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# THE CARE MINIMUM

## THE CASE FOR RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE AND INVESTING IN CHILD CARE TOGETHER

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If we have learned one thing from this global pandemic, it is that child care providers and the workers they employ are undeniably essential.[†] But like many other essential workers on the front lines of COVID-19, they are undervalued and often paid poverty-level wages—in significant part because they are mostly women.[1] Black and brown women are especially likely to work in the child care field—and in many other jobs that leave them unprotected and underpaid.[2] This issue brief explores how public investment in child care and child care workers, combined with raising the minimum wage, will benefit working people and their families and support an equitable economy.

Even before the current crisis, care workers struggled to make ends meet. In 2018, one in ten child care workers had incomes below the federal poverty line, which is twice the poverty rate for workers overall.[3] Most turned to public income support programs to support themselves and their families.[4] And child care workers struggle to afford high-quality child care for their own families: in 2018, the average annual cost of full-time care ranged from just under $4,000 to more than $20,000 a year, depending on the location, the type of care, and the age of the child.[5]

Working people across the country find it extremely difficult to manage the high costs of child care—especially women, who are typically paid just 82 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts. The gender wage gap is driven in part by women's overrepresentation in low-paid jobs, including child care jobs—and wage gaps are much wider for many women of color, mothers, and especially women of color who are mothers.[6] A woman who is paid $35,000 annually—the median annual income for a Black mother working full time, year-round[7]—would have to spend from a tenth to over half of her before-tax income to afford average-priced care for one child. And while government programs exist to help some parents afford child care, the assistance available varies across states and federal investment is inadequate to meet the need; only one in six families eligible for child care assistance actually receives it.[8]

† People who work in child care go by different names, including but not limited to: child care workers, early educators, teachers, family child care providers, and more. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines "childcare workers" to include individuals who "attend to the basic needs of children, such as dressing, feeding, and overseeing play." They may also "help younger children prepare for kindergarten or assist older children with homework." In this issue brief, we use the term "child care workers" to refer to individuals working in the child care and early learning industries—in line with the definition provided by the BLS—while the term "child care provider" refers to the businesses and centers that employ those individual workers.

Although these inequities existed long before COVID-19, the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated them. Today, millions of people—especially Black women and Latinas—who struggled to get by working in retail stores, restaurants, hotels, and more have now lost their jobs altogether, making child care even harder to afford as they try to find new employment.[9] At the same time, our child care system is on the brink of collapse. Providers who already operated on razor-thin margins now face higher operational costs to keep children and staff safe and lower revenues from reduced enrollment—the result of parental job loss, fears of infection, and necessary social distancing requirements. As a result, many child care providers—often small businesses run by women of color—are being forced to close permanently, and more than one in six child care workers have lost their jobs.[10]

A real economic recovery—especially for women—will not be possible without a strong child care sector and higher wages for the millions of workers in low-paid jobs facing economic instability. In September 2020, a record-setting 865,000 women left the labor force (compared to 216,000 men),[11] and many will be unable to re-enter if child care is not available. But high-quality care will only grow further out of reach if providers do not get the financial support they need to stay afloat—support that even fewer families can now afford to provide. This is support that can only come from robust public investment.

We find ourselves here not merely because of an inadequate policy response to the pandemic, but because of decades of failures by policymakers—both the failure to invest in child care as a public good and the failure to invest in the working people who power our economy. We can, and must, take steps to correct these policy failures in tandem. Achieving universal access to high-quality, affordable child care is intricately intertwined with achieving economic and racial justice. We will not be able to improve, much less rebuild, our child care system without also tackling the systemic inequalities facing Black and brown women in the workplace, including the fundamental injustice of minimum wage laws that allow employers to pay the people whose labor drives corporate profits too little to meet their basic needs.

By advancing one key strategy to improve job quality for working people—raising the minimum wage—in conjunction with public investments in child care, we can ensure that wage increases benefit working families, child care workers and providers, and the economy overall.

