

An Open Letter from Economists and Public Policy Scholars in Support of Long-term Child Care Investments

September 14, 2021

We, the undersigned, agree that long-overdue, comprehensive investments in affordable, quality child care must be a part of any major economic legislation. For decades, American families and in turn economic growth have been held back by the lack of modern care infrastructure, as working families have been forced to choose between work and caregiving, hampering female labor force participation and reducing productivity. Congress must seize this opportunity to finally support families and unleash economic growth.

Child care impacts maternal workforce participation – constraining economic growth

Since the 1990s, child-care costs in the United States have grown at [twice](#) the rate of inflation. In the intervening decades, we've seen American women's labor force participation [stagnate](#) and the U.S. [transition](#) from being a leader to a laggard in women's labor force participation. Child care access is strongly associated with [maternal labor force participation](#), and child care undersupply leads to costly [career sacrifices for women](#). All told, it is estimated that the child care crisis costs the United States [\\$57 billion](#) a year in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue. These supply shortages disproportionately impact women, who most-often assume caregiving responsibilities, as well as historically marginalized communities and rural families, significantly weakening many parents' ability to secure and maintain stable employment. For many aspiring entrepreneurs, especially women, child care costs can be prohibitive.

American families are constrained by unaffordable child care costs

American families faced a bleak child care landscape before the coronavirus pandemic struck, with more than half living in [child care deserts](#), where there isn't enough child care supply. For those who can find care, a recent analysis of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) shows that the typical working family with a child under five spends about [\\$13,000 per year on child care](#). Lowering child care costs for low- and middle-income families, who can [spend between 14 and 35 percent](#) of their income on child care, can relieve the financial pressure on families while promoting better long-term health, educational, and civic outcomes for children. In recent years, the child care subsidy system has been chronically underfunded, reaching only [1 in 7 subsidy-eligible children](#). These costs hold families back from getting ahead, reaching or staying in the middle class, and generating other economic activity.

Comprehensive investments in quality early learning are needed

As economists and public policy scholars – and for some, as working parents – we support President Biden's proposal to invest in early childhood, including affordable and accessible child care for infants and toddlers and public preschool. [Child care is critical infrastructure](#) that allows parents to work if they choose. Making child care jobs better compensated is key to attracting and retaining skilled early educators, as the median child care worker only [earns about \\$12 an hour](#) and roughly half of child care workers [relied on public assistance](#) to make ends meet. And a

[recent analysis of the costs and benefits](#) from more than a half century of policy interventions found that investments in children's health and education provide the highest marginal return on every public dollar spent.

Investment in child care is 50 years overdue

In 1971, [Congress passed bipartisan legislation](#) to establish a national system of locally administered child care that would ensure working parents, in particular working women, could count on safe, reliable, and affordable care for their children. Unfortunately, President Nixon's veto of the Comprehensive Child Development Act set the country on a different path, one in which child care has become a major household expense, accompanied by vastly unequal levels of access, affordability, and quality. Along with other unaddressed challenges, this has held families and the economy back such that for the first time [most Americans no longer believe their children will be better off than they are](#). Fifty years later, we are at a pivotal moment in which policymakers can finally make lasting, necessary changes to the child care system to reduce these long-standing economic inequities.

Now is the time to invest in the millions of low-income and middle-class households who are [looking to Washington to find common sense solutions](#) to their everyday problems. Congress supported the immediate relief needs for families and providers of child care, but now it's time to tackle the long-term solutions that will spur our economy. Lawmakers should come together around the shared goal of supporting working parents, compensating our chronically undervalued child care workers, and building a fair and just child care system for our children and our economy.

Signed,

Aaron Sojourner, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Abhay Aneja, J.D., Ph.D. | UC BERKELEY

Ajay Chaudry, Ph.D. | NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Alice Gates, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND

Alicia Sasser Modestino, Ph.D. | NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Almaz Zelleke, Ph.D. | NYU SHANGHAI

Amanda Weinstein, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF AKRON

Andres Vinelli, Ph.D. | CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

Ann Bookman, Ph.D. | UMASS BOSTON

Anna Markowitz, Ph.D. | UCLA

Anne Winkler, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS

Art Rolnick, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Arthur MacEwan, Ph.D. | UMASS BOSTON

