



How the Child Care for Working Families Act Benefits Children With Disabilities and Their Families

By MK Falgout and Katie Hamm | October 5, 2020

Authors' note: *The disability community is rapidly evolving to using identity-first language in place of person-first language. This is because it views disability as being a core component of identity, much like race and gender. Some members of the community, such as people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, prefer person-first language. In this fact sheet, the terms are used interchangeably.*

More than 1.1 million children under age 6 in the United States receive services for a disability,¹ while 2.5 percent of parents of young children have a disability that affects their workforce participation.² All families, including those with disabilities, benefit from access to affordable child care that will support their children's development in inclusive and enriching environments. These programs also provide parents with the support they need to thrive. But the dearth³ of inclusive, affordable child care options causes job disruptions for parents of disabled children at twice the rate of those whose children do not have disabilities.⁴ This fact sheet highlights how the Child Care for Working Families Act provides a comprehensive solution to meet the child care needs of all families.

Families of children with disabilities and the current child care system

The current child care system requires additional public resources to reach all the families who need high-quality services. This lack of public investment results in a mostly private-pay system that marginalizes historically underserved communities.

- Although 1 in 8 children ages 3 to 5 who is enrolled in an early childhood program has a disability or significant social or emotional challenges,⁵ nearly 1 in 3 parents of disabled children report that finding available slots is a primary difficulty in accessing child care, compared with 1 in 4 families with nondisabled children.⁶
- Nearly one-third of children with disabilities live in poverty,⁷ making most licensed child care options nearly impossible to afford.⁸
- Children of color are underrepresented in early intervention⁹ programs through infancy and toddlerhood for reasons pertaining to disproportionate lack of access to quality health care.¹⁰
- New data suggest that in all but six states, no more than 2 percent of children who receive a child care subsidy have a disability.^{11*}

- Children ages 3 to 5 who have disabilities are 14.5 times more likely to face suspension or expulsion than children without disabilities,¹² due in part to the fact that only 1 in 5 early childhood educators and providers report “receiving training on children’s social and emotional development.”¹³
- Child care workers, primarily women and disproportionately women of color, earn on average less than \$12 an hour,¹⁴ and only 1 in 5 early childhood educators receives training on children’s social and emotional development.¹⁵ Both of these realities contribute to the inadequate support for providers caring for children with disabilities, given that nearly 10 percent of the early childhood workforce works mostly with children who have disabilities.¹⁶

The Child Care for Working Families Act benefits children with disabilities

The Child Care for Working Families Act (CCWFA) creates a new standard for inclusive and accessible child care by investing in communities historically underserved by an underfunded child care system dependent on parental fees to cover the high cost of care.¹⁷ Just as importantly, the CCWFA ensures that providers are appropriately compensated for providing quality child care. More specifically, the bill has the following benefits:

- The CCWFA prioritizes policies and funding that serve disabled children in high-quality, inclusive early learning environments by:
 - Affirming the importance of child care in supporting children with disabilities by setting benchmarks that ensure the system provides care for children with disabilities alongside children without disabilities.
 - Investing in expanding the supply of high-quality, inclusive child care for children with disabilities and infants and toddlers with disabilities.
 - Requiring states to consider the additional cost of providing high-quality and inclusive care to children with disabilities when developing child care provider payment rates, as well as requiring that parents of disabled children are consulted in the process of developing these rates.
 - Requiring states to provide training opportunities for child care providers so that they can learn how to care for children with disabilities and conduct developmental screenings.
 - Prohibiting the use of suspensions, expulsions, and adverse behavioral interventions in all child care settings receiving public funds.
 - Establishing a new funding stream to provide early intervention services in child care settings.
 - Allowing states to prioritize funds to construct or renovate child care, including for providers who are caring for children with disabilities.
- The CCWFA ensures that child care is affordable and inclusive for all families, while compensating providers at the true cost of child care by:
 - Guaranteeing that families below 75 percent of the state median income level receive free child care and that no family pays more than 7 percent of their household income toward child care tuition, making child care affordable for all, especially the one-third of children with disabilities who live in poverty.¹⁸

- Significantly improving training and compensation—including instituting pay parity with K-12 teachers for early childhood educators with comparable credentials—so that the child care workforce has the support it needs for all children, including those with disabilities, to succeed.
- Offering consumer education for parents in order to help them choose a child care provider that meets their child’s needs.

The Child Care for Working Families Act would establish a child care system that appropriately meets the needs of all families, including those with disabled children.

MK Falgout is a research assistant for Early Childhood Policy at the Center for American Progress. Katie Hamm is the vice president of Early Childhood Policy at the Center.

** Due to state limitations in data collection and reporting processes, these data may not fully capture the number of children with a disability served by the Federal Child Care Subsidy Program.*

Endnotes

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