



To: Community Change
From: Mike Lux
Re: Child Care Memo

Time for a Real Solution to the Child Care Crisis

As the 2020 election cycle begins its critical last phase, the campaign having been dominated by coronavirus, there is an issue beginning to explode: what are we going to do about child care? Stories like [this](#) and [this](#) are starting to show up with greater and greater frequency in the national media. There can be no doubt that solving the child care crisis in America is critical to rebuilding an economy continuing to face the challenges of the COVID crisis.

However, something else is equally certain, which is that the child care system in this country has been in a deep state of crisis for a long time. We need more than a temporary fix, more than a few extra billion dollars here and there into the child care system to help us make it through the current moment. What the COVID crisis has shined a glaring spotlight on is that our country desperately needs to finally solve this problem that has been long undermining both our economy as a whole and the lives of working parents in that economy.

The Republicans are doing what they have always done: ignore the child care crisis and just tell everyone they have to get back to work. But that doesn't cut it. Parents with small children simply can't wave a magic wand and go back to work with no child care help, and schools can't fully reopen without regard to the safety of children and teachers.

Chaos

Chaos is increasingly the result of our nation's contradictory attempts to get the economy going again without dealing with child care. Look at [what happened](#) in Texas when it started to reopen:

Restaurant servers, retail cashiers and movie theater concession workers in Texas could be called back to work as soon as Friday, in the first phase of the state's emergence from a coronavirus shelter-at-home order.

But parents working in those industries who have young children will be turned away from licensed child care centers, which remain open only for children of essential

workers such as grocery clerks and nurses. And public and private schools across the state are closed for all students through the end of the school year.

And now the hurried, chaotic re-opening is resulting in the worst kind of consequences, as Texas has exploded in new cases and become one of the national COVID epicenters. Chaos is not the way to rebuild this economy. Paying attention to the details that matter to working families is what is needed.

Tens of Millions Need Child Care While Providers, Especially in Poor Communities, Have Closed or Are at Closure Risk

Eleven percent of the U.S. workforce - 17.5 million workers - are taking care of young kids on their own and will be unlikely to return to work full-time until schools and day cares fully reopen according to [an analysis](#) by the University of Chicago's Becker Friedman Institute.

Thirteen percent of U.S. parents had to quit a job or reduce their working hours due to a lack of child care, according to a survey of 2,557 working parents conducted by Northeastern University from May 10 to June 22. The survey found parents were losing an average of eight hours of work a week - the equivalent of a full day - because they had to address their kids' needs.

Nearly 60% of children under five participated in regular weekly care arrangements and a third were enrolled in a child care program of some kind before the coronavirus struck. Yet, with many child care providers from small family day cares to after-school programs closing up shop indefinitely, [parents have few options](#):

Though in many places they were not required to close, since the pandemic began, nearly half of child care facilities nationwide have shut down, some of them indefinitely as the coronavirus forced families to keep kids at home, according to a survey of child care providers conducted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Seventeen percent of providers have closed to everyone except the children of essential personnel. Of the facilities which have remained open, 85% are operating at less than 50% of enrollment capacity and the majority of those are operating at less than 25% of capacity, the survey conducted in April found.

[According to](#) the National Women's Law Center and an organization called CLASP, for a child care center, operational costs are 23% higher during the pandemic. And for an in-home provider, it's 19% higher. And again, if you're starting from really thin margins, you probably don't have financial cushion to dip into for those extra costs, so a lot of them are actually operating in the red right now. Without a significant public investment in a dedicated child care stabilization fund, [child care closures](#) will be concentrated in low-income and middle-income

neighborhoods and many families will be unable to access child care assistance during a period of record-high unemployment.

Child Care Crisis Will Hurt Women's Economic Prosperity the Hardest, Particularly Black and Brown Women

According to the [Center for American Progress](#):

The coronavirus has exacerbated the work-family dynamic for many mothers, as they do more unpaid caregiving during child care and school closures. A recent CAP analysis of the 2016 Early Childhood Program Participation Survey found that half of American families reported difficulty in finding child care before the pandemic. Among the families that reported difficulty finding a child care program, there was a 12 percentage point decline in the likelihood of employment for mothers but no measurable impact on the likelihood that fathers worked. If schools and child care programs are still closed as parents are expected to go back to work, it may result in many fewer women in the post-COVID-19 workforce.

Given that 41 percent of mothers are the sole or primary breadwinner in their family, bringing in half of household income or more, this trend could jeopardize family economic security. It could put women who have experienced job loss in greater financial peril, particularly Black women and Latinas with higher unemployment rates and who often have more difficulty finding jobs because they face the added burden of racial discrimination in the job market. The United States cannot afford a decline in women's labor force participation. Women drive the economy as a whole and it is women's earnings that have driven economic gains for middle-class families over the past 50 years. Between 1979 and 2013, women's labor force participation resulted in an additional \$1.7 trillion in economic activity. A large-scale federal investment in child care is critical to economic growth, supported by women's labor force participation.

Time for a Real Child Care Solution, Instead of Ignoring the Issue and a Haphazard, Chaotic Approach

Our economy cannot get back on track without addressing the child care crisis directly and with the resources needed to address the problem. Trillions of dollars are being thrown around in response to this crisis. Big corporations are getting hundreds of billions in tax breaks, direct subsidies from taxpayers, and more subsidies from the Federal Reserve. It's time to invest at least \$100 billion in our child care infrastructure, because without it working- and middle-class families will struggle to survive and the economy won't recover.