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THE 2020 CHILDCARE-FOR-ALL CHAMPIONS

Childcare-for-all is a critical part of a progressive platform that is committed to gender, racial, and economic equity. Americans deserve a progressive policy solution that provides high-quality childcare options in every community.

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What could be more fundamental to American communities than how we care for our children?

Picture the newborn snuggling with her mom. Imagine a baby smiling at his dad for the first time, or the joy when a toddler takes her first steps or says his first word. Think about the power of the love and the bonds that parents have with their children at every age. Parents want the very best for their children. Their communities should too. The collective journey of democracy means we must care for each other and support the most vulnerable members of our society, including children. It is immoral to do anything else.

That's only one reason public policy has a significant role to play in guaranteeing the availability of high-quality childcare¹ options that don't break the bank, in every community. Few issues touch so many progressive values. Today, too many families cannot find affordable, high-quality childcare options when and where they need them. This impacts children's well-being and preparedness for school and parents' ability to work or go to school—especially mothers. Women do more of the unpaid work within the home, including spending more time caring for children than men with similar demographic backgrounds and parental status.² Single-parent and lower-income families are hit especially hard. Communities of color also often have less access to great childcare options³, so the lack of comprehensive childcare solutions exacerbates racial inequities, since high-quality care can lead to

better school, life, and work outcomes.⁴ Smart, progressive “childcare-for-all” policies are not only the right thing to do, but they are also an opportunity for progressive candidates and policymakers to lead the way on bold solutions and innovative ideas to make progress on gender, racial, and income equality; child development and family well-being; educational outcomes; and economic growth.

The eleven current 2020 Democratic candidates who participated in the most recent presidential primary debate have prioritized childcare and early education to varying degrees. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) has issued a bold new proposal, which she mentioned during the debate, while Secretary Julián Castro has outlined one without the same level of details. Senators Kamala Harris (D-CA), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) have cosponsored the Child Care for Working Families Act [H.R. 1364 & S. 568]—a similarly visionary piece of legislation—and talk about it to varying degrees on the campaign trail. Former Vice President Biden, South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg, Andrew Yang, Representative Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI), and Tom Steyer have not yet laid out comprehensive plans. This report lays out what the childcare need is, what a progressive policy solution should include, and where eleven of the 2020 candidates stand on them.

Why Childcare Is an Important Progressive Issue

Today, most parents are working⁵ but cannot find quality, affordable childcare in their area. Of parents with children under age eighteen, 71 percent say this is a problem, and 83 percent of parents with children under age five say it is a problem.⁶ High costs and lack of supply both contribute to this problem. In many states, childcare costs more than median rent, mortgage payments, or state-college tuition and fees.⁷ Half of all Americans live in areas where the need outstrips the availability of licensed childcare.⁸

In addition, historically, the expectation was that childcare could be free. Going back in US history, slaves were often tasked with caring for children. More recently, many families relied on the unpaid labor of moms, although single moms and moms of color often still had to find a way to work inside and outside the home. This history—and the continued undervaluing of care work—has kept the economic value of this work depressed, with the consequence of economic insecurity and inequality for generations of people working in childcare, who are primarily women and disproportionately women of color.⁹ Today, childcare workers are paid a median wage of just over \$11 per hour.¹⁰ In addition, too few have the benefit of a union or other worker organization to ensure they have a voice at work.

While the cost of public investment in strong childcare and early-education programs is significant, the cost of not investing in them is more significant. It includes lost wages and foregone economic growth. The United States loses \$57 billion each year in economic productivity because parents lack affordable, quality childcare options.¹¹ Every year, \$8.3 billion in wages are lost as a result of the lack of affordable childcare,¹² and US businesses lose approximately \$4.4 billion annually due to employee absenteeism as a result of childcare breakdowns.¹³ These financial costs add to the social costs of increased gender inequality as the brunt of the care falls on women's unpaid labor, increased racial inequality as black and Latinx parents struggle more than white parents to find affordable, quality childcare options,¹⁴ and increased

income inequality as those who can afford better care will reap the rewards of showing up at school more ready to learn and succeed.

That's why it's so important that progressive candidates and elected officials take this opportunity to lead on childcare and early education as a central part of a platform committed to gender, racial, and economic equity.

Key Elements for a Progressive Childcare Platform

A progressive childcare-for-all plan must (1) make childcare affordable for every family; (2) value the care workforce, including with good compensation and the right to organize; (3) ensure that children are safe, nurtured, and learning in high-quality settings; (4) use a social justice lens to address diverse, inclusive, flexible, culturally competent, and bilingual options of care, including care in a variety of settings; and (5) guarantee public financing that is stable and covers the costs of affordability and valuing the workforce.¹⁵ A comprehensive plan must also address the continuum of care necessary to support children and families starting from birth and continuing before and after school and all summer long, which includes (6) universal pre-K and (7) paid family and medical leave. Paid family and medical leave ensures that parents can afford to care for their newborns, foster children, and adopted children without risking their jobs or paychecks. Thus, a comprehensive policy solution to address childcare and early education meets the seven criteria, reaching families across the board and at each stage of the child's development.