## HIGHER WAGES AND HIGH-QUALITY, AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE BENEFIT EVERYONE

Raising the minimum wage has a positive impact not only on household incomes, but also on overall health and well-being for both working people and their families. Higher wages for working parents can reduce childhood poverty and its negative consequences on long-term development and well-being; growing up in poverty is associated with reduced lifetime earnings, adverse health outcomes, and lower educational achievement.[12] Recent data from Maine show that raising the minimum wage led to a nearly 25% reduction in the rate of child poverty—the state's largest annual decrease on record.[13] Raising wages also improves health outcomes across a variety of markers,[14] including increased food security,[15] decreased prevalence of low birthweights and illness-based workplace absence,[16] and lower incidence of suicide.[17]

Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour by 2025 would lift an estimated 1.3 million families out of poverty and boost incomes for many millions more;[18] the Economic Policy Institute projects that more than 33 million people would get a raise, including about one-quarter of all working women and 30% of working women of color.[19] Because women disproportionately see their incomes rise when the minimum wages goes up, states with higher minimum wages typically have smaller gender wage gaps.[20] During a recession, raising wages has been shown to boost the economy by increasing the purchasing power of households with low incomes,[21] which helps build economic security for low-paid workers and communities of color.[22] And when paired with the increased public investment necessary to offset the cost to child care providers of higher wages for child care workers and staff, raising the minimum wage would better allow low- and middle-income families to afford high-quality child care.

Child care workers across the country—whose wages are typically below $12 per hour—are among those who stand to benefit the most from a $15 minimum wage.[23] Higher pay will improve job quality and stability for child care workers,[24] helping them to support themselves and their families. A better compensated workforce, in turn, can improve continuity and quality of care for children,[25] which has wide ranging benefits: high-quality child care has positive impacts on children's cognitive and social development[26] and can improve long-term health outcomes.[27]

High-quality child care also helps parents—especially mothers—advance their education,[28] enter and remain in the workforce, and gain financial security for their families.[29] But, because neither families nor child care providers can afford to absorb the cost of the wage increase that child care workers deserve, these benefits cannot be realized without increased public investment in child care.

The positive outcomes from these policy changes thus represent shared goals that can be met if low-paid workers, child care providers, parents and caregivers, and advocates for these constituencies work to advance both minimum wage increases and investments in high-quality, affordable child care. When we work together, we can help today's lawmakers undo what decades of poor policymaking have done: we can ensure that people working in low-paid jobs—including child care jobs—receive higher wages without putting the cost burden on either families or providers.

To realize this vision, advocates and policymakers must reject the false scarcity narrative—the misplaced notion, driven by decades of disingenuous focus on debt and the deficit, that there are not enough public resources to support the full range of necessary public programs—and instead look to four key principles that will ensure equitable implementation of a minimum wage increase while investing in child care providers and families:

1. **Raise the minimum wage for everyone, without exclusions.**
2. **Invest the public dollars needed to accommodate wage increases for child care workers, without shifting the cost burden to parents or asking providers to make up the difference.**
3. **Ensure that raising the minimum wage is a complement to—not a substitute for—other strategies that address under-compensation for child care workers.**
4. **Recognize that the ultimate goal is fair compensation and high-quality, affordable child care for all.**

# THE WAY FORWARD

## PRINCIPLE 1. Raise the minimum wage for everyone, without exclusions.

Across the United States, women—disproportionately women of color and immigrant women—make up nearly two-thirds of the workforce in the 40 lowest paying jobs. Even when they worked full time, close to four in 10 women working in these jobs in 2018 had household incomes below twice the poverty line, and that share was closer to half for Latinas (44%), Native American women (46%), and Black women (49%) in low-paid jobs.[30] And caring for children is one of these jobs: the child care workforce is 93% women and approximately 40% women of color,[31] and child care workers' median wage is just $11.65 per hour,[32] often with few or no benefits like health care, paid sick days, or paid family and medical leave.[33]

Jobs that do not enable people to meet their basic needs are unsustainable for working people, their families, and our economy. Prior to the pandemic—and following years of sustained advocacy from the Fight for $15 movement—a growing number of states were responding by enacting substantial minimum wage increases.[34] In states that implemented minimum wage increases between 2013 and 2018, the lowest-paid workers saw meaningful wage gains (while those in states without minimum wage increases experienced no wage growth at all).[35] And in 2019, the House of Representatives passed the Raise the Wage Act to raise the minimum wage from $7.25 to $15 per hour nationwide by 2025,[36] though the Senate refused to take up the legislation.

Higher wages, particularly for the lowest-paid workers, are essential for a strong, shared recovery from the pandemic-induced recession. As cities and states reopen their economies, a central challenge is restoring consumer demand; raising the minimum wage is a highly effective tool to do just that, because it puts extra dollars in the pockets of people who are highly likely to spend it, often just to make ends meet.[37] At the same time, because unemployment is high and people don't have many job options available to them, low-paid workers have even less bargaining power than usual to try to push for a raise.[38] Raising the minimum wage is one important way that policymakers can shift power to working people and value the people who are caring for our children, protecting the public health, and keeping our economy afloat.

