

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 2, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

Thank you for your leadership and urgency in advancing a relief package that honors the sacrifices made by essential workers and provides our communities with the resources necessary to crush the virus, stabilize the economy and build back better. We urge you to include \$100 billion in reconciliation packages to not only stabilize child care for families and early educators, but also lay the groundwork for moving toward universal child care and early learning.

As you know, the pandemic has laid bare the fault lines in our society. Those who have always been the most vulnerable, including women and people of color, have been disproportionately impacted due to institutionalized racism and sexism as well as years of chronic underfunding, including in the caregiving economy. You have led with purpose and vision in prioritizing the need for structural change to build a more just and equitable future. With one in three workers having a child, we know there is no rebuilding our economy without rebuilding and strengthening child care.

Child care and early education are investments that support our communities today and lay the groundwork for children and families' long-term success. Quality care facilitates the ability of parents and other caregivers to work while allowing children to learn and thrive in their most formative years of brain development and during non-school hours as they get older. Yet, even before the pandemic, a child care crisis was unfolding across our nation, making the sector vulnerable to collapse. Child care was unaffordable, costing more than in-state college tuition in half of states and eating up 35 percent of income for low-wage families. It was inaccessible, with half of the country living in a child care desert and families waiting years on waitlists to secure care. Compounding these challenges is the fact that child care workers – educators responsible for our children's growth and development – were being paid an average of \$29,900 per year and relying on public benefits for basic needs. These factors were worse for families and workers of color, who faced higher barriers to accessing and affording care, while being paid lower wages in the child care workforce. Simply put, the status quo was unsustainable.

The pandemic made a bad situation worse, with women and people of color paying the price. In fact, one study showed that without further action the economy is at risk of losing more than \$64.5 billion per year in women's lost wages and economic activity. At the beginning of the pandemic, experts estimated at least \$9.6 billion per month was needed to sustain the industry, yet Congress, hamstrung by Senate Republicans, provided just \$3.5 billion until December or the equivalent of 11 days of relief over nine months. As a result, there are 171,400 fewer child care workers today than in February and a November survey by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) found that 42 percent of respondents that are still open have gone into debt by putting expenses on their personal credit cards. The expense of providing safe care has also risen since the initial estimate of relief needed, as providers shoulder the costs of cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE), and personnel while operating at reduced capacity with lower revenues. If we do not right this wrong and inject at least \$40 billion in immediate child care stabilization funds, we are at risk of exacerbating the harm and losing half of our nation's child care capacity.

However, we cannot simply put a band-aid over a fundamentally broken system. We must seize the opportunity to advance the critical fixes envisioned in the landmark *Child Care for Working Families Act*, estimated at \$60 billion per year. These changes would not only dramatically expand affordable child care and early learning options but also increase pay for workers who have proven to be essential and facilitate more high-quality providers. Making these changes would finally acknowledge that child care is a public good – a collective responsibility that is beneficial for our children's health and wellbeing, the economy, and our future.

This significant investment would also acknowledge that child care is a gender and racial justice issue. Two million fewer women are in the labor force now than before the pandemic, in part due to caregiving responsibilities. In September, a period coinciding with the return to distance learning, four times as many women as men left the workforce, and in December all the jobs lost in the economy were held by women. Moreover, nearly 40 percent of child care workers are Black women and Latinas and 17 percent are immigrants. Indigenous women are also disproportionately represented in the child care workforce at twice the rate of their representation in the overall workforce. Furthermore, it is important to note that the undervaluation of the child care industry has its roots in slavery, which forced Black women to nurse and care for children of white landowners, while being forcibly separated from their own children. The policies that followed restricted work options for Black women, immigrant women and other women of color to child care and other domestic jobs, institutionalizing low wages in this sector. As we strive toward racial and gender justice, the care economy must be central to the conversation.

Finally, passing this legislation would unfetter our economy, which prior to the pandemic was already losing \$57 billion each year in productivity and revenue due to child care – roughly the cost of the proposal that lays the groundwork for a child care system that works for everyone. Indeed, by allowing parents to work, attend college or job training programs, quality child care will nourish our children and support parental employment while growing our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and benefiting the country on the whole. Since moving toward universal child care impacts both spending and future revenues, budget reconciliation is the perfect avenue for advancing these proposals whose time has come.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of this request. We stand ready to assist as you continue your work on behalf of women and families.

Sincerely,



Jackie Speier
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Brenda L. Lawrence
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Lois Frankel
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Veronica Escobar
Vice Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

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Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

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Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress

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Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress

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Donald M. Payne, Jr
Member of Congress

_____/s/_____

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

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Angie Craig
Member of Congress

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Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

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Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

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André Carson
Member of Congress

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Ayanna Pressley
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Judy Chu
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Madeleine Dean
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Doris Matsui
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Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

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Nanette Diaz Barragán
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Sheila Jackson Lee
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Kathleen Rice
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Grace Meng
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Lucille Roybal-Allard
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Marcy Kaptur
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Jamie Raskin
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Marilyn Strickland
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