



United States Representative
ROSA DELAURO
Representing the Third District of Connecticut



Child Care is Essential Act, News and Clips

The articles below do not necessarily talk about the Child Care is Essential Act, but they discuss the child care crisis as an issue during COVID-19 and beyond.

**** [The coronavirus has caused a child care crisis. Here's how some parents are managing.](#)** Vox, Nicole Narea and Anna North

**** [The coming child care crisis](#)** AXIOS, Erica Pandey

**** [Big New Obstacle for Economic Recovery: Child Care Crisis](#)** New York Times, Eliza Shapiro and Patrick McGeehan

**** [Coronavirus Has Finally Put A Spotlight On America's Childcare Crisis. What Happens Now?](#)** Refinery29, Cait Munro

Child Care Crisis

**** [The coronavirus has caused a child care crisis. Here's how some parents are managing.](#)**

Vox

Nicole Narea and Anna North

8 May 2020

A single mom homeschooling her preteen while caring for her toddler. Another mom managing both her child's school schedule and her own. Two parents splitting their workdays in half to take care of their son.

With tens of thousands of schools, as well as numerous day care centers, closed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, millions of families around the country have stories like these: stories of how they make their lives work when their kids are suddenly home all day, every day. For some, it's been a time to connect in a new way as a family. "It's nice to be with our kids all day," one mom told Vox.

But for many parents, it's still really, really hard. Moms and dads have become teachers, expected to supervise a totally new form of school for most kids — online learning — often with no training. If they're working from home, parents are trying to juggle child care with Zoom meetings and projects, sometimes working hours every night to make up for lost time during the day. "I feel incredibly exhausted all the time," one mom said.

If they're working outside the home in health care or other essential jobs, parents are finding care for their kids with family members, at emergency centers, or with groups that have sprung up in recent weeks to support frontline workers.

But even with help, these workers are facing a lot of anxiety. One dad, a nurse, told Vox he's worried about bringing Covid-19 home and infecting his mother-in-law, who is caring for his kids. Meanwhile, for the millions of American parents who are unemployed right now, the days are often spent taking care of children while trying to get a new job or file for unemployment.

With most Americans still under shelter-in-place orders, the experience of parenting during the pandemic can be isolating, and it's easy to wonder whether everyone else is somehow managing better than you are. To break through the isolation a bit, Vox spoke to six parents about how they structure their days, what their challenges are, what makes things a little easier, and what they need right now. Their stories — of stress, sleeplessness, and sometimes moments of joy — are below.

Hayley Gorbet and Philip Scott Gorbet: “How am I going to pull this off?”

Reno, Nevada

Three children, ages 5, 8, and 11

Their day-to-day: Hayley Gorbet had a full schedule of work and school before the pandemic hit. She was pursuing an associate's degree in clinical psychology at the local community college while also working at Applebee's at night and occasionally shopping for Instacart. She used to leave for her night shift after her husband, who installs heating and air conditioning systems for a living, got home from his day job.

But now that she has been furloughed from Applebee's and her kids are home from school during the pandemic, her focus is looking after them and helping them with remote schoolwork. Hayley's stepdad has been chipping in with child care occasionally, and her husband's work has been slowing down amid the pandemic so he has been able to relieve her from child care duties earlier.

How it's going: Life at home is chaotic. Gorbet had to ask her professor for an extension on an essay, and while she's still attending lectures via Zoom, there are always disruptions from her kids that make it hard to focus.

The biggest challenge: “It's been hard for me to structure my learning at home, as well as theirs,” she said. “I've been working on my stuff late at night, which has been hard getting up in the morning to get them ready. I hope life goes back to normal because I don't know if I can do all that learning from home.”

What's more, her kids' schoolwork has been demanding: One of their teachers recommended spending no more than an hour or two on an assignment, but four and a half hours later, they still hadn't finished it. And each of their teachers is approaching distance learning slightly differently, with some communicating with parents over email and others over the education app ClassDojo — it's a lot to keep track of, she says.

“I woke up this morning and was like, ‘Oh, my gosh, how am I going to pull this off?’” she said.

What lifts their spirits: “We do have a really strong family support system. My stepdad is looking after my little boys while I'm in math class. And my sister is a teacher in Boise, Idaho, and she teaches fourth grade, so she has been giving me tips. We should be reaching out to each other and getting words of encouragement and love. I think those things help everybody navigate through the situation.”

Alison Wathen and John Herfkens: “The hill you're willing to die on”

Kalamazoo, Michigan

4-month-old twins

Their day-to-day: When their kids' day care closed, Wathen and her husband were in a bind: There was no way they could continue doing their jobs and care full-time for two infants. Her parents offered to come and help,

but they both have chronic health issues, and Wathen and her husband live in the Chicago area, where cases were rising. “We all felt it was safer for us to just go to them,” Wathen said.

So the couple packed up their belongings and moved in with Wathen’s parents in Michigan. They’ve been there about six weeks now — four adults and two babies “in a small house meant for two,” Wathen says.

Wathen’s mother still works part time, so her father does most of the child care. Wathen, who’s working remotely as a case coordinator for children with disabilities, is able to take a little time every day to give her parents a break. But her husband, an accounting manager at a medical association, isn’t available at all during the day. Overall, “it’s basically my father doing about 75 percent of the work,” Wathen said.