Today—even as we are relying more than ever on the essential services of child care workers, home health aides, grocery store workers, cleaning staff, and other underpaid, undervalued workers—the recession threatens to reverse, rather than advance, the modest progress on the minimum wage. Some states and cities, like Virginia[39] and Hayward, California,[40] have already used the economic crisis caused by the pandemic to justify delaying minimum wage increases, despite the substantial body of evidence demonstrating that raising the minimum wage does not cost jobs.[41] And child care providers, along with the families who rely on their services, may themselves be wary of raising the minimum wage. Indeed, there are real differences between child care and other sectors in which employers often pay wages low enough to be impacted by a minimum wage increase. In retail and food service, for example, labor is a relatively small share of operating costs, and higher labor costs can typically be absorbed by a combination of increased efficiencies and nominal price increases passed on to consumers.[42] For child care providers, by contrast, labor is the bulk of operating costs, and consistently low staff-to-child ratios are necessary to provide a safe, nurturing environment for children.[43] Thus, when labor costs rise, providers historically have been left with few and unsatisfactory options, such as raising tuition for families—families who already struggle to afford what providers need to charge to provide high-quality care.

Long-standing opponents of minimum wage increases have often seized on these challenges to claim that raising the minimum wage will be a calamity for both businesses and working families.[44] The solution, however, is not to keep wages low, or to carve out child care workers while raising wages for everyone else; it is to raise wages for everyone while recognizing that child care is not a private commodity but a public good, and deserves a concomitant level of public investment.

**The solution:** Raise the minimum wage for everyone, without exclusions for child care workers, child care providers and other small businesses, or anyone else. (An increase to $15 per hour, phased in over a multi-year period to allow businesses time to adjust, is a good place to start.[45]) At the same time, use additional policy tools—outlined in the principles that follow—to address the ways in which wage increases uniquely impact the child care system.

### PRINCIPLE 2. Invest the public dollars needed to accommodate wage increases for child care workers, without shifting the cost burden to parents or asking providers to make up the difference.

To fully realize the benefits of a minimum wage increase, policymakers need to ensure that child care providers can stay in business, child care workers can keep their jobs, and families can more easily afford high-quality child care, rather than seeing the cost of that care grow even further out of reach. Public investments designed to address the specific challenges facing different stakeholders can help support providers and families while improving job quality for child care workers.

***Invest in family child care providers.*** An increase in the minimum wage may pose particular challenges for small child care providers who operate out of their own homes ("family child care homes")—a type of care provider already in national decline since 2008.[46] These providers typically have one or two assistants, and each serves only a small number of individual families, although millions rely on these smaller providers. As self-employed business owners, family child care providers are not typically covered by the minimum wage increase, but their assistants would be.[47] Without additional public investment, providers may be forced to cut their own compensation to below (or further below) $15 per hour in order to afford raising their employees' wages.

The importance of family child care has never been more apparent than during the COVID-19 health crisis, when communities across the country have turned to home-based child care providers to care for children of first responders and others who provide essential services. By specifically increasing funding and support for family child care providers, we have the opportunity to preserve this critical infrastructure—a type that many parents prefer—while also supporting small businesses owned by women and people of color.

**The solution:** Increase targeted state and federal supports for family child care providers, including funding and financial/technical assistance, which would benefit both providers and their employees. These supports could come in the form of grants, as well as assistance with costs related to training and professional development, licensing fees, and other expenses. It is also important to connect family child care providers to other financial resources, such as mortgage or rental assistance and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.[48] In addition, policymakers should make it easier for family child care providers to unionize, to give these providers a greater voice in policymaking and a mechanism for more easily accessing resources.[49]

***Invest in child care assistance programs.*** To afford higher wages for staff, child care providers may need to raise revenue by 1) increasing tuition for families who pay out-of-pocket for care, and/or 2) accepting fewer children from families who receive child care assistance, since child care subsidy programs typically pay providers at rates so low that providers themselves have to cover the difference between what the state pays for families who receive child care assistance and the amount the provider charges private-paying families.[50] Both strategies have the effect of making high-quality child care even harder for families to afford—but policymakers can avoid that outcome by enacting funding increases and policy changes that enable more families to access help paying for child care and ensure fair compensation for providers that serve families who receive assistance.

