

# Educational Opportunities Blueprint for Success: Investing in Affordable, Quality Child Care

## Issue Paper

### Introduction

The 2020 pandemic laid bare the inequities of a political, economic and social system that does little to support and empower women, children and families. YWCA Greater Pittsburgh (YWCAGP) has been at the forefront of supporting women, children and families for more than a century. The organization believes that when women thrive, children flourish and families and communities succeed.

YWCAGP is in a unique position to further its advocacy priorities, which are rooted in its services, programs and staff expertise, and aligns to YWCA USA's response strategy to address social issues through direct service in tandem with community issue education and advocacy.

This is the first in a series of YWCAGP issue papers that describes one of today's most critical issues facing working women, their children and families: access to affordable, high-quality child care and early learning programs. It also provides a glimpse of the contributing factors causing these challenges and explains how the organization is effecting change through targeted efforts to help women advance economically, recruit and retain child care workers, and advocate for policy changes at the local, state and national levels.

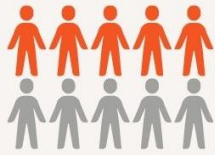
The United States ranks 30<sup>th</sup> out of the 33 other advanced countries belonging to the Organisations for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) in public spending on families and children, which includes policies such as child payments and allowances, parental leave benefits, and child care support.<sup>1</sup>



## YWCA Greater Pittsburgh Position Statement

YWCAGP believes that to create educational equity for women, children and families, additional support and resources are essential for those who need it most, specifically women of color who also face racial, gender and systemic disparities. As a result, YWCAGP established its Strategic Education Opportunity Programs. These programs provide a targeted, need-based approach to help increase access to quality, affordable early education and child care, and other resources and support that help create equitable educational opportunities for marginalized women, children and families.

**According to the Department of the U.S. Treasury**



**Half of Americans** live in child care deserts, defined by **1** child care spot for every **3** children

The average family spends **13%** of its income on child care

From February 2020 to October 2020, the child care industry shrank **83%**<sup>2</sup>

The industry is plagued by high turnover and dismally low pay



While women in the high-income category have more choice in deciding whether or not to return to work, women in the low-income category have to return to work to provide for their families. In fact, Black and Latina women are more likely to be the primary, if not the sole, breadwinners of their families.

According to a 2019 study conducted by the Center for American Progress, 68% of Black women, 41% of Latina women and more than 54% of Native American women are the primary or sole breadwinners of their families compared to 37% of White women.<sup>4</sup>

Fundamentally, the pandemic exacerbated the existing inequities of an inadequate system for working parents, child care workers and providers.

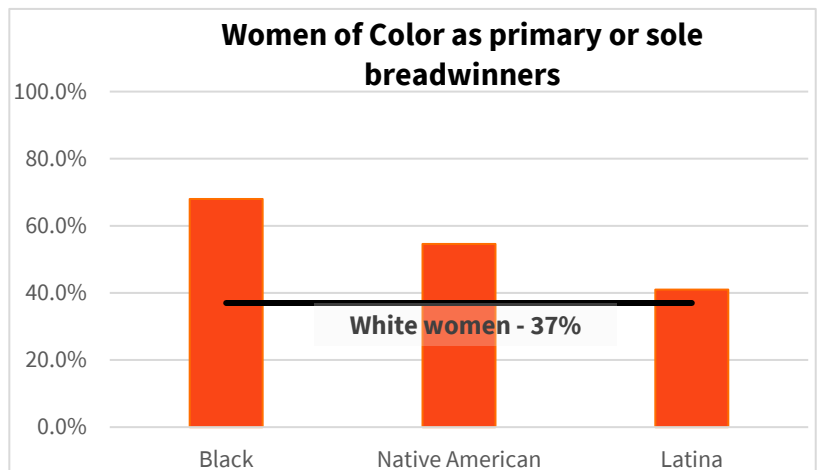
While the industry continues to face various challenges, now is the right time to address the most pressing issues to help improve the current child care model. Women, child care workers and providers are more than ready for positive and impactful change.<sup>3</sup>

## YWCAGP Priorities

**1. Access to affordable, high-quality child care is essential for the economic stability and growth of women, children, their families and the broader economy.**

Bottom line, working women contribute to the overall health of the U.S. economy.

Before the pandemic, women comprised more than half of the U.S. labor force. As of February 2022, there were 1.8 million fewer women in the workforce. Many cite their lack of return is due to ongoing issues with child care responsibilities caused by challenges with quarantines, school and child care center closures and the shortage of child care workers.