How it’s going: “In the words of my father, no one wants to move back in with their parents,” Wathen said. And moving in with babies is especially difficult — now every parenting decision is a conversation among four people, rather than just two. “When you’re parenting with your own parents watching, it’s a lot harder because you question everything and they question everything,” Wathen said.

It’s hard on her parents, too, both emotionally and physically. “They’re in their 60s,” Wathen said. “It’s not easy to bounce a baby for eight hours.”

The biggest challenge: The hardest thing for Wathen and her husband is when they disagree with her parents on a question of baby care. Then she and her husband have to decide if it’s worth it to raise the issue, given that her parents are already doing so much. It’s especially hard because they don’t know how much longer they’ll be in this situation.

“If it’s just for a week or two, okay, but if this is something that sets up a pattern for the next three months, that could make a huge difference once we go home, if we ever get to go home,” Wathen said. “It just makes it hard to decide what is the hill you’re willing to die on.”

What would help: Working less. Wathen says her brother’s employer has given workers the option to work half time so they can take care of kids. “If that were something that was available to my husband and I, then we could have taken care of the kids ourselves and not put my parents at risk by going to them,” Wathen said.

Lyzbeth Rivera: “It’s just us three”
San Francisco, California
Two kids, ages 3 and 12

Their day-to-day: In March, Rivera was let go from her job as assistant general manager of a spa. So now she’s at home, guiding her 12-year-old son through his online lessons while taking care of her toddler daughter.

Usually, she lets her son work on his lessons on his own, setting a time frame for him to finish them. Then she can take care of her daughter, doing arts and crafts, reading, and speaking in Spanish. “I’m bilingual, so I’m making sure that she also becomes bilingual,” Rivera said.

Rivera has heard a lot of horror stories about applying for unemployment, and feels fortunate that she was able to get her benefits quickly, meaning she’s able to pay the rent. Now she usually sets aside one day a week to apply for new jobs. But she needs to find one that will wait for her to start until her son is back in school and her daughter is back in day care. “I don’t want to leave them alone,” she says.

How it’s going: Rivera has homeschooled her son in the past, which she says has made the transition easier. “I just remind him every day, it’s like how you were doing it before,” she says.

Still, it can be a challenge supervising his school while taking care of her daughter. Sometimes the 3-year-old “wakes up in a really moody situation, and she just wants me to hold her,” Rivera said. At those times, “I just tell my son, you’re on our own, you’re solo.”

He’s fallen behind on his schoolwork at times, but she does her best to keep him on track. “I just have to remind him to just keep doing it, finish it up, keep communicating with me,” she said. “Because it’s just us three.”

The biggest challenge: Online education now isn’t like it was when she first homeschooled her son, Rivera says. That was planned, and this happened suddenly. And Rivera wants more from her son’s teachers. “The communication has been lacking a lot,” she said. “I just worry because I don’t know if my son’s getting the adequate amount of education right now.”

She tries to fill in the gaps and teach him things he doesn’t learn in school, like how to save and manage money, something she wishes she had learned at an earlier age. “Teaching him financial things about life right now, especially because of what’s going on, is something that I’ve had to reinforce a lot,” Rivera said.

What lifts their spirits: The whole family does a lot of baking and cooking together. “A week ago my daughter was all into birthdays, so I made her a birthday cake with a candle,” Rivera said. Her daughter even helped a little, and they experimented with different ways of decorating the cake.

Then “we wished her happy birthday, even though it’s not her birthday,” Rivera said. “Just keeping them entertained with different things like that helps the time pass by faster.”

Elizabeth and Lauren Henkel-Lorenz: “I feel incredibly exhausted all the time”

Maplewood, New Jersey

Two daughters, ages 2 and 5

Their day-to-day: Elizabeth Henkel-Lorenz’s workdays at home with her wife, Lauren, and their kids involve a lot of switching off. Elizabeth, a curriculum developer, wakes up early and does child care from 6 to 9 am while Lauren, a special education administrator, works. Then Lauren takes care of the kids from 9 until noon. Then the 2-year-old naps while the 5-year-old watches TV. “That’s probably the most productive time in the house,” Elizabeth Henkel-Lorenz says.

In the afternoon, the two adults split time based on who has a meeting, and they “work at night as needed to fill in the blanks,” Henkel-Lorenz says. For her, that can be anywhere between one and three hours a night.

How it’s going: “It’s really hard,” Henkel-Lorenz says.

On the one hand, “it’s nice to be with our kids all day,” she says. Ordinarily, they’re in full-time day care and preschool, and other adults are caring for them many hours a day. But now, “it feels like we’re their people,” Henkel-Lorenz says. But caring for them while working full time is very challenging: “I feel incredibly exhausted all the time,” Henkel-Lorenz says.

Still, she’s grateful that she and her wife have been able to find an arrangement that works for them. “I have so many friends where the gender divide just was at work” in the division of pandemic-era domestic labor, she says, with the husband getting to work uninterrupted while the wife handles all the child care on top of her own job. “It’s been great that we don’t have a situation like that,” she said.

The biggest challenge: “I think wanting to give them the attention that they deserve and not being able to is so hard,” Henkel-Lorenz says. “Everybody’s saying to give yourself grace with screen time and TV, but it doesn’t feel great to know that for a lot of the day, our daughter’s watching much more TV than she normally would.”

What lifts their spirits: The family got a puppy at the beginning of the pandemic, which has turned out to be more work than the adults bargained for. But she's "very cute and the kids really like her," Henkel-Lorenz said.