As noted above, families across the income spectrum often struggle to afford high-quality child care, and even when families are eligible for child care assistance they frequently do not receive it. Moreover, under current policies, a provider generally cannot receive a payment rate for serving families receiving assistance that is greater than the rate the provider charges to private-paying families.[51] Thus, policy adjustments to accompany rising wages should not only expand eligibility for child care assistance but also ensure that funding is available to cover services for all who are eligible. And policymakers should raise payment rates to providers who serve families receiving assistance to adequately cover per child costs, while granting providers the flexibility to allow families not receiving assistance to pay lower rates.

**The solution:** In addition to providing immediate pandemic-related relief to stabilize the child care sector,[52] the federal government should increase long-term investments in child care and ensure that states can meet the needs of both families and child care providers.[53] States, in turn, should increase payment rates to providers and expand access to child care assistance programs.

***Invest to ensure families are not worse off.*** Policymakers must be mindful of the "cliff effect" that can result when an increase in the minimum wage is not accompanied by adjustments to eligibility criteria for public programs, or phase-out mechanisms that allow for a gradual reduction of public benefits as families' incomes rise.[54] The cliff effect occurs when an increase in income—whether from a higher minimum wage, a deserved promotion, or an increase in hours worked—is enough to disqualify a family from receiving a work support, but is not enough to cover the cost of the lost benefit.

Potential cliff effects are often overstated by opponents of wage increases, when in fact public benefits policies—including child care assistance policies—typically are designed to minimize cliff effects.[55] For example, under existing federal law, states are required to have 12-month eligibility periods with phase outs for families already receiving child care assistance, must allow families to continue receiving assistance for their full eligibility period as long as their income remains below 85% of the state's median income, and cannot increase copayments during that eligibility period even if the family's income increases.[56] Nonetheless, a substantially higher minimum wage could mean that some families currently receiving child care assistance subsidies would lose eligibility—but not if states adjust their eligibility polices to account for the wage increase.

**The solution:** As states raise minimum wages, they can reexamine eligibility limits for child care assistance to avoid the cliff effect for families on the cusp of eligibility who are still paid low wages. In general, states can raise the eligibility threshold for assistance, institute flexible polices around assistance redetermination and coverage while parents search for work, and reduce copayment burdens.

**PRINCIPLE 3. Ensure that raising the minimum wage is a complement to—not a substitute for—other strategies that address under-compensation for child care workers.**

The minimum wage must work alongside other fair compensation strategies. In the short term, the child care workers—and all essential workers—who are risking their and their families' health during the pandemic should receive premium pay in recognition of their service, such as the additional $13 per hour proposed in the House-passed HEROES Act; the House-passed Child Care Is Essential Act also funds premium pay for the child care workforce.[57] But building back a more sustainable child care infrastructure for the long term must include permanent changes to compensation throughout the sector, not only for the lowest-paid workers who are most likely to see their pay rise with a minimum wage increase. There are steps policymakers can take to implement a laddered pay scale, while creating pathways to higher-paid positions that retain the diverse talents and experiences that child care workers bring to their work.

Raising the minimum wage is a critical start in properly compensating the child care workforce. However, if wages for educators with increased training and credentials do not rise above that level, child care workers will leave the field—making it even harder for families to access the care they need and for children to receive the quality, stable educational environments that are optimal for neuro-cognitive and social development. Wage compression in center-based care is well documented. In 2016, only 25% of teachers with a bachelor's degree working in center-based programs with infants and toddlers earned $15 or more per hour,[58] and only 50% of those with a bachelor's degree and working with three- to five-year-olds earned $15 or more per hour.[59] Moreover, within an undercompensated, undervalued workforce, racial stratification and wage disparities persist; Black and Latinx child care workers are most likely to hold positions that are lower paid. Even after controlling for educational attainment and position, Black early childhood workers earn an average of $0.78 less per hour than their white counterparts, which means $1,622.40 less per year for a full-time, full-year worker.[60]

## MODELS INCENTIVIZING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR CHILD CARE WORKERS

There are existing models working to address compensation, credentials, and opportunity within the child care and early education field. The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® program provides scholarships to child care teachers to help them achieve additional education and higher pay once they have completed their educational requirement, in exchange for a commitment to stay with their child care program or in the field for a certain period of time.[61] The model was created by the Child Care Services Association in North Carolina and has been adopted in 22 states and the District of Columbia. The program is operated by non-profit organizations and supported by public funding at the federal, state, and local levels, along with some private funding. A subset of these states also operate the Child Care WAGE$® program, which provides salary supplements to educators who have already earned higher credentials.[62] While these programs cannot fully address under-compensation and wage compression in the child care field, they can serve as a starting point for states seeking strategies to build upon.