These family frontline responders are at the intersection of multiple racial, gender, and structural barriers, and are among the workers who have been hardest hit during the COVID-19 global upheaval.

**To help women return to the workforce, it is imperative to make high-quality child care a priority, and more importantly, make it more accessible and affordable to women, especially marginalized women, who are most often women of color and single heads of households.**



## **2. Child care industry: undervalued and underpaid**

Historically, child care has been known as unpaid women's work. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, White women's primary role was to stay in the home and care for their children, while their male partners were the primary breadwinners.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, Black women have always been an integral part of the unpaid labor force whether as enslaved persons working in the agricultural southern economy, caring for their owners' children, or as domestic workers. And while the overall number of women participating in the workforce has significantly increased over several decades, the pay gap between women and men still exists: for every dollar men earn, women are paid 83 cents.<sup>7</sup> The pay for women in the child care industry is even lower.

**A LIVING WAGE IS NEEDED TO ATTRACT AND HIRE FUTURE WORKERS TO THE INDUSTRY. DOING SO WILL ENABLE THESE WORKERS TO SUFFICIENTLY PROVIDE FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

There are 650,000 child care programs in the U.S., including home-based providers that employ more than 1.5 million workers.<sup>8</sup> Ninety-four percent of these workers are women. Prior to the pandemic, child care workers were some of the lowest-paid workers in the nation. Statistics reveal that 59% of all home-based child care workers have household incomes below the national median, and this number jumps to 75% for Black home-based child care workers. This disparity is even apparent for workers with college degrees: on average, Black early learning educators earn 78 cents less per hour than their White counterparts.<sup>9</sup>

Because many of these workers fall below the poverty line, they qualify and receive governmental aid from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. When you factor in the existing pay disparities due to institutionalized racism and sexism, child care workers, especially women of color, are less likely to earn a living wage.<sup>10</sup>

In 2021, the Bureau of Labor Statistics cited the medium salary for child care workers was \$27,490 per year, which translates into \$11.65 per hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$8.91, and the highest 10 percent earned \$17.99 (pay varies with geographic locations and type of daycare sites).<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Recruit, hire and retain workers by closing the pay gap



Child care workers and child care providers are critical in helping working parents, especially women, participate in the workplace. During a child’s formative years, these workers help the youngest minds learn, grow and develop. Yet, while taking care of other children, the majority of them struggle to provide financially for themselves and their families.

In addition to earning a living wage, a concerted effort must be made to offer ongoing professional development and growth opportunities. High turnover rates and staff shortages have plagued the child care industry for decades. These challenges simply increased as the concern for the health and safety of both clients and staff increased during the pandemic. Child Care Aware of America estimates that 16,000 child care programs permanently closed their doors from December 2019 through March 2021.

To help address staffing issues and re-open some of those shuttered centers and home-based sites, a significant effort must go into attracting, hiring, and retaining individuals to early child care careers.

### 4. Advocating for change

To solve the nation’s child care crisis, legislators at the federal, state and local levels must work with civic and business organizations to bring about change. While President Biden’s “Build Back Better” bill, which included funding for free child care for children under six and free universal preschool services was removed, state and local governments are advocating for change to address the challenges confronting working women, child care workers and providers.

YWCA Greater Pittsburgh partnered with state, regional and local policy makers to advocate for much-needed funding for its child care programs. Former Pennsylvania Governor, Tom Wolf, allocated \$25 million for the Child and Dependent Care Program in the state’s 2023 budget. Similar to the federal child care tax credit, the funding will enable more than 200,000 families to benefit from this state-tax credit beginning in 2023. Additionally, a \$79 million increase in funding is earmarked for the state’s early learning education initiatives, such as Pre-K Counts and Head Start, along with \$90 million to help increase and stabilize the child care staffing shortages through recruitment and retention payments.<sup>12</sup>

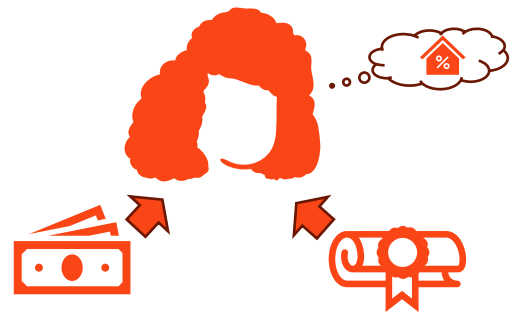


**Mayor Gainey at YWCA Greater Pittsburgh Early Learning Center in Homewood-Brushton**

# **YWCAGP Call to Action**

YWCAGP is committed to eliminating racism and empowering women, children and families. In doing so, the organization understands the importance of giving the youngest learners a head start to help them succeed in school and in life. As a provider of child care and early learning services, YWCAGP has experienced the many challenges facing the industry. While inequities exist, YWCAGP is taking solid steps to address these challenges. As a result, YWCAGP has identified key areas to support, where action can be taken to help address the challenges facing the industry:

