



# COMMUNIQUE

## CHILD CARE CRISIS IN THE CITY FINDING AFFORDABLE QUALITY SPOTS PUTS UNDUE STRESS ON WORKING PARENTS

By Marci Rosenblum, Communications Director

**Diane McPhatter (Administrative Manager, Dept. of Homeless Services) remembers the struggles she faced 21 years ago finding child care for her daughter so she could return to work. There were few spots available for the long hours she needed and the cost was high. “It was a major problem and one that many women were facing when they had to return to work and didn’t have family to help them out,” Diane said. That was 1997. Now it’s 2018 and very little has changed.**

America is facing a child care crisis stemming from a combination of both soaring needs and soaring costs — and New York City is not exempt. Child care arrangements and their costs are significant issues for parents, relatives, care providers, policy makers, and anyone concerned about children. Yet, it’s not a new phenomenon. The question is why a country like America, a state like New York, and a City like the Big Apple have yet to come up with a solution.

While Diane thought she was out of the child care dilemma now that her daughter is an adult, life took her by surprise. Now with custody of her four-year-old grandson, the 47-year-old single grandmother once again finds herself in the midst of finding quality, affordable, accessible child care — and it’s a daunting task.

“Nothing has changed after all these years except the cost,” Diane said. “Back in 1997, child care was \$40 a week, but for someone living on \$20,000 a year, \$40 a week was a lot to pay. Even though we earn more now, child care is \$100 a week. That’s a lot to pay for a single mother.”

To make matters even more difficult for Diane, her grandson has sickle cell anemia and is on regular medication. She needs a licensed child care provider who is qualified to administer medication, determine if her grandson isn’t feeling well, and contact Diane immediately.

CWA Local 1180 knows this is a growing problem, and is teaming up with Public Advocate Letitia James, other politicians, and community groups in hopes of changing the options available to New York’s working parents and caretakers such as Diane. Mothers in particular are prone to have to make the choice between caring for their children and developing their careers and earning potential, and it’s not a choice anyone should have to make.

It’s no wonder that child care benefits are important to Diane and thousands of others just like her, because across the economic spectrum, day care and school eat up a significant portion of New York City residents’ earnings. On average, day care costs \$16,250 for an infant, \$11,468 for a toddler, and \$9,620 for a school-age child, annually. For some parents, that adds up to 13% of their income. For a vast majority of New Yorkers, especially municipal workers, that is an unaffordable amount.

“Child care is essential to supporting our working families and by providing on-site, affordable care, we can ensure they never have to choose between caring for their children and pursuing their careers,” James said. “Providing on site options for hundreds of thousands of municipal workers would be a game changer for the successes of our children, our parents, and our city.”

Though Mayor Bill de Blasio prioritized providing child care for New Yorkers in 2014 through the Universal Pre-Kindergarten Act, child care center leases continue to rise in