To ensure that raising the minimum wage creates a higher wage floor for entry-level child care jobs without further compressing the overall wage scale, policymakers could, for example, develop wage supplements scaled by job title and educational level in order to create job ladders, reward job tenure, and incentivize formal educational attainment. Such wage supplements can help build a pathway for child care workers to higher wages equivalent to similarly qualified K-12 educators and tied to standards and credentials that are based on knowledge, skills, and competencies. But any conversation about educational attainment, qualifications, and in-line compensation must also take into account the financial barriers and lack of support for child care workers pursuing higher education, inequities which disproportionately affect people of color.[63] A laddered pay system that bases compensation on education level should be combined with expanded opportunities for continued education that ensures the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of child care workers at each step of the ladder.

**The solution:** In the short term, policymakers should fund pandemic premium pay for everyone in the child care workforce (along with other essential workers) to better reflect the value of their work in this time of crisis and reiterate the need for better compensation generally. Going forward, policymakers should not only raise the minimum wage but also take steps to avoid wage compression by, for example, instituting a laddered pay system and simultaneously building out financial aid and supports for child care workers—particularly workers of color and bilingual educators—to access higher education and certification.

### PRINCIPLE 4. Recognize that the ultimate goal is fair compensation and high-quality, affordable child care for all.

For millions of people in low paying jobs across the country, including child care workers, a $15 minimum wage would be a meaningful income boost that helps them put food on the table, access the health care they need, and support themselves and their families. State and federal investments that stabilize the child care sector during and in the aftermath of the pandemic—combined with steps to expand families' eligibility for assistance paying for child care and avoid wage compression for workers—will help ensure that rising wages expand, rather than diminish, families' ability to access high-quality, affordable child care.

At the same time, however, we must recognize that $15 an hour is still insufficient for many families relative to the expenses they face every day. The Economic Policy Institute estimates that by 2024, a single worker without children will need to make at least $15 an hour working a full-time job ($31,200 annually) to meet basic needs, and workers in costlier areas and those supporting families will need more.[64] And even the substantial child care investments we describe here are not sufficient to ensure access to high-quality, affordable child care for all. Raising the minimum wage and making the investments needed to avoid unintended consequences in the child care sector are critically important starting points—but we can't stop there.

**The solution:** Ensure that minimum wage increases and child care investments are considered and implemented together—and that each measure fits into a longer-term strategy designed to move toward living wages, a strong safety net, and access to high-quality, affordable child care for everyone.

## CONCLUSION

We know this won't be easy. Our nation's history of underinvestment in the work performed by women and people of color—with child care as a prime example[65]—means that our policy choices have too often entrenched disparities and pitted us against one another to battle over insufficient resources. But as we move forward out of the economic recession and public health crisis caused by the pandemic, we can reject a framework based on scarcity of resources and instead call for a long-overdue investment in this nation's workforce. This moment presents us with the potential to finally value the work people do, the care they provide, and the strong start that all children deserve.

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**20** *See The Raise the Wage Act*, *supra* note 19.

**21** *See* David Cooper, *Now is Still a Good Time to Raise the Minimum Wage*, ECON. POL'Y INST.: WORKING ECON. BLOG (June 24, 2020), https://www.epi.org/blog/now-is-still-a-good-time-to-raise-the-minimum-wage.

**22** *See* William M. Rodgers III & Amanda Novello, *Making the Economic Case for a $15 Minimum Wage*, CENTURY FOUND. (Jan. 28, 2019), https://tcf.org/content/commentary/making-economic-case-15-minimum-wage/?agreed=1&session=1; *The Importance of Raising the Minimum Wage to Boost Broad-Based U.S. Economic Growth*, WASH. CTR. FOR EQUITABLE GROWTH, (2017), https://equitablegrowth.org/the-importance-of-raising-the-minimum-wage-to-boost-broad-based-u-s-economic-growth/; John Marotta & Solomon Greene, *Minimum Wages: What Does the Research Tell Us About the Effectiveness of Local Action?*, URBAN INST. (Jan. 2019), https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99645/minimum_wages._what_does_the_research_tell_us_about_the_effectiveness_of_local_action_0.pdf.

**23** The median hourly wage for a child care worker in 2019 was $11.65. U.S. Dep't of Labor, BLS, Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2019, 39-9011 Childcare Workers, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes399011.htm.

**24** *See* Rodgers & Novello, *supra* note 22; The *Importance of Raising the Minimum Wage to Boost Broad-Based U.S. Economic Growth*, *supra* note 22.