They also have "Disney princess dinners" as a family, where everyone dresses up as a Disney princess. "We're a big Halloween family, so we have a lot of costumes," Henkel-Lorenz says. "We do very silly stuff to try and make things feel special."

James and Kristel Minnock: "We just basically split-shift everything"
Oxnard, California
One child, age 12

Their day-to-day: When schools closed, it had an especially big impact on the Minnock family. Their son has autism and needs a one-on-one aide for education, and his parents aren't trained to provide that kind of support for him. His school sent some materials to try to help, James Minnock said, but "they know and we know that it's just not going to happen."

With school on hold, Minnock's wife, an adjunct professor, takes care of their son in the mornings. In the afternoons, she works remotely and Minnock, who works for the Department of Defense, comes home to do child care.

The family does still get visits from state-provided caregivers to give Minnock and his wife a break, he said. But other than that, "we just basically split-shift everything, and one or the other of us has to be actively taking care of him at any time."

How it's going: Minnock says "it's a blessing" that he's still working outside the home. He's not worried about Covid-19 because his workplace is doing a good job of monitoring the risks. Moreover, "because I am 'super-fun dad,' if I am home, I don't get to work," he says. "If I had to telework, I would just have to quit."

He is worried about how his son will react when he finally goes back to school. Right now, Minnock says, "I think he thinks that he's done."

The biggest challenge: A lot of the activities that helped Minnock's son aren't possible right now due to the lockdown. "He would go to the pool, he would go to splash pads," Minnock said. "All that's been stripped away."

Minnock was very worried when he heard that California might close all beaches. "That was our last thing," he said. "That's where I take him every day."

Change is hard for Minnock's son, and it's been especially difficult to deal with the many incremental changes to restrictions during the pandemic. "I'd rather do all the changes at once so that we can figure out how to get him through the day," Minnock said. "Continually reacting to new things being shut down is just drawing out the agony."

What would help: Minnock said he wishes state officials had given families a clearer idea of what would be shut down and for how long. If they had known how severe restrictions were going to be beforehand, the Minnocks might have moved to a state where they have family and more options for helping their son. As things stand, "we don't know when it's going to shut down or when it's going to start back up, so we're not getting the information we need."

Joshua Martin and Stacy McCall-Martin: "She's giving up her life to be here"

Stanton, California
Three kids, ages 4, 9, and 11

Their day-to-day: When the pandemic hit, “it was really tough to take in that our children are not going to be in school,” Martin said. A nurse, he ordinarily works at an outpatient clinic but was reassigned to a hospital as cases of Covid-19 began to spike in Southern California. His wife, a therapist who treats teenagers, can work remotely but can’t care for their kids at the same time.

Now that cases where he lives have stabilized somewhat, Martin is no longer in the hospital — he spends most of his time performing wellness checks on older people in the community, making sure they are taking their medications and are up to date on their lab tests. That work takes place by phone, but he still has to go to the clinic to do it, meaning he’s out the door by 7:30 most mornings. He also takes an online chemistry class three nights a week.

But luckily, Martin’s mother-in-law was able to move in with the couple to care for the children while they work. She supervises all the kids’ online schooling and even has some experience in preschool education, which is especially helpful for the 4-year-old. “We’ve been blessed and lucky to have her,” Martin said.

How it’s going: At first, Martin worried about bringing the virus home and infecting his mother-in-law, who is over 60. But he’s been taking a lot of precautions: For example, when he gets home, he always showers and changes clothes before spending time with his family. “Knock on wood, no one has gotten sick here,” he said.

Emotionally, Martin says, “everyone is doing pretty well.” It took some adjustment at first because his mother-in-law likes to have the kids on a strict schedule, while he tends to be more free-form. But they adapted to his mother-in-law’s preference, he said: “Because she’s there, we want her to be comfortable.”

The biggest challenge: One of the hardest things about their new situation was that Martin and his wife wanted to pay his mother-in-law for her help but weren’t able to afford very much. Luckily, a child care stipend program for essential workers gives the family a little money for payment. “She’s giving up her life to be here and help us, and at least she’s somewhat compensated,” Martin said. But she’s probably still making less than minimum wage, he said.

What lifts their spirits: Martin and his wife are both taking time for self-care when they can. For him, that means video games, since golf courses are closed. For her, it’s crafts — she even decorated a face mask to commemorate her birthday this year, “just so she can always remember this time,” Martin said.

** [Big New Obstacle for Economic Recovery: Child Care Crisis](#)

New York Times
Eliza Shapiro and Patrick McGeehan
10 July 2020

When New York City decided to reopen its school system, the nation’s largest, on a part-time basis in September, it set off a new child care crisis that could seriously threaten its ability to restart the local economy and recover from the coronavirus outbreak.

Business and union leaders say the city needs to mount a kind of [Marshall Plan](#)-like effort to find child care for many of the system’s 1.1 million students when they are not in classrooms. They said there was no way the economy — from conglomerates in Midtown Manhattan to small businesses in Queens — could fully return to normal if parents had no choice but to stay at home to watch their children.

The concerns reflected a growing recognition across the nation that the reopening of schools could be the linchpin in the broader effort to undo the severe economic damage from the outbreak. New York City alone is facing its worst financial crisis since the 1970s, [with an unemployment rate hovering near 20 percent](#).

“There is no discussion of this right now that’s serious,” said Kathryn S. Wylde, chief executive of the Partnership for New York City, whose members include the city’s biggest private-sector employers. “There is not a serious solution. Which means that people will not be able to go back to work.”