**Hire and retain child care workers** – Recognize the need to close the pay gap and provide professional development training for upward career mobility, where possible. In addition, funders need to support providers in their efforts to not only increase child care workers’ wages, but sustain these wages to align with cost-of-living shifts. As a result, YWCA Greater Pittsburgh will continue to advocate for legislative policies that enable child care providers to pay sustainable wages.



**Increase focus on non-traditional child care hours** – Understand the demand for child care surpasses the supply in most communities, and uncover ways to partner with business and civic leaders to address the child care needs of employees who work non-traditional hours.

**Expand provider grants** – Offer grants to existing licensed, registered and permitted providers, located in child care deserts, where there is a significant lack of child care services and programs.



**Serve as champions for change** – Advocate and collaborate with key stakeholders at the state, regional and local levels to keep the issues confronting early learning programs and the child care industry a top priority to help affect change.

## Bringing the mission to life

YWCA Greater Pittsburgh is committed to bringing its mission to life through strategic initiatives and a concerted effort to eliminate racism and empower women, children and families. While the information presented provides a brief summary of one of the many issues facing working mothers, child care workers and providers, and the child care industry at large, particularly for women of color, it also explains how the organization is addressing these challenges head on.

Having accessible and affordable, high-quality child care for all working families is critical. A women's ability to participate in the workplace depends on it. The future of their children depends on it. The future of child care in the U.S. depends on creating a child care and early learning infrastructure that benefits every family regardless of income.



## Join the movement!



YWCAGP invites everyone to join in its child care advocacy initiatives to increase access to more affordable, high-quality child care, especially for marginalized women. Go to [YWCA Greater Pittsburgh](#) to learn more about its child care and early learning programs, or other provided services.

YWCAGP welcomes your [feedback](#).

In addition, be sure to follow YWCAGP on all of its social media platforms.

## Footnotes

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2. Mullen Caitlin, America's child care crisis has become too big to ignore. Working moms are ready for solutions, Biz Women, (Nov. 2021), <https://www.bizjournals.com/bizwomen/news/latest-news/2021/11/child-care-working-moms-crisis.html?page=all>
3. Heather Long, `The pay is absolute crap': Child-care workers are quitting rapidly, a red flag for the economy, The Washington Post, (Sept. 2021), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/09/19/childcare-workers-quit/>
4. Undervalued: A Brief History of Women's Care Work and Child Care Policy in the United States, (Dec. 2017) National Women's Law Center, <https://nwlc.org/resource/undervalued-a-brief-history-of-womens-care-work-and-child-care-policy-in-the-united-states/>
5. Sarah Jane Glynn, "Breadwinning Mothers Continue to Be the U.S. Norm," Center for American Progress, (May 2019), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/breadwinning-mothers-continue-u-s-norm/#:~:text=As%20noted%20in%20previous%20%20reports,of%20another%20race%20or%20ethnicity.>
6. Sarah Jane Glynn, "Breadwinning Mothers Are Critical to Families' Economic Security," Center for American Progress, (Mar. 2021), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/breadwinning-mothers-critical-familys-economic-security/#:~:text=More%20than%20half%20of%20Native,Hispanic%20mothers%20of%20any%20race>
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8. U.S. Census Bureau, "Income and Poverty in the United States:2020."
9. Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board, "Child Care in State Economies: 2019 Update,"<https://www.ced.org/assets/reports/childcareimpact/181104%20CCSE%20Report%20Jan30.pdf>
10. The Education Trust and The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, (Nov. 2021) [New Report: Equity in Child Care is Everyone's Business | Family Forward NC<sup>0</sup>](https://www.edtrust.org/~/media/Files/2021/11/112021-11-11-Child-Care-Report-Updated-11-11-2021.pdf) Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/>
11. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Childcare Workers, <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service-/childcare-workerw.htm>
12. Governor Wolf Highlights New State Child Care Tax Credit to Support Working Families, <http://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/governor-wolf-highlights-new-state-child-care-tax-credit-to-support-working-families/>