**25** *See* Mary E. Bratsch-Hines et al., *Child Care Instability From 6 to 36 Months and the Social Adjustment of Children in Prekindergarten*, 30 EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH QUARTERLY 106 (2015), https://fpg.unc.edu/node/7457; Marcy Whitebook, Deborah Phillips, & Carollee Howes, *Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*, CTR. FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD CARE EMP. (2014), https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2014/ReportFINAL.pdf.

**26** Taryn Morrissey, *The Effects of Early Care and Education on Children's Health*, HEALTH AFFAIRS 2 (2019), https://www.healthaffairs.org/do/10.1377/hpb20190325.519221/full/HPB_2019_RWJF_11_w.pdf; *see also* Ross A. Thompson & Ron Haskins, *Early Stress Gets Under the Skin: Promising Initiatives to Help Children Facing Chronic Adversity*, FUTURE OF CHILDREN (2014), https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/sites/futureofchildren/files/media/helping_parents_helping_children_24_01_policy_brief.pdf.

**27** Taryn Morrissey, *Addressing the Need for Affordable, High-Quality Early Childhood Care and Education for All in the United States*, *in* VISION 2020: EVIDENCE FOR A STRONGER ECONOMY 86, 89 (Wash. Ctr. for Equitable Growth, 2020), https://equitablegrowth.org/addressing-the-need-for-affordable-high-quality-early-childhood-care-and-education-for-all-in-the-united-states/ ("[T]here are substantial and lasting benefits of early care and education participation for health, including immunization rates, early screening rates, improved cardiovascular and metabolic health, and reduced smoking.").

**28** *Building Pathways, Creating Roadblocks: State Child Care Assistance Policies for Parents in School*, NAT'L WOMEN'S LAW CTR. (May 2015), https://www.nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/state_child_care_assistance_policies_for_parents_in_school.pdf.

**29** Elise Gould & Jessica Schieder, *An Ambitious Investment in Child Care Can Boost Women's Labor Force Participation and Narrow the Gender Wage Gap*, ECON. POL'Y INST. (Apr. 12, 2016), https://www.epi.org/publication/an-ambitious-investment-in-child-care-can-boost-womens-labor-force-participation-and-narrow-the-gender-wage-gap/.

**30** *See* Tucker & Vogtman, *supra* note 1.

**31** Whitebook et al., *supra* note 4, at 4.

**32** U.S. Dep't of Labor, BLS, Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2019, 39-9011 Childcare Workers, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes399011.htm.

**33** Whitebook et al., *supra* note 4, at 129-130.

**34** *See* Yannet Lathrop, *Raises From Coast to Coast in 2020: Minimum Wage Will Increase in Record-High 47 States, Cities, and Counties This January*, NAT'L EMPLOYMENT LAW PROJECT (Dec. 2019), https://s27147.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Report-Minimum-Wage-Raises-From-Coast-to-Coast-2020.pdf.

**35** Irene Tung, *Minimum Wage Increases Reverse Post-Recession Wage Declines for Workers in Lowest-Paid Jobs*, NAT'L EMPLOYMENT LAW PROJECT 1 (Feb. 2020), https://s27147.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Data-Brief-Minimum-Wage-Increases-Reverse-Post-Recession-Wage-Declines-Workers-Lowest-Paid-Jobs.pdf.

**36** The Raise the Wage Act, *supra* note 19.

**37** *See* David Cooper, *Now is Still a Good Time to Raise the Minimum Wage*, ECON. POL'Y INST.: WORKING ECON. BLOG (June 24, 2020), https://www.epi.org/blog/now-is-still-a-good-time-to-raise-the-minimum-wage.

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**39** Jeffrey Taylor, *Democrats Feel Business Heat to Delay Their Minimum-Wage Hikes*, BLOOMBERG (Apr. 27, 2020), https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-27/businesses-push-to-delay-minimum-wage-hikes-secured-by-democrats.

**40** Peter Hegarty, *Hayward Delays Minimum Wage Increases Because of Coronavirus Impact on Businesses*, EAST BAY TIMES (Mar. 25, 2020), https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2020/03/25/coronavirus-minimum-wage-increase-put-on-hold-in-hayward/.