[Under the plan announced by Mayor Bill de Blasio this week](#), classroom attendance would be limited to only one to three days a week in an effort to protect public health. The city’s approach is similar to that being followed by many school districts, which are concerned that crowded schools might intensify the outbreak.

The decisions on school reopenings are also fueling a contentious political debate over whether elected officials, educators and public health experts are moving forward too cautiously, even as [the number of virus cases soars](#) in the United States.

President Trump and his aides are [putting pressure on state and local officials](#) to bring children back to classrooms full time this fall, saying the fate of the economy depends on it.

“Parents have to get back to the factory,” Alex Azar, the federal health and human services secretary, said this week. “They’ve got to get back to the job site. They have to get back to the office. And part of that is their kids, knowing their kids are taken care of.”

But some educators and public health experts said they were worried that fully reopening the schools before the outbreak is contained could recklessly lead to the spread of the virus.

[A flurry of recent announcements on school reopenings](#) has left families grappling with the harsh reality that they may not be able to fully return to work until there is a vaccine or effective treatment.

Children in Seattle will likely return to school only one or two days a week, and students in Los Angeles County, home to the country’s second-largest school system, [may not be able to return to classrooms at all next month](#) if cases continue to increase in the region.

In New York, Jane Meyer, a mayoral spokeswoman, said that the city had begun reaching out to the business community and that it would announce child care options in the coming weeks.

“We know working families are trying to put the pieces together and make this work, and we are laser-focused on providing solutions,” she said.

The school reopening plan will add to the complexities businesses face in juggling work and child care. Big companies have been scrambling to make workplaces safe and sanitary, but many have said that creating space in their buildings for schoolchildren would raise too many liability issues.

Some employers said they did not expect most parents to return to work without a normal school schedule. Leaders of the city’s big labor unions said many members had been looking after the children of those whose jobs were considered essential. Before many of the others could return to work, union leaders said, they would need safe spaces for their own children.

Steven James, New York City chief executive of the Douglas Elliman real-estate brokerage, said the schools plan would not allow for a normal return for nearly 1,000 employees based at the company’s Midtown office.

“It throws a bit of a wrench in it,” Mr. James said. “It’s not going to be, ‘I’ll drop you off at 8:30 on my way to the office and pick you back up at 3.’ It won’t be like that.”

While employees who have been working from home during the pandemic might have some flexibility, that is not the case for many low-income families and essential workers.

Unions that represent essential workers say many members face child care difficulties in normal times and now are being forced into an even worse predicament.

“Many of our members live in households where all of the adult members work staggered schedules to deal with child care,” said Kyle Bragg, president of 32BJ SEIU, which represents 85,000 building cleaners, security guards, doormen and airport workers in New York.

Public school parents will not learn what days their children can attend school until August, so it will be difficult for working families to let their employers know before late summer when they can show up in person.

Working parents have expressed confusion and anxiety about the prospect of a part-time return to schools without a child care plan.

David Segal, a sanitation worker who lives in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, said he and his wife had been “pulling out our hair trying to figure out child care” for their two young children. His older child was set to start pre-K this fall.

If Mr. Segal’s son can attend school only once or twice a week, his wife, who works in a clothing store, would have to significantly reduce her hours.

“I’m not sure how we will pay the bills,” Mr. Segal said, adding that a private day care could cost more than his wife’s annual income. “It’s insane that no political leaders have any answers for working-class parents.”

About 40 percent of New Yorkers think a full-time return to school this fall is a good idea, [according to a recent Marist poll](#).

Jose Maldonado, secretary-treasurer of Unite Here Local 100, said 15,000 employees in his 18,000-member union were laid off because of the coronavirus and were eager to get back to work.

Many of those members had jobs serving food in cafeterias, delis and airports. Those who have kept working have had laid-off workers care for their children, Mr. Maldonado said.

Mr. Maldonado, who is recovering from Covid-19, has a daughter, Cristina Cerezo, who is a guidance counselor at Public School 333 in the Bronx. Ms. Cerezo said she and some of her students’ parents were wary about the feasibility of the mayor’s plan.

“We’re flying this plane as we build it,” she said.

“There’s a child care crisis coming,” said Michael Mulgrew, president of the city’s teachers union, which represents about 75,000 classroom teachers.

Thousands of teachers who have spent months juggling remote learning for their students and their own children will now have to figure out how to return to school full time while their children go back only a few days a week.

“Every way that you look at it, it feels impossible” to plan for fall, said Emily James, a mother of two who teaches high school English in Brooklyn.

“The city has to come up with some way to provide child care instead of trying to make everything work through the schools,” Ms. James said, adding that she was nervous about whether teachers would be safe returning to buildings.

Some experts say they worry [that the flexibility some companies offered on child care in the spring will wane](#) come fall. This week, a woman in California [sued her former employer, claiming she was fired because her young children made noise during calls](#) while she was working at home.

“As we start talking about reopening, there’s almost this compassion fatigue, that I’ve put up with you and your lack of child care long enough,” said Brigid Schulte, who runs the [Better Life Lab](#) at New America, a research group.

The city’s employers are also desperate for clarity on school reopening and child care.

Miriam Milord, owner of BCakeNy, a bakery in the Prospect Heights section of Brooklyn, said, “It would be great for employees to have child care.”

This summer, a teenage girl from the neighborhood has been supervising Ms. Milord’s 12-year-old son and a few of her employees’ children at her house while the parents bake and sell cakes.