Where the candidates stand

A number of candidates meet at least most of the seven conditions for a progressive plan. Others still have potential to meet them. Table 1 summarizes where the candidate's stand.

TABLE 1: HOW PROGRESSIVE ARE THE CANDIDATES WHEN IT COMES TO CHILDCARE FOR ALL?

YES **NO** **NOT ENOUGH DETAILS TO KNOW**

KEY ELEMENTS OF CHILDCARE PROGRAMS

	AFFORDABILITY Make childcare affordable for every family	WORKFORCE value the care workforce	HIGH QUALITY ensure that children are safe, nurtured and learning	DIVERSE, FLEXIBLE OPTIONS use an inclusive social justice lens	PUBLIC INVESTMENT guarantee public financing that meets the needs	SUPPORT UNIVERSAL PRE-K	SUPPORT PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE
Biden	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Booker	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Buttigieg	YES	YES	YES	NOT ENOUGH DETAILS TO KNOW	YES	YES	YES
Castro	YES	YES	YES	NOT ENOUGH DETAILS TO KNOW	YES	YES	YES
Gabbard	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Harris	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Klobuchar	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Sanders	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Steyer	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Warren	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Yang	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

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Widespread support for key principles and opportunities to be more progressive

Senator Warren talks about her childcare-for-all plan often on the campaign trail.¹⁶ She has proposed a detailed early-childhood education platform that meets all the criteria—the Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act [S.1878/H.R. 3315] modeled on the 1970s’ Comprehensive Child Development Act,¹⁷ and also building on existing law to create affordable, high-quality childcare options.¹⁸ Her campaign has created a universal childcare calculator, and she has proposed using a wealth tax to pay for her plan.¹⁹ Her proposal also addresses pre-K, and she is also a cosponsor of the FAMILY Act (S.463, H.R. 1185), a bill to

provide twelve weeks of paid time to care (including for parents), and has brought up the need for paid family and medical leave in her campaign.²⁰

When surveyed, 73 percent of Democrats said they would support a new plan that, like Warren’s, would give grants to states, cities, nonprofits, schools, and other local partners to create a network of childcare options that would be available to every family, ensure childcare workers are paid at least \$15 per hour and cap expenses for families at 7 percent of their income, and be paid for

by a 2 percent tax on accumulations of wealth worth more than \$50 million.²¹

“We’re the richest country in the history of the planet. Access to high-quality care and education during the first five years of a child’s life shouldn’t be a privilege reserved for the rich. It should be a right for every child.”

— *Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)*

Secretary Julián Castro has outlined a proposal on his campaign website calling for universal childcare, pre-K, and pay parity for childcare workers. He also supports paid family and medical leave. He proposes something similar to the Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act, calling for “federal grants for local, county, state, and tribal governments to create independent childcare centers and increase compensation for childcare workers for parity with elementary school teachers.” Like the Warren plan and the Child Care for Working Families Act, no family would pay more than 7 percent of their income.²² While he has not released a detailed plan, it looks like he is calling for a truly universal plan available to all incomes. It is not clear whether families would have flexibility in the type of care they use or if they would be required to use center-based care, and how quality and diverse needs would be addressed.

“Decades of research has told us that a significant portion of childhood development begins prior to entry into kindergarten. These formative years lay the groundwork for the future health and success of our nation’s students...In an

increasingly competitive global economy, the United States cannot afford to leave our youngest students at a disadvantage.”

— *Secretary Julián Castro*

The Child Care for Working Families Act [H.R. 1364 & S. 568] first introduced in Congress by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA) in 2017 is a comprehensive bill that would guarantee flexible assistance for childcare to low-income and middle class on an income-based sliding scale that ensures that no family pays more than 7 percent of their income and every childcare worker is paid at least a living wage. The bill meets the five progressive criteria and has wide support among the Democratic field. Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), and Warren have all cosponsored the bill.

In October, Senator Harris announced her “Children’s Agenda,” which includes six months of paid family and medical leave (most of the other proposals are for twelve weeks), the Child Care for Working Families Act and universal pre-K. The agenda centers around the economy, health, criminal justice reform and accountability and includes additional support for children and families like paid sick days and fair scheduling policies, among other policies.²³

“...we must make it clear that every working parent deserves access to high-quality, affordable care for their child.”