Ayoung Kim, Ph.D. | MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Betsey Stevenson, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Brian E. Roe, Ph.D. | THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Caitlyn Collins, Ph.D. | WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Candace Howes, Ph.D. | CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
Caren Grown, Ph.D. | THE WORLD BANK
Carrie Wendel-Hummell, Ph.D. | THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS
Catherine Maclean, Ph.D. | TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
Christian Weller, Ph.D. | UMASS BOSTON
Christina Ewig, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Christina Weiland, Ed.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Cindy Cain, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM
Colleen Heflin, Ph.D. | SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
Corey Shdaimah, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
Daphna Bassok, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
Darby Saxbe, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
David Alexander, Ph.D. | ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN
David Blau, Ph.D. | THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
Dean Baker, Ph.D. | CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND POLICY RESEARCH
Deb Figart, Ph.D. | STOCKTON UNIVERSITY
Deborah Phillips, Ph.D. | GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
Demie Kurz, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
Diana Strassmann, Ph.D. | RICE UNIVERSITY
Eileen Appelbaum, Ph.D. | CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND POLICY RESEARCH
Eileen Boris, Ph.D. | UC SANTA BARBARA
Eleni Bickell, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
Elizabeth Adamson, Ph.D. | THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
Elizabeth Oltmans Ananat, Ph.D. | BARNARD COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
Emily Abel, Ph.D. | UCLA
Erica L. Groshen, Ph.D. | CORNELL UNIVERSITY
Farida Khan, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO COLORADO SPRINGS
Francesca Bettio, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF SIENA
Francesca Degiuli, Ph.D. | FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY
Francine Blau, Ph.D. | CORNELL UNIVERSITY
Gabrielle Pepin, Ph.D. | W.E. UPJOHN INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH
Heidi Shierholz, Ph.D. | ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE
Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Ph.D. | NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
Jason Furman, Ph.D. | HARVARD UNIVERSITY
Joan Lombardi, Ph.D. | EARLY OPPORTUNITIES
Jocelyn Olcott, Ph.D. | DUKE UNIVERSITY
John Miller, Ph.D. | WHEATON COLLEGE
Joya Misra, Ph.D. | UMASS AMHERST
Joyce J. Chen, Ph.D. | THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Julia Henly, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
Julie A. Nelson, Ph.D. | UMASS BOSTON
Julie Matthaei, Ph.D. | WELLESLEY COLLEGE
Juliet Bromer, Ph.D. | ERIKSON INSTITUTE
Justin Wolfers, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Karen Christopher, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE
Kate Bahn, Ph.D. | WASHINGTON CENTER FOR EQUITABLE GROWTH
Kate R. Schneider, Ph.D. | JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
Kathlene McDonald, Ph.D. | THE CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK
Katie B. Garner, Ph.D. | INT'L ASSOC. OF MATERNAL ACTION AND SCHOLARSHIP
Kelly A. Davidson, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
Kim Price-Glynn, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT
Kimberly Christensen, Ph.D. | SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE
Kimberly D. Lucas, Ph.D. | METROLAB NETWORK
Kristin Smith, Ph.D. | DARTMOUTH COLLEGE
Lauren Bauer, Ph.D. | BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
Lea J.E. Austin, Ed.D. | CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD CARE EMPLOYMENT
Lenore Palladino, Ph.D. | UMASS AMHERST
Lily Roberts | CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS
Lynda Pickbourn, Ph.D. | UMASS AMHERST
Lynet Uttal, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Madonna Harrington Meyer, Ph.D. | SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
Mahala Stewart, Ph.D. | HAMILTON COLLEGE
Marci Cottingham, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM
Margaret Jodlowski, Ph.D. | THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
Mark Paul, Ph.D. | NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA
Mary C King, Ph.D. | PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY
Mary Tuominen, Ph.D. | DENISON UNIVERSITY
Maureen Perry-Jenkins, Ph.D. | UMASS AMHERST
Max Sawicky, Ph.D. | CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND POLICY RESEARCH
Melissa Boteach | NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER
Melissa Hodges, Ph.D. | VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY
Michael Reich, Ph.D. | UC BERKELEY
Mignon Duffy, Ph.D. | UMASS LOWELL
Mimi Abramovitz, DSW | HUNTER COLLEGE
Mindy Fried, Ph.D. | ARBOR CONSULTING PARTNERS
Mohamad Shaaf, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA
Nancy Folbre, Ph.D. | UMASS AMHERST
Naomi Lightman, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Natasha Pilkauskas, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Nathan Boucher, Ph.D. | DUKE UNIVERSITY
Nina Banks, Ph.D. | BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY
Peter Q. Blair, Ph.D. | HARVARD UNIVERSITY
Peter Dorman, Ph.D. | EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE
Phyllis Moen, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Rakeen Mabud, Ph.D. | GROUNDWORK COLLABORATIVE
Randy Albelda, Ph.D. | UMASS BOSTON
Rebecca Ryan, Ph.D. | GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
Rhonda Vonshay Sharpe, Ph.D. | WOMEN'S INSTITUTE FOR SCIENCE, EQUITY AND RACE
Rucker Johnson, Ph.D. | UC BERKELEY
Russell S. Hassan, Ph.D. | THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
Ruth Milkman, Ph.D. | CUNY GRADUATE CENTER
Ruth Paris, Ph.D. | BOSTON UNIVERSITY
Sarah Cohodes, Ph.D. | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Sarah Damaske, Ph.D. | PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
Sarah Wolfolds, Ph.D. | CORNELL UNIVERSITY
Scott W. Allard, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
Sharon Wolf, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
Stacey Jones, Ph.D. | SEATTLE UNIVERSITY
Suzanne Bergeron, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, DEARBORN
Taryn Morrissey, Ph.D. | AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
Thomas E. Lambert, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE
Tim Bartik, Ph.D. | W.E. UPJOHN INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH
Tim Smeeding, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Tracy Mott, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF DENVER
Victoria Restler, Ph.D. | RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE
William Gormley, Ph.D. | GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
Yavuz Yasar, Ph.D. | UNIVERSITY OF DENVER
Yoonsook Ha, Ph.D. | BOSTON UNIVERSITY
Zoë Plakias, Ph.D. | THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY