

Child care providers across the US protest deplorable wages and conditions

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On Monday, more than 1,000 child care centers in the US temporarily shut down facilities Monday, while workers called in sick, to take part in the third annual “Day Without Child Care,” sponsored by Community Change Action. The protest highlighted the crisis faced by both child care workers and parents in the provision of care for young children.

In March 2021, \$24 billion in child care stabilization grants and \$15 billion in supplemental discretionary child care funds were passed by Congress and signed into law by President Joe Biden as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The ARPA funds provided desperately needed financial support to child care programs, early educators, and families and their young children throughout the United States.

However, on May 11, 2023, the Biden administration ended the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, taking with it vitally needed funds for child care providers. On September 30, 2023, the \$24 billion in Child Care Stabilization funds expired. The \$15 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant is set to expire in September of this year.

Before the allocation of these funds, child care workers were already earning poverty wages and parents were scrambling to find affordable care for their young children. To say the child care system in America is in crisis is a huge understatement.

An analysis published earlier this month by the National Women’s Law Center presents staggering statistics.

The median hourly wage for a child care worker in the US is \$14.60. A child care worker employed at this rate for 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, would earn just over \$30,000 annually—although few of these workers have these hours. Health and Human Services places the 2024 poverty level for a four-person household at an abysmally low \$31,200.

Making matters even more dire, early childhood

educators are paid far less than educators in grades K-8, who themselves are poorly remunerated. UC Berkeley researchers found that poverty rates among early childhood educators are 7.7 times higher than teachers in grades K-8. Child care workers and services are listed on websites like Care.com alongside nannies, cleaners, personal care assistants and other low-paid occupations for hire.

Early childhood education (ECE), also known as nursery education, emerged as a field of study during the Enlightenment, particularly in 18th century Europe. Early childhood researchers emphasize the importance of ECE for developing the physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive skills of young children. But in 21st century America, ECE is relegated to the category of mere childminding, with child care workers paid accordingly.

A child care director/administrator in Mississippi responded to a survey by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) on the challenges of running a child care center under the current economic conditions:

My program has been impacted in every negative way possible. I can’t pay bills on time, supplies are limited, can’t support the children as I did. I am at the point of closing my center after 25 years. I helped all of my employees to get a degree; some have received Masters, and I can’t afford to pay them what they are worth or I don’t pay myself.

Meanwhile, affordable, quality child care is out of reach for most working- and middle-class parents. A report from Care.com found that nearly half of US parents spend more than \$18,000 a year on child care expenses. And one

in five US families spends \$36,000 or more on child care in a single year.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant, a federal program that provides subsidies to parents for child care, is severely underfunded. According to the First Five Years Fund, CCDBG only reaches about 14 percent of eligible working families.

A federal government report last year found that in some areas of the US, such as Washington D.C., single parents spent 75 percent of their income on infant care.

More than 14 million US children aged 5 and younger, or roughly two in three children in this age group, have all available parents in the workforce. This forces parents to choose between working and obtaining child care.

According to US Census data, more than a quarter of parents with children under 6 said that they or a family member were forced to miss work due to a child care issue. Parents must make the impossible choice of quitting their jobs or placing their children in unlicensed facilities, with overworked, underpaid workers and unsafe conditions.

An early childhood educator in Oregon told NAEYC:

We don't bring in enough in tuition to meet salary. Increasing tuition would be a huge hardship on parents. We need to increase wages, but can't afford to. I can't find qualified staff and have had to close a classroom. Morale is low, behaviors are challenging. We are NOT OK.

Budget cuts to child care are taking place at the state and local level as well. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, a Democrat, has proposed a 2025 budget that wholly eliminates the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund. This fund was created in 2021 with the aim of providing permanent funding to help offer direct payments to child care professionals and employers to equalize compensation of child care workers with their counterparts in the District's public school system.

Child care as a basic right

Thousands of providers and parents participated in the Day Without Child Care, motivated by their demand for

living wages for child care workers. However, the liberal organizers' perspective of pressuring Congress and the Biden administration to provide more funding will find no response from the same big-business politicians who have slashed federal programs and grants under conditions where child care is in an unprecedented crisis.

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US vice president, commented on Monday's protests:

Child care providers are among the most exploited sections of the US workforce. The already appalling conditions at child care centers in the US have been compounded by the Biden administration's decision to end the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, which has led to the slashing of grants and subsidies to child care centers, creating a catastrophe for working class families and child care workers alike.

While these programs are cut to the bone, the Democrats and Republicans have authorized billions to fund the genocide in Gaza and US-NATO proxy war against Russia.

Child care and early childhood education are basic social rights that can only be defended through the mobilization of the working class in a political struggle for socialism against the two big-business parties. This fight must be independent of the unions, which have abandoned child care workers and their members, millions of whom are parents struggling to find affordable, high-quality health care for their young children.



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