— *Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA)*²⁴

Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) has talked about her support for childcare, Head Start, and pre-K in response to

questions from voters on the campaign trail.²⁵ She has also introduced the Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act [H.R. 1488 & S.605] to address the shortage of childcare options in rural areas. Her campaign website talks about quality childcare and paid family leave as part of a shared-prosperity agenda.²⁶

“It’s about the economy, it’s really important to talk about it in that way, It’s about making it easier for individual families and workers, but it is also about having a strong economy. It’s impossible to have a strong economy when it’s too expensive to work because of child care.”

— *Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)*²⁷

Senator Bernie Sanders’s (D-VT) campaign website calls for universal childcare and pre-K, paid family and medical leave, paid sick days, and paid vacation as part of his “fight for working families” platform. His campaign told Vox: “Bernie has been a longtime supporter of universal child care and early education for all as the best way to address disparities in access to high-quality education.”²⁸

“The children are our future, and they deserve the best possible head start in life with a high quality, universal pre-k program.”

— *Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT)*²⁹

In October, Senator Booker announced a plan for “Ending Child Poverty in America and Creating Opportunity for All,” which says he will build on the framework of the Child Care for Working Families Act to make high quality childcare affordable and invest in childcare workers by raising wages and improving benefits.³⁰ This builds on his

campaign kickoff speech, in which he noted the need for affordable childcare and paid family and medical leave.³¹ He also spoke to an Iowa audience on the campaign trail about the need for universal prenatal care, affordable childcare, paid family leave, and universal pre-K.³²

“And we will take on the systemic challenges that disproportionately affect women and hold our entire country back. We will fight for equal pay, affordable child care, and establish national paid family and medical leave.”

— *Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ)*³³

In October, Mayor Pete Buttigieg released a women’s agenda that includes fair wages for early educators, supports the FAMILY Act, and references a forthcoming comprehensive child care plan.³⁴ He also has spoken on the campaign trail about the need for a federal investment in a “three-legged stool” of affordable care, higher compensation for child care workers and improving quality. He has also talked about how as mayor he provides paid parental leave to city employees.

“I believe there’s a three-legged stool ... one of them is affordability, another one of them is compensation and then the third is quality and they all go with each other.”

— *Mayor Pete Buttigieg*³⁵

Vice President Joe Biden has talked about a tax-credit approach and universal pre-K. During the second presidential primary debate, his campaign tweeted that he would expand the childcare tax credit to \$8,000.³⁶ As part of his education agenda, on his campaign website he

talks about universal pre-K, placing an early-childhood-development expert in every community health center, and expanding home-visiting programs—but not about addressing childcare specifically.³⁷

“Our children are our future, it’s time we start investing in them from birth.”

— *Former Vice President Joe Biden*³⁸

Andrew Yang’s campaign website notes the need for early-childhood education for all and paid family leave.³⁹ He calls for six to nine months of paid family leave, and has spoken about and tweeted his support for on-site and subsidized childcare.⁴⁰

“Pre-k and early childhood education have been proven to get kids off to a better start, and it also relieves families from having to find and pay for daycare for their children when they are 3 and 4. Other countries are investing in it, including China, and we need to as well for the good of our children and families and our long-term competitiveness as a country.”

— *Andrew Yang*⁴¹

Tom Steyer and Representative Gabbard have not focused much on childcare and early education in their campaigns. Steyer’s website highlights his support for universal pre-K as part of his education agenda and paid family leave as part of his women’s equality agenda.⁴² Representative Gabbard’s website does not highlight these issues. In answer to a voter question in New Hampshire she noted that “...we can and should put more resources toward [universal pre-K and childcare programs]...” and also spoke about the importance of paid family and medical leave. She noted she would be rolling out more plans later including giving parents the opportunity to receive more resources to stay home with their children. She is a cosponsor of the paid family and medical leave bill - the FAMILY Act, but not the Child Care for Working Families Act.

An opportunity for every candidate to support progressive childcare solutions

It was not always a given that presidential candidates would prioritize childcare and early education. The 2016 election was the first time both Democratic and Republican candidates addressed the issue.⁴³ With so much at stake—economic security; gender, racial, and economic equity; healthy child development and well-being; educational outcomes and economic growth—every candidate has an opportunity to lay out a comprehensive vision for childcare and early education that meets the core progressive criteria.

ENDNOTES

1. Childcare, for purposes of this report, includes any nonparental care, including center-based care, home-based care, and family childcare providers, in addition to afterschool and summer programs. Publicly funded pre-K programs also provide a safe, nurturing place for children, and these programs can also be a part of childcare solutions, although pre-K is only one part of a larger solution. Sometimes it's referred to as "childcare and early education," since children start learning from the day they are born and the early years can be especially crucial for brain development. Childcare is broader than children aged from zero to five since it includes after school and summer care for school-age children up to age thirteen too.
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