Ms. Milord said she laid off 10 of her 16 workers, but had brought four of them back. Some are single mothers who would need child care on the days their children are not in the classroom.

“We definitely would like to hire back one or more of them,” Ms. Milord said. “But what’s the plan?”

Ms. Wylde said she had heard suggestions about how the private sector could pitch in to provide space for students when they are not in school, including using empty hotel ballrooms and auditoriums, and even vacant storefronts.

But she said those ideas seemed unrealistic given the huge number of students involved and the potential liabilities. Finding enough space would require a sweeping plan — one, she said, that would rival the Marshall Plan, which provided aid to Western Europe after World War II. Such an endeavor would also dwarf the [largely successful effort in 2014 to create space for universal pre-K](#).

City officials have not yet formally proposed any of these ideas to the business community, she said.

For now, working families are left in limbo, fearful for their own livelihoods and for the city’s future.

Mia Pearlman, a mother of two who lives in Ditmas Park, Brooklyn, lost her income when the pandemic hit. Her family has been living on federal unemployment checks and her husband’s teacher salary, and she does not know what her family will do if the government help dries up.

The mayor’s school plan, she said, “does not accommodate the reality of having kids in New York City.”

[** Coronavirus Has Finally Put A Spotlight On America’s Childcare Crisis. What Happens Now?](#)

Refinery29

Cait Munro

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B.* is a domestic worker living in Philadelphia with her husband and two children, ages 11 and 8. She cleans houses, often Airbnbs that are between guests, but also some primary residences. She's been working, she tells Refinery29 through a linguistic interpreter, through most of the coronavirus pandemic, as has her husband, who is also undocumented. Her children's schools, however, have been closed since early March, which has meant she's had to rely on an unsteady patchwork of stands-ins. "There are some apartments that I clean [Airbnbs] that I bring them to — especially this and last month — because it's been impossible to find someone who can take care of them," she explains. "I have some neighbors next door who are elderly, I give them the keys, and ask them to look after my kids while I clean. And my sister-in-law will take care of them a lot."

Open schools meant B.'s children had somewhere to be for most of the day, she says, but now she has no childcare, other than what she can cobble together herself. "It's because I don't qualify for any help, because I am undocumented," she explains. "It's been really hard." It's not that things were necessarily easy before the pandemic (B. says "the situation has been pretty much the same" with regards to having childcare for the hours not covered by school days), but they are certainly more difficult now. Her hours have been longer during the pandemic, because people's homes are messier when they're spending more time in them, which means she's often late getting home to fix her kids dinner, or collect them from her sister-in-law. And, B. adds, she doesn't get paid more to clean up a dirtier apartment.

Dialogues about the dire impossibility of working without steady childcare have recently exploded on Twitter, with high-profile users like [Smitten Kitchen's Deb Perelman](#), writer/editor [Emily Gould](#), and [The Appeal](#) president [Josie Duffy Rice](#) expounding on their own struggles of working from home during the pandemic while caring for their kids. What's perhaps most infuriating, according to these working parents, is that there don't seem to be any plans for how to help them as businesses — but not schools — reopen. In late June, Perelman, who also recently wrote a story on the subject for the [New York Times](#), tweeted: "What I am simmering with white hot rage over is the idea that both plans are moving ahead — an open economy but mostly closed schools, camps — as if it would be totally okay if a generation of parents lost their careers, insurance, and livelihoods in the process. It's outrageous." The tweet currently has over 4k likes, and a litany of responses from equally distressed parents concerned for their bank accounts, career trajectories, sanity, and relationships with their spouses and kids.

The coronavirus shutdown has wrought a host of new overwhelming economic and social issues, from soaring unemployment rates to a historic rise in mental health problems, but it has also amplified existing problems, like police brutality, systemic racism, inadequate healthcare options, and a lack of accessible, affordable childcare. Throughout the last few months, few, if any places in America have been in a position where it's either safe — or even practical — to operate schools and daycares as usual (though, many essential workers have used [state-run emergency daycares](#) and schools, but this isn't possible for the population at-large). Without schools and daycare, some parents have leaned on grandparents or other relatives for help, but given that the COVID-19 risks are greater for older adults, and that many people don't live near extended family, that's an imperfect and rarely possible solution.

The childcare conundrum feels like an intractable one right now, but, like so many of these other COVID-adjacent problems, it's not an entirely new one — it's just new to the upper-middle class. For most of America — especially families like B.'s, where both parents are undocumented and thus have no access to government-sponsored programs — the precarious struggle of balancing work and family has been a fact of life, one that has been holding back countless people from reaching their full career potential — particularly women. According to data from the [National Survey of Children's Health](#), in 2016 alone, almost 2 million parents of children five and under had to quit a job, not take a job, or change their job because of problems with access to childcare. So while it's great that this long-standing crisis is finally getting some attention, to paint it as being merely a feature of the "coronavirus economy," as some have, is blatantly ignorant.

“The childcare crisis is not new. The need for paid family and medical leave is not new. The need for protections for caregivers and for parents and for pregnant workers is not new. It shouldn't take a global pandemic to raise awareness about these issues,” says Sarah Brafman, Senior Policy Counsel at [A Better Balance](#), which advocates for policies to help working families. “But we have a moment where we do have a global crisis, and this is an opportunity to address the failings of our past.”

