

# CHILD CARE

*“Why do we have to jump through hoops just to get our kids a better future?” - LIFT participant*

High quality child care is critical for both parents’ and childrens’ wellbeing, but in D.C, and across the country, families are facing crushingly high child care costs. This sets children up for failure by hindering access to much needed early learning opportunities. It also sets parents, especially mothers, up for failure by forcing them to choose between child care, pursuing their educational goals, and making enough to put food on the table.

For single parents with an infant, DC is [the most expensive place](#) for child care in the country, as a share of their median income.

## Annual cost in Washington, DC

**College:** \$7,255



**Housing:** \$17,628



**4-year-old care:** \$17,842



**Infant care:** \$22,631



**Source:** Economic Policy Institute: *The cost of child care in the United States*

- The federal Department of Health and Human Services recommends families spend **no more than 7% of their income on child care**. By this standard, [less than 8%](#) of D.C. families can afford infant care.
- [Across the country](#), the average price of center-based child care for two young children **would meet or exceed all of the earnings for an average Black, American Indian and Alaska Native, or Hispanic working mother**,
- In DC, the average price for center-based child care for an infant or toddler is [\\$24,417 per year](#). For home-based care, the average price is \$18,143 per year.
- Center-based care at this price **would take up 73% of the income of a single parent in DC with median income**.

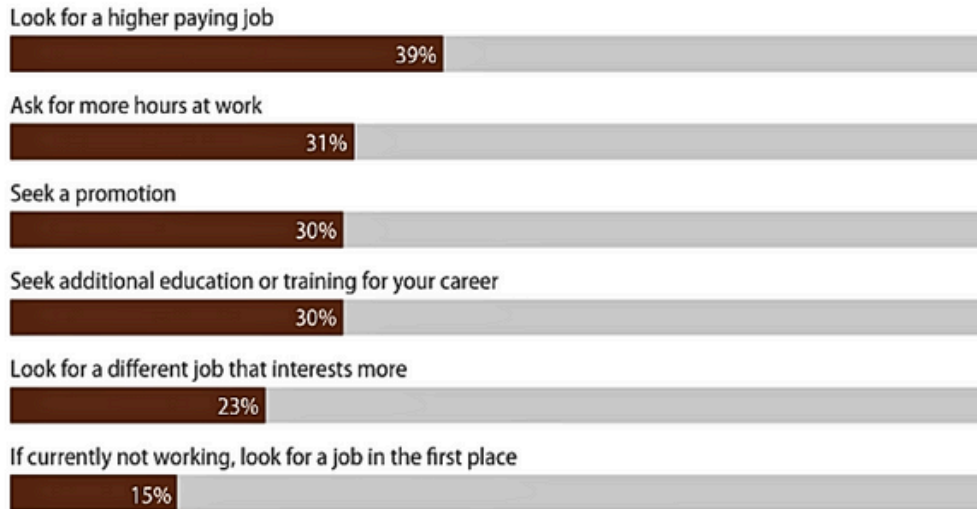
Parents who have access to reliable, high-quality, affordable child care have the capacity to maintain steady employment, pursue their educational goals, and engage in self-care activities.

FIGURE 4

### Parents would take several steps to improve career options with more reliable and affordable child care

Parents with children under 18

Q. "If you had access to more reliable and affordable child care, would you or your child's other parent take any of the following steps in relation to employment and work?"



Note: Respondents were allowed multiple responses; thus, responses will not add up to 100 percent.  
Source: GBA Strategies national poll of 1,657 registered voters, conducted June 18–26, 2018.