**41** *See generally, e.g.*, Cooper, *supra* note 37; Paul Wolfson & Dale Belman, *15 Years of Research on U.S. Employment and the Minimum Wage* (Tuck School of Business Working Paper no. 2705499, 2016), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2705499 (finding, in a meta-analysis of 739 estimated effects from 37 published studies on the minimum wage and employment between 2000 and 2015, "no support for the proposition that the minimum wage has had an important effect on U.S. employment"); Sylvia Allegretto et al., *Credible Research Designs for Minimum Wage Studies*, 70 ILR REV. 559 (2017), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0019793917692788 (finding that studies employing the most credible research designs find little to no impact of the minimum wage on employment); Doruk Cengiz et al., *The Effect of Minimum Wages on Low-Wage Jobs* (NBER Working Paper no. 25434, 2019), https://www.nber.org/papers/w25434 (examining 138 state minimum wage changes in the U.S. between 1979 and 2014 and finding even with minimum wages rising as high as 55 percent of the median wage, there was no evidence of any reduction in the total number of jobs for low-wage workers).

**42** *See, e.g.*, Sylvia Allegretto & Michael Reich, *Are Local Minimum Wages Absorbed by Price Increases? Estimates form Internet-based Restaurant Menus* (Institute for Research on Labor & Employment, University of California, Berkeley IRLE Working Paper No. 124-15, 2016), https://irle.berkeley.edu/files/2015/Are-Local-Minimum-Wages-Absorbed-by-Price-Increases.pdf.

**43** *See* Simon Workman & Steven Jessen-Howard, *Understanding the True Cost of Child Care for Infants and Toddlers*, CTR. FOR AM. PROG. (2018), https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/11/15/460970/understanding-true-cost-child-care-infants-toddlers/.

**44** *See* Jeffrey Taylor, *Democrats Feel Business Heat to Delay Their Minimum-Wage Hikes*, BLOOMBERG (Apr. 27, 2020), https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-27/businesses-push-to-delay-minimum-wage-hikes-secured-by-democrats; Marc E. Fitch, *Child Care Provider Says $15 Minimum Wage Will Hurt Parents and Child Care Workers*, YANKEE INST. FOR PUB. POLICY (Feb. 10, 2020), https://yankeeinstitute.org/2020/02/10/child-care-provider-says-15-minimum-wage-will-hurt-parents-and-child-care-workers/. The weight of the evidence indicates such delays are unnecessary; see supra note 41 and accompanying text.

**45** As noted above, as a result of the Fight for $15 movement, $15 per hour has increasingly become the benchmark to ensure a minimum standard of economic security for working people. Since 2016, seven states, Washington, D.C., states and numerous additional localities have begun to phase in a $15 minimum wage, and in November 2020, voters will decide whether to raise Florida's minimum wage to $15 by 2026. *See* Jacob Pramuk, *Two-Thirds of Florida Voters Support $15-an-Hour Minimum Wage Ballot Measure, Poll Finds*, CNBC (Sept. 15, 2020), https://www.cnbc.com/2020/09/15/florida-polls-most-voters-support-15-minimum-wage-ballot-measure.html. The Economic Policy Institute estimates that by 2024, a single worker without children will need at least full-time earnings at $15 an hour to meet basic needs anywhere in the country. Econ. Pol'y Inst. & Nat'l Emp. Law Project, *Why America Needs a $15 Minimum Wage*, ECON. POL'Y INST. (Feb. 2019), https://files.epi.org/pdf/127246.pdf.

**46** *See* Nat'l Ctr. On Early Childhood Quality Assurance, *Addressing the Decreasing Number of Family Child Care Providers in the United States*, ADMIN. FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES 2 (2019), https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/addressing_decreasing_fcc_providers_september2020_final.pdf.

**47** Sarah Thomason et al., Ctr. for Labor Research & Educ., Ctr. for the Study of Child Care Emp't, COWS, *At the Wage Floor: Covering Homecare and Early Care and Education Workers in the New Generation of Minimum Wage Laws*, CTR. FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD CARE EMP'T 13 (2018), https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/05/At-the-Wage-Floor.pdf.

**48** *See Ensuring Home-Based Child Care Providers Can Access New and Expanded Federal Benefits*, NAT'L WOMEN'S LAW CTR. (Apr. 2020) https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/home-based-providers-and-federal-covid-19-response-legislation-final.pdf; *A Strong Economy Needs Strong Family Child Care: Principles and State Policy Recommendations*, ALL OUR KIN (June 2020), http://www.allourkin.org/sites/default/files/A%20Strong%20Economy%20Needs%20Strong%20Family%20Child%20Care%20-%20All%20Our%20Kin.pdf.