While many families of privilege are experiencing what it's like to be without steady childcare for the first time — and are understandably buckling under that pressure — for those who were already struggling with finding affordable and appropriate care for their kids, the impact has been compounded. “We definitely need more help. You know, our money is good when it comes to paying taxes, but when it comes to our time of need, then we're no good at all,” says B. “Everyone has to put in their little grain of sand and help us to bring this issue to light and offer to help speak up for us. Only together will we get the attention that we need.”

Indeed, childcare is an issue that, while crucial for families, should be important to anyone who wants to see the American economy made whole again. “If they really want to help people get back to work, they have to figure out how to safely create spaces where children can stay,” says Emily James, an English teacher at a Brooklyn, New York high school. James lives in the Bronx with her husband and daughters, ages 5 and 7. Prior to the pandemic, James says, her husband worked nights, starting at 4 a.m. “We basically just switched off because we had opposite schedules — we would tag off, dump them off to each other. Or we would have a babysitter for an hour or so in between, if we could.” These days, they're both home, because he's on leave due to a health condition, but that hasn't made balancing work with caring for the kids any easier. “From 8:00 in the morning until 1:00 p.m., my kids would be next to me while I was teaching my students.”

“For me personally, as a writer and a teacher, I've had to just give up doing certain extra stuff,” James adds. “I've had to stop writing because it wasn't worth the fight of, like, trying to find that space in my house that doesn't exist.”

One solution to the current problem would be to pass the **Child Care Is Essential Act**, which has been introduced in Congress and would provide \$50 billion worth of grants to childcare providers, allowing them to safely reopen during a time when many are struggling to stay afloat financially after months of closure. There's a fear that, if not bailed out in the manner of, say, the financial sector or many major corporations, daycare centers and other childcare providers, especially those in lower-income neighborhoods, will shutter just as reopening ramps up, leaving parents who work outside the home with even fewer childcare options than ever. And then, it's still unclear what will happen with schools this fall — in New York City, the largest public school district in America, the plan is for in-person classrooms to operate just one to three days a week, leaving major gaps in on-site education for students, making things especially for parents who aren't able to work from home. This also puts teachers with children in particularly difficult positions, as it's unlikely they'll be able to line up their in-school days with their children's in-school days. “It feels impossible,” says James. “It's a puzzle that just doesn't fit.”

While a new law was passed in March that requires [public employers and many private companies](#) to provide up to 80 hours of paid sick leave, businesses with less than 50 employees are exempt, meaning their employees can't benefit from what still only amounts to 10 days of extra relief. And paid sick leave is, of course, only one part of a much bigger picture. According to a survey of 1,000 working moms produced by [HeyMama](#) and [InHerSight](#), flexibility and empathy are the two biggest things they say they need from their companies right now. (Although, among survey-takers who selected “other” as their answer choice, the most common response was that they want help from their employers in paying for childcare.) Tellingly, flexibility — as it pertains to deadlines, working hours, time off, and location — is something that, according to a 2018 survey by the [Harvard Business Review](#), 96 percent of employees, whether parents or not, say they want from the company they work for (just 47 percent say it's something they actually have). Empathy is a less tangible

thing for a company to strive for, but it's certainly more likely to be achieved when there are people at the top who understand, in this case, what it's like to change a diaper and take a phone call at the same time, which is part of the reason it's so important not only to have diversity in the top rungs of companies, but also to make it possible for working parents to move up the career ladder.

But any time we're relying on private organizations to decide to do the right thing, it's going to leave a large swath of people — those who don't work for the kinds of companies where these conversations are happening, or who are freelance or gig workers, or who are unemployed, or who are undocumented — in the lurch. The Department of Labor reports that over 30 million Americans have lost work since the beginning of the pandemic (though some estimate the toll [could be more like 40 million](#)), and many parents are worried the work/parenting balancing act they're having to pull off right now could negatively impact their chances of regaining full-time employment, especially in such a crowded job market.

Freelancers, in particular, are subject to a lot of professional uncertainty, must deal with a range of expectations from clients, and may have a harder time obtaining new contracts right now. “Without childcare, I have to be home and that affects how much I can actually be outside of the house working. So I have to get firm on my boundaries and be prepared to not have the same opportunities as people who may have more access to childcare options than I do,” says Amer Woods, who lives in Atlanta, Georgia, has an 11-year-old son, and is currently looking for a full-time role as a neurophysiologist while also freelancing as a writer and content producer. “This could also affect the number of offers for other things, such as projects, promotions, availability to travel, etc. I may get passed over now because me caring for my child can be perceived as a negative against me and my work ethic.”

Already, there have been accounts of employees being pushed to go back to work without proper childcare provisions in place. In early July, Florida State University made headlines for sending its employees an email noting, “Effective, August 7, 2020, the University will return to normal policy and will no longer allow employees to care for children while working remotely.” (It has since backed down from the position, with a spokesperson apologizing for causing “confusion and anxiety” among employees.) Perhaps even more disturbing is [the account of Drisana Rios](#), a San Diego woman who recently filed a lawsuit against an insurance brokerage firm that allegedly fired her because her young children kept interrupting her Zoom meetings. While there are protections under the Civil Rights Act against discrimination on the basis of sex — Rios' case [will likely hinge on proving](#) that's what this was — and in a handful of states, laws that prohibit discrimination against parents and caretakers, at-will employees can largely be dismissed at the employer's discretion.

