hear from families like Whitney's that even finding the limited care options that exist is challenging and a huge mental strain, requiring hours and days of calls to providers only to find out no slots are available or they have closed. Local websites that are hard to navigate or parent made spreadsheets created by local parent groups. Families deserve better.

And this is just part of the problem. While our child care system has relied on families paying unaffordable sums, the amazing early educators who care for children (many of whom are moms themselves) are being paid poverty-level wages. Caregivers and early childhood educators deserve respect and dignity for their valuable work. They deserve family supporting wages with benefits, like health care and paid family leave. They deserve fundamental work-related rights and protections. And the [1 out of 5 early childcare workers who are immigrants](#) deserve a path to citizenship. And by making child care jobs sustainable, a robust child care system will not only be job enabling, but job creating. We also know that [increasing wages leads to improved quality](#) and [continuity of care](#), which is so important to parents.

We know you recognize that it's not enough to build back to what we used to have. We need to build back better.

The pandemic has shown what mothers all across the nation already knew, the child care crisis is a structural problem that needs solutions like those proposed in the Building an Economy for Families Act, including measures to expand families' access to high-quality, affordable child care

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with a significant increase in mandatory funding; additional targeted funding for child care facilities to build much needed supply; an increase in wages for child care providers; the Child Care Information Network to help families find child care; and enactment of a paid family and medical leave program, which is so critical to early childhood.

We look forward to working with you on the Building an Economy for Families Act and on putting our country on the path toward a just recovery by building the kind of care infrastructure that is so critical to families, communities, and our economy. Thank you.