

Testimony by Congresswoman Ashley Hinson (IA-01)
05/27/21 Ways & Means Committee Hearing:
Universal Paid Leave and Guaranteed Access to Child Care

Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Walorski, Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today about an issue that is important to Iowans, all Americans – and working women, in particular.

Safe, affordable child care is essential, and I look forward to working with all Members of this Committee to increase access to child care for working Americans.

As the mother of two boys (Max, age 10, and Jax, age 8), I know exactly what it means to balance a full-time job so I can provide for my family with actually raising that family. It's no easy feat for a working mom to juggle these demands. Personally, I juggle it all of the time. I attend virtual parent-teacher meetings for Jax while running to the floor for votes. Just the other day, I was about to do an interview over zoom and the pot of mac and cheese I just made Max was barely out of the frame of the camera. I make sure both boys get on the bus on time every morning, whether I'm doing that from my kitchen or from the Capitol.

And I can only do this because I have an incredible support system, including my wonderful husband Matt and the boys' grandparents. I can also manage this because my kids are finally both in school. Let me tell you, it was even harder when I was a local news reporter, and they were still little.

Women bear the brunt of child care – and that means it’s usually women who end up leaving the workforce if they can’t access it. Sometimes, this is a choice moms are making – and that’s great. But too often, this isn’t a choice. Leaving the workforce is a requirement for moms because they don’t have a safe, affordable option for child care.

Right now, we are in the middle of a she-cession. This pandemic has forced countless women out of the workforce to tend to kids as their schools remain closed. These same women are the ones having the hardest time re-entering the workforce. This sheds light on an even bigger problem: when women leave the workforce for an extended period of time, they face an uphill battle to reenter it. This disproportionately impacts women and families in rural areas.

One of the biggest challenges facing women who *want* to stay in the workforce following maternity leave is finding reliable, affordable child care providers.

So, we have to look at the root causes of this problem. What is it that makes child care so hard to access? The answer is simple: child care centers are few and far between, wait lists are long, and costs are through the roof. Even if you can find a slot for your child, chances are high that you can’t afford it.

That drove me to look deeper. And what I found is that not only are child care options are few in number, but that centers are closing with alarming frequency. And prices aren’t going down – they are going up. The primary driver appears to be overburdensome regulations that are not focused on kids’ safety but that do drive up operating costs. This means that centers have two choices: lose money or raise prices. It’s making child care unsustainable for small business owners and inaccessible for parents.

I’d like to share with you some of the most problematic rules being pushed by state regulators. Some states require daycare providers to have college credit or even a bachelor’s degree to work at a daycare. Others have a laundry list of toys that

aren't deemed stimulating enough for children. That's right – some places are banning toys not based on safety, but based on whether or not someone thinks they are useful for more than playtime. These are burdensome, unnecessary standards for child care providers to meet. They increase the cost of business, resulting in fewer local providers, and lost job opportunities.

My bill, the Child Care Accessibility Report and Evaluation Act – or, the “Child CARE Act” – would help reduce the cost of child care, give parents more control over their kids' care, and boost access to child care options by fostering a regulatory environment in which child care centers can thrive.

In the end, overburdensome regulations restrict access to child care, especially for lower-income and rural families. New moms are kept out of the workforce by this shrinking pool of available care, long wait lists, and unaffordable rates. The Child CARE Act aims to reverse this troubling trend.

The Child CARE Act is simple. It would direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to submit a report to Congress analyzing the effects of state regulations on affordability and accessibility of child care. That's all.

Once Congress has this information, we can make informed decisions about where the regulatory patchwork is causing trouble and reverse course. The data could be used to incentivize states to make responsible decisions about their child care standards – like my own State of Iowa, which focuses on safety and access – while encouraging overregulating states to change their methods and improve access.

I think we can all agree that we need *more* child care options for parents. We need to get women back into the workforce and that cannot happen without improving access to child care.

With that, I thank you again for the opportunity to participate today, I urge support for the Child CARE Act, and I welcome your questions.