“There are many working mothers who are rightfully concerned that they will be furloughed or let go prior to other employees without children,” says Kelly Williams, an employment attorney at [Slate Law Group](#) in San Diego. “Lately, we have also seen the increased firing of pregnant women, despite having performed well at their company, due to the fact that they will be going on maternity leave.”

While the fear that all of this will add up to parents — and particularly women — dropping out of the workforce is legitimate, it's likely that most of the people struggling to simultaneously work and care for kids right now will not voluntarily leave their jobs, because, well, who the hell can afford to? What's more probable is that those in salaried roles will stay, continue to struggle, and then get passed over for promotions and lose out on crucial opportunities that could determine their earning potential for years to come. Gig and freelance workers will continue to struggle with chronic underemployment, and [the disturbing trend of fewer women being hired than men will continue](#). But even among some middle-class professionals, there is a growing sense that maybe the sacrifices necessary to be a two-income household are just no longer worth it. “It's really changed our priorities as far as, are we ever really going to be able to have two incomes again?” questions Sade Dozan, a Senior Development Manager at the advocacy group Caring Across Generations, whose husband is immunocompromised and no longer working. “COVID-19 is not going away any time soon. It's not like it's going to be, okay, suddenly it's September, and it's gone. And that's really shifted our priorities around caregiving and financial income. I think once people make that switch it's going to be very hard to go back.”

Getting funds to keep daycare centers afloat, demanding flexibility and understanding from companies, and forging a path forward for schools seem to be the inevitably imperfect priorities for ensuring families — and the economy — survive this crisis in the short-term. But when it comes to long-term policy changes, we need to ensure we're including families at every socio-economic level in the conversation, and thinking beyond the scope of what single organizations can achieve by shifting their corporate culture. Long before the pandemic, there'd been a feeling that you could have a kid *or* you could have a career — not both and not at the same time, unless you're wealthy (thanks, late-stage capitalism). But now we've reached a new level of crisis, and with that, a chance to reassess how we move forward. If we don't use this moment to put pressure on both government and business leaders to ensure universal care for all, we run the risk of permanently turning parenthood into yet another thing that is only manageable for the very privileged.

“What we have to remember is that these are issues of racial, gender, and economic justice,” says Brafman. “The childcare workforce being comprised largely of women of color and having it be a largely underpaid industry is a racial justice issue. The fact that women are being forced out of the workforce in higher numbers and not having the ability to return, or having to return in lower-paying positions is a gender justice issue. And the composite of that is affecting the family as a whole. And that is an economic justice issue.”

Caring Across Generations, A Better Balance, and other groups are advocating for new policies that would amount to universal care for all, including the elderly and people with disabilities. It was a cornerstone of [Elizabeth Warren's presidential campaign](#), with the senator calling for a network of facilities for children too young to attend schools, subsidized and regulated by the government, and something Bernie Sanders also regularly spoke on. And now that, due to coronavirus, many people who would never otherwise have to experience what it's like to be without childcare have done so, there may — hopefully — be more support than ever for these kinds of policies. “I feel like even when people are saying things like, ‘I can't wait for life to go back to normal,’ I don't feel like people are saying let's go back to the ways and the policies of January 2020,” says Josephine Kalipeni, Caring Across Generations' Director of Policy and Partnerships. “I think people are hungry for a sense of safety in a way that actually means that it has to be a new, big and bold idea.” Brafman agrees. “We have the solutions,” she says. “We just have to put them in place.”

**Name abbreviated to preserve anonymity.*



Pulling Child Care from the Brink of Collapse

The Child Care Is Essential Act, H.R. 7027
The Child Care for Economic Recovery Act, H.R. 7327

Background

Child care providers are struggling to keep their businesses solvent during the COVID-19 pandemic. At least [half](#) of all providers have closed at some point during the pandemic. Although many have re-opened, providers are experiencing increased costs to implement safety measures while also taking in decreased revenue. Almost a quarter of child care providers have lost their jobs.

Without further federal support, the child care sector is likely to suffer permanent losses. Working families are already suffering from declining access to child care: [13 percent](#) of parents have had to reduce their work hours or leave their jobs due to difficulties with child care. Congress must provide dedicated stabilization funding to child care providers to ensure parents can go back to work so that our nation's economy can fully recover.

The Pandemic's Impact on Child Care

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread, child care providers are figuring out how to support families while keeping children and staff safe. Eight out of ten ([82 percent](#)) centers and nine out of ten ([91 percent](#)) family child care homes are now open. However, almost all child care providers are serving fewer children than usual. **On average, providers are serving [67 percent](#) fewer children now than they were prior to the pandemic, significantly reducing their revenue.**

At the same time, providers are required to implement enhanced health and safety protocols that carry significant costs. Many states require that providers regularly do deep cleanings and disinfecting, which can add several hours of work each week. Even more costly are new limitations on classroom sizes. The [Minneapolis Federal Reserve](#) recently showed that **a hypothetical child care center is likely to operate at a loss when limiting classroom sizes to 10, as is necessary to meet certain state safety guidelines.**

The Future of Child Care

The child care sector is at risk of a permanent decline in available slots. Between increased operating costs and a precipitous drop in enrollment, child care providers are weathering unsustainable circumstances. Unfortunately, existing support has reached a limited number of providers, with only [6 percent](#) of child care businesses able to secure a PPP loan. As a result, almost three-quarters ([73 percent](#)) of providers have been forced into enacting layoffs, furloughs, and pay cuts, and over [240,000](#) child care providers have lost their jobs since [March](#). **A recent survey of more than 5,000 providers showed that [two out of five](#) providers expect to close permanently if they do not receive immediate financial assistance.**

Congressional Action Needed

Congress needs to act urgently to prevent the child care sector from collapsing. Congressional Democrats have proposed two complementary packages to save the child care sector. Both are necessary to support the sustainability of the child care sector.

