



set up for success

supporting parents in low-wage jobs and their children

An Agenda for Action - Executive Summary

ABOUT THE CENTER

The National Women's Law Center is a non-profit organization working to expand the possibilities for women and their families by removing barriers based on gender, opening opportunities, and helping women and their families lead economically secure, healthy, and fulfilled lives—with a special focus on the needs of low-income women and their families.

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Executive Summary

Today, too many working families are set up to fail. As described in the National Women's Law Center's January 2016 report, *Set Up to Fail: When Low-Wage Jobs Jeopardize Parents' and Children's Success*, millions of parents across the country work in jobs whose low wages, unfair scheduling practices, and minimal benefits make it difficult to meet both work and caregiving responsibilities. Unpredictable work hours, rigid attendance policies with limited access to paid leave, and inadequate paychecks leave many parents in low-wage jobs struggling to provide their children with the high-quality early care and education they need to succeed in school and beyond. And inadequate public policies too often compound the challenges families face at work and in accessing early care and education.

The parents most likely to find themselves in low-wage jobs are women—disproportionately women of color and immigrant women—who are often raising very young children on their own. Their children face daunting odds: research shows that children growing up in poor or low-income families tend to have lower achievement in school relative to their peers from higher-income families, as well as poorer outcomes in adulthood.

Set Up for Success: Supporting Parents in Low-Wage Jobs and Their Children recommends two-generational policies, practices, and strategies to improve the lives of low-wage working parents and their children—and provides examples that have been advanced and implemented by different stakeholders. The recommendations are intended to further five critical goals, each of which is essential to improving the ability of low-wage working parents to support their families and promote their children's growth and development.

Goal: Increase parents' incomes.

- Raise the minimum wage, including the wage for tipped workers.
- Raise pay for low-wage workers and offer additional benefits, such as health care and retirement benefits.
- Strengthen and enforce protections against sex, race, and other discrimination in pay, hiring, and promotions.
- Ensure that part-time workers receive pay, benefits, and promotion opportunities that are equal to those offered to full-time employees in comparable positions.
- Strengthen and expand critical supports for low-income families, including, for example, the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and federal and state tax policies that help boost income.
- Help low-wage workers access tax credits and public benefits for which they may be eligible, and connect with resources in the community.
- Reform the unemployment insurance system to better meet the needs of low-wage workers, especially those with volatile schedules.
- Make it easier to establish and maintain eligibility for income support programs like TANF and SNAP, so that workers with volatile schedules and incomes can easily access these benefits.

Goal: Ensure parents are treated fairly in the workplace and have stable, predictable work schedules.

- Establish and implement fair scheduling practices that allow employees to meet their caregiving responsibilities and other obligations outside of work.
- Enforce scheduling protections through state agency actions in jurisdictions with protections such as “reporting time pay” laws, which require hourly employees to be paid a minimum amount when they report to work as required or requested by their employer (even if no work is provided), or other enforcement power to address workplace terms and conditions.
- Develop metrics for employers to assess the impact of poor scheduling practices on retention, employee discipline, and absenteeism.
- Develop and provide software or consulting services to help employers develop scheduling practices that better meet the needs of both employers and employees and reduce costs to employers stemming from employee churn, absenteeism, and discipline.
- Protect workers from employment discrimination, including through policies to ensure that pregnant and caregiving workers are not forced to choose between meeting their responsibilities at work and caring for themselves and their families.

Goal: Expand children’s access to high-quality, affordable child care and early education.

- Increase child care investments to make child care assistance available to more low-income families and their children, raise child care provider payment rates and compensation, and support activities to strengthen the supply and quality of child care.
- Provide tax assistance to help families meet the high costs of child care.
- Help workers access and afford child care through their employers.
- Increase investments in high-quality early education programs, including federal Head Start and Early Head Start programs and state prekindergarten programs, so that more children of parents working in low-wage jobs can participate.
- Design child care assistance policies to meet the needs of families with parents working in low-wage jobs.
- Design early education programs—including Head Start, Early Head Start, and state prekindergarten programs—to meet the needs of families with parents working in low-wage jobs.
- Actively reach out to parents—including parents working in low-wage jobs, immigrant families, families that do not speak English as their primary language, and other families who may lack the time or community connections to learn about the programs on their own—through community-based organizations to let them know about the availability of child care assistance, Head Start and Early Head Start, and state-funded prekindergarten programs.
- Support family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care as an option for families who prefer it or lack other options.
- Provide financial incentives and technical assistance to encourage child care centers and family child care providers to offer care during nontraditional hours.
- Ensure that state and local zoning and land-use policies do not preclude child care providers from operating, especially in low-income areas, so that parents have child care options that are convenient to access.
- Increase child care providers’ compensation and professional development opportunities, and give them a greater voice in the policy-making process.

Goal: Increase parents' access to paid sick days and paid family and medical leave.

- Encourage or require employers to provide paid sick days and paid family and medical leave.

Goal: Improve parents' opportunities to obtain education and training that can help them advance into better jobs.

- Ensure that representatives of the state agencies that provide child care assistance, child care resource and referral agencies, or child care organizations are seated on local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to highlight the importance of child care to workforce development initiatives and planning.
- Make it easier for families to qualify and remain eligible for child care assistance while participating in education and training programs.
- Increase federal funding to provide child care assistance to low-income parents participating in education and training programs.
- Encourage states to use all federal funding available to help parents access the child care needed to participate in education and training programs.
- Provide integrated case management and other assistance to participants in workforce development programs to address multiple barriers—including child care—that parents may encounter.
- Improve collaboration across programs that serve low-wage working parents.
- Encourage the development of programs that provide parents participating in workforce development programs with on-site child care or funds to pay for child care, or coordinate with child care providers in the community, to help parents access the child care they need.
- Educate workforce development programs and employer-provided training programs aimed at improving the skills of current workers about the particular barriers low-wage working parents confront in participating in education and training, so that they can design programs to minimize those barriers.

Encourage partnerships across sectors to promote parents' and children's success.

The challenges experienced by families intersect and overlap. In addressing the cross-cutting and multi-faceted challenges facing parents in the low-wage workforce and their children, ***cross-cutting and multi-faceted strategies*** can be particularly effective. *For example:*

- The federal government, states, and cities can create *task forces with cross-sector membership* to examine the range of issues affecting low-wage working families and develop strategies to help them.
- Advocates can create *cross-cutting coalitions* to tackle the multiple challenges experienced by low-wage working families.
- Non-profit organizations or other entities can create *certification measures to designate employers* that provide better working conditions across multiple measures, including pay, benefits, schedules, and autonomy for their workers—so that businesses, workers, and consumers can use that information in their respective decision-making processes.

The conditions of many low-wage jobs—and the barriers to accessing early education or opportunities for advancement that those conditions create—can have detrimental, cumulative, and often long-lasting effects on parents' and children's well-being. The prospect of improving these families' chances at success can seem daunting. But promising two-generational policy solutions and strategies that diverse stakeholders can advance hold real potential for supporting low-wage working parents and their children. Advocates, worker justice organizations, policy experts, researchers, private sector representatives, and low-wage workers themselves are using these solutions and strategies to secure real change. Building on and broadening these efforts, and working together across sectors and disciplines, are what is needed to set families up for success.

*For more details and all source information, see the full agenda for action, **Set Up for Success: Supporting Parents in Low-Wage Jobs and Their Children.***



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