**49** *See* Helen Blank, Nancy Duff Campbell, & Joan Entmacher, *Getting Organized: Unionizing Home-Based Child Care Providers*, NAT'L WOMEN'S LAW CTR. (2013), https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/nwlc_gettingorganized2013update.pdf. The organizing model for family child care providers differs somewhat from the traditional union model; rather than bargaining with each individual family, the "employer" is typically the state responsible for setting child care subsidy reimbursement rates and conducting oversight. *See, e.g.*, The *Building a Better Early Care and Education System Act – AB378*, EDUCATION WORKERS UNITED, SEIU LOCAL 99, https://www.seiu99.org/childcareforall/faq/.

**50** In 2019, 47 states set provider payment rates for their child care assistance programs below the 75th percentile of current market rates. Karen Schulman, *Early Progress: State Child Care Assistance Policies 2019*, NAT'L WOMEN'S LAW CTR. 11 (2019), https://nwlc.org/resources/early-progress-state-child-care-assistance-policies-2019/.

**51** For more information on provider payment rates and other state and federal policies under the Child Care & Development Block Grant program, see Karen Schulman, *The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014: Update on State Implementation of Key Policies*, NAT'L WOMEN'S LAW CTR. (2019), https://nwlc.org/resources/the-child-care-and-development-block-grant-act-of-2014-update-on-state-implementation-of-key-policies/.

**52** *See* Nat'l Women's Law Ctr. & Ctr. For Law & Social Policy, *Child Care is Key to Our Economic Recovery* (Apr. 2020), https://nwlc.org/resources/full-brief-child-care-is-key-to-our-economic-recovery-what-it-will-take-to-stabilize-the-system-during-this-crisis/.

**53** *Id.*; *Improving and Expanding Child Care Assistance to Stabilize our Economy*, NAT'L WOMEN'S LAW CTR. (Apr. 2020), https://nwlc.org/resources/improving-and-expanding-child-care-assistance-to-stabilize-our-economy/.

**54** Armelle Casau & Sarah Hyde, T*he Cliff Effect: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, N.M. VOICES FOR CHILDREN (Nov. 2018), https://www.nmvoices.org/archives/11564.

**55** *See generally* Yannet Lathrop, *Raising the Minimum Wage Leads to Significant Gains for Workers, Not to 'Benefit Cliffs'* NAT'L EMP. LAW PROJECT (Aug. 2020), https://s27147.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Policy-Brief-Raising-Minimum-Wage-Leads-Significant-Gains-Workers-Not-Benefits-Cliffs.pdf. Policymakers should also take care to ensure that workers whose incomes rise due to a minimum wage increase can still access the support they need to afford health insurance, food, and other necessities. To date, research shows that most workers and families affected by minimum wage increases experience an increase in their net income, after accounting for changes in earnings and benefits. See id.

**56** *See generally* Schulman, *The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014, supra* note 51; Hannah Matthews et al., *Ctr. for Law & Social Pol'y &., Implementing the Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization: A Guide for States*, NAT'L WOMEN'S LAW CTR (2017), https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/final_nwlc_CCDBGUpdate2017.pdf; Andrea Johnson et al., *Stepping Up: New Policies and Strategies Supporting Parents in Low-Wage Jobs and Their Children*, NAT'L WOMEN'S LAW CTR. (Aug. 2018), https://nwlc.org/resources/stepping-up-new-policies-and-strategies-supporting-parents-in-low-wage-jobs-and-their-children/.

**57** The HEROES Act would create a fund to provide $13 per hour of premium pay, on top of regular wages, to workers deemed "essential," including workers in grocery stores, health care workers, first responders, and child care workers, among others. H.R. 6800, 116th Cong. § 170101 (2020). The Child Care Is Essential Act would provide $50 billion to states to provide stabilization grants to cover providers' operating costs to help them stay in business and alleviate cost burdens for families. H.R.7027, 116th Cong. (2020).

**58** Thomason et al., *supra* note 47, at 24.

**59** Marcy Whitebook et al., *The Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016*, CTR. FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD CARE EMP. 13-14 (2016), https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2016-index/.

**60** *See* Leah J.E. Austin et al., *Racial Wage Gaps in Early Education Employment*, CTR. FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD CARE EMP. (Dec. 2019), https://cscce.berkeley.edu/racial-wage-gaps-in-early-education-employment/.

**61** T.E.A.C.H. EARLY CHILDHOOD® NORTH CAROLINA, https://www.childcareservices.org/programs/teach-north-carolina/.

**62** CHILD CARE WAGE$®, https://www.childcareservices.org/programs/wages/.

**63** Whitebook et al., *supra* note 59, at 30-32.

**64** Econ. Pol'y Inst. & Nat'l Emp. Law Project, *supra* note 45.

**65** See Vogtman, *supra* note 1.