- The *Child Care Is Essential Act*, [H.R. 7027](#), would create a **\$50 billion stabilization fund** to give grants to child care providers to pay for increased costs during periods of low enrollment over the next five to six months.
- The *Child Care for Economic Recovery Act*, [H.R. 7327](#), includes several fixes to federal child care policy to ensure the longer-term survival of child care providers.

Along with the \$7 billion allocated to child care in the *Heroes Act*, Democrats are eager to ensure the next coronavirus package includes the \$50 billion stabilization fund established in H.R. 7027. Recent calls for dedicated child care funding from House Republicans as well as the introduction of a child care stabilization proposal by Senate Republicans (S. 4221) demonstrate growing bipartisan support for child care. However, significant differences remain across the parties regarding the size of the investment this sector needs.

Democrats will fight to ensure Congress provides enough support for the child care sector so that all working parents know their children are cared for in safe, nurturing settings.



Child Care Is Essential Act

Stabilizing the Child Care Sector and Supporting Providers to Safely Reopen and Operate

Led by Chairs Rosa DeLauro and Bobby Scott

Child care providers are at the forefront of the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic yet have been among the hardest hit sectors. The *Child Care Is Essential Act* would provide grant funding to child care providers to stabilize the child care sector and support providers to safely reopen and operate.

Support for Struggling Child Care Providers

Creates a new Child Care Stabilization Fund: The bill creates a \$50 billion Child Care Stabilization Fund within the existing Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program.

Grant awards would be determined by providers' pre-COVID-19 operating costs and adjusted to reflect the additional cost of providing care due to the pandemic. Grants would be equitably distributed to eligible child care centers, home based child care providers, and family child care homes.

Providers could use stabilization grants for:

- Personnel costs, including premium pay, employee benefits, and employee salaries.
- Sanitization and cleaning, personal protective equipment, and other necessary equipment.
- Training and professional development related to health and safety practices.
- Fixed costs, including mortgage obligations, rent, utilities, and insurance.
- Mental health supports for children and employees.
- Modifications to child care services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Other goods and services necessary to maintain or resume operation of the child care program, or to maintain the viability of the child care provider.

Support for Child Care Workers

Requires employers to keep child care workers on payroll: Under the legislation, all providers would be required to continue to employ and pay their staff at the same compensation level as pre-COVID-19 as a condition of receiving stabilization grant funds. Moreover, employers can use stabilization grant funds to provide their employees premium pay.

Support for Working Families

Facilitates relief from copayments and tuition: Under the legislation, all providers would be required to provide families with relief from copayments and tuition as a condition of receiving stabilization grant funds.

Improved Safety of Child Care Facilities

Promotes health and safety through compliance with public health guidance: Under the legislation, open providers would be required to meet health and safety guidance from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and state and local authorities, and closed providers would have to provide an assurance that they will reopen their program when they are able to implement such guidance. Providers can use stabilization grant funds to purchase equipment and make modifications necessary to meet such guidance.



United States Representative
ROSA DELAURO
Representing the Third District of Connecticut



The Child Care is Essential Act Helping Communities of Color

Child care providers are at the forefront of the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic yet have been among the hardest hit sectors. Because women of color are [overrepresented in the child care workforce](#), the devastation of the industry perpetuates long-standing racial and gender inequities in our country, as Black, Latina, and Native women are left struggling with the loss of wages. Concurrently, parents of color have [less access to telework](#). Therefore, many workers of color have worked through the pandemic in low wage [essential frontline occupations](#) with the need for child care.

Programs that serve families with lower incomes are [more likely](#) to experience permanent closures as families are unable to make tuition payments due to unemployment or pay reductions. Ensuring the child care sector remains afloat will positively [impact](#) the economic well-being of child care workers and those families working in other essential occupations. Without immediate action, families of color in particular will be left choosing between feeding their children and providing the care and educational enrichment their children need.

The **Child Care Is Essential Act** would provide grant funding to child care providers to stabilize the child care sector and support providers to safely reopen and operate. Administered through the existing Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) lead agency of each state, tribe or territory, grants would be available to licensed, regulated, or registered child care providers that are currently open or temporarily closed due to COVID-19, regardless of whether they had previously received funding through CCDBG. Grant awards would be determined by providers' pre-COVID-19 operating costs and adjusted to reflect the additional cost of providing care due to the pandemic. Grants would be equitably distributed to eligible child care centers, home based child care providers, and family child care homes.

Providers could use stabilization grants for:

- Personnel costs, including premium pay, employee benefits, and employee salaries.
- Sanitization and cleaning, personal protective equipment, and other necessary equipment.
- Training and professional development related to health and safety practices.
- Fixed costs, including mortgage obligations, rent, utilities, and insurance.
- Mental health supports for children and employees.
- Modifications to child care services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Other goods and services necessary to maintain or resume operation of the child care program, or to maintain the viability of the child care provider.

All providers would be required to continue to employ and pay their staff, and to provide families with relief from copayments and tuition as a condition of receiving grant funds. Open providers would be required to meet health and safety guidance from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and state and local authorities, and closed providers would have to provide an assurance that they will reopen their program when they are able to implement such guidance.