- In one 2018 study, 65% of parents with children under the age of 18 and 77% of parents with children under the age of 5 reported that child care issues had [negatively impacted](#) their career or that of someone in their immediate family.
- Unaffordable child care particularly impacts women. According to [the U.S Department of Labor](#), at the county level, a 10% increase in childcare prices (infant, toddler, and preschool-aged prices) is associated with a 1 percentage point reduction in maternal employment rates. Conversely, a 10% reduction in childcare prices is correlated with an increase in maternal employment ranging from 0.25% to 11%.
- According [to the Economic Policy Institute](#), if families had access to high-quality affordable child care, single mothers would earn an additional \$5.0 billion annually and married mothers would earn an additional \$29.6 billion in the formal labor market.
- The high cost of child care is also a steep barrier to women's participation in [higher education](#).

Though the federal government and local jurisdictions including D.C have invested in need-based child care subsidies, the available subsidies do not come close to meeting the need, either locally or nationally.

- In 2019, [12.5 million children](#) were eligible for income-based child care subsidies under federal rules, and 8.7 million children under state rules, but only 2.0 million children actually received subsidies.

- D.C.'s child care subsidy program recently raised [its income eligibility cap to 300%](#) of the Federal Poverty Level (\$90,000 for a family of 4). While this is a positive step, it is not enough to make child care affordable to many middle income families. A single mother with two young children earning \$1 over this limit could pay nearly \$50,000, or nearly 70% of her income for full time child care.

The District of Columbia should act immediately to expand guaranteed income programs in order to expand educational opportunities for children and meet the child care needs of low-income parents.

- In [one study](#), 24% of expanded Child Tax Credit recipients reported spending the funds on child care expenses, including 39% of Black families.
- Participants in the [Thrive East of the River](#) guaranteed income program were twice as likely to report being able to access child care for their children after receiving their payments compared to before.
- A [national study of early childhood program participation](#) found that, among children whose parents reported difficulty finding child care, cost was the single most commonly cited reason for the difficulty.

- Child Care Aware of America, Price of Care: 2022 Child Care Affordability Analysis, (2022), [https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2022\\_CC\\_Afford\\_Analysis.pdf](https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2022_CC_Afford_Analysis.pdf)
- Economic Policy Institute, Child care costs in the United States, (Oct. 2020), <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/DC>
- Sarah Jane Glynn & Katie Hamm, The Economics of Caregiving for Working Mothers, (Dec. 10, 2019), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/economics-caregiving-working-mothers/>
- Child Care Aware of America, Price of Care, <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2022%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Fact%20Sheets/DC%202022%20Price%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>
- John Halpin, Karl Agne, & Margie Omero, Affordable Child Care and Early Learning for All Families, (Sep. 2018), <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/09/ChildCarePolling-report.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Labor, Childcare Prices In Local Areas, (Jan. 2023), [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/NDPCP/WB\\_IssueBrief-NDPCP-final.pdf?\\_ga=2.22983608.2072027151.1699298285-1858095616.1697127614](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/NDPCP/WB_IssueBrief-NDPCP-final.pdf?_ga=2.22983608.2072027151.1699298285-1858095616.1697127614)
- Elise Gould & Hunter Blair, Who's Paying Now? The Explicit and Implicit Costs of the Current Early Care and Education System, (Jan. 15, 2020), <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/whos-paying-now-the-explicit-and-implicit-costs-of-the-current-early-care-and-education-system/>
- MON, Higher Education, Women, and GI
- Institute of Education Sciences, Early Childhood Program Participation: 2019, (May 2021), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020075REV.pdf>
- DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Child Care Subsidy Program FAQ for Families, <https://osse.dc.gov/childcaresubsidyfaq>
- Hamilton et al., *The impacts of the 2021 expanded child tax credit on family employment, nutrition, and financial well-being*, (Apr. 2022), [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Child-Tax-Credit-Report-Final\\_Updated.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Child-Tax-Credit-Report-Final_Updated.pdf)
- Urban Institute, An Evaluation of THRIVE East of the River: Findings from a Guaranteed Income Pilot during the COVID-19 Pandemic, (Feb. 2022), [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/an-evaluation-of-thrive-east-of-the-river\\_0.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/an-evaluation-of-thrive-east-of-the-river_0.pdf)
- Institute of Education Sciences, Early Childhood Program Participation