

**TESTIMONY OF FATIMA GOSS GRAVES,  
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR PROGRAM  
NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER**

**ON LOW-WAGE WORKING PARENTS AND CHILD CARE  
TO THE 2016 DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM COMMITTEE  
JUNE 9, 2016**

My name is Fatima Goss Graves and I am the Senior Vice President for Program at the National Women's Law Center. I'd like to begin by saying what an honor it is to be here. The National Women's Law Center has been working since 1972 to advance the issues that cut to the core of women's lives. We have a broader set of recommendations for the Committee but I wanted to spend my time talking about one of the most pressing issues facing working women in today's economy.

The truth is, for many parents working in low-wage jobs, the conditions of their jobs set them up to fail and meeting the dual demands of their work and home becomes an impossible juggling act. More than 23 million people in the United States work in low-wage jobs—jobs such as home health aides, child care workers, and restaurant workers. Two-thirds of these workers are women. And more than four and a half million are mothers with children under the age of eighteen. We also know that mothers in the low-wage workforce are disproportionately women of color and immigrant women.

The wages they take home are far too low for workers to support themselves or their families – making it difficult to pay for many of life's necessities, including rent, loan payments, and critical health services including reproductive health services. And in addition to the wages, many low-wage jobs come with schedules that are unpredictable, unstable, or inflexible. These conditions wreak havoc on parents' ability to find and pay for child care.

So though we know that high-quality early care and education can help ameliorate the effects of poverty and job instability and support children's healthy development, too frequently, it is out of reach for parents working low-wage jobs.

**This simply is not sustainable.** Today, the National Women's Law Center released **Set Up for Success** – a detailed agenda for action to support low-wage working parents and their families. The agenda details policies—including core ideas that would help to close the gender and race pay gap, such as raising the minimum wage and providing paid sick days and paid family and medical leave—that have already been discussed here. But today, I'm focusing primarily on the Agenda's solutions that address the instability of low-wage jobs and the deep need to increase investments in high-quality, affordable early care and education.

First, we should begin by *ensuring parents are treated fairly in the workplace and can access jobs that have stable, predictable work schedules*. The Schedules That Work Act would provide workers with advance notice of their schedules, minimize disruptions to scheduled shifts, and

ensure that employers provide schedule changes that would allow employees to meet their caregiving responsibilities when no business reason prevents it.

Second, it is essential that we *expand children's access to high-quality, affordable child care and early education*. We can do so by:

- Increasing funding for the major federal child care program, the newly reauthorized Child Care and Development Block Grant – this program is currently so underfunded that it only serves 1 in 6 eligible children.
- The people who care for those we love most **must be paid more**. And to pay our child care providers more will require that we raise child care provider payment rates.
- Greater investments are also needed to strengthen the supply and quality of child care, which is especially important in light of the new requirements of the reauthorized child care law.
- It is also essential to put significant new investments in infant and toddler care—which are typically very costly – indeed, in many states it rivals the cost of college and it is very hard to find. The Child Care Access to Resources for Early-learning Act would provide funding to expand access to high-quality child care for all children under age four in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- We need to increase investments in high-quality early education programs, including federal Head Start and Early Head Start programs and in-state prekindergarten programs.

We all have a stake in ensuring that families are set up for success. If we advance policies that provide working women with wages that are higher, workplace policies that are fairer, and access to high-quality, affordable child care and early education, we can secure the real change that our working families deserve.

Thank you for having me today and I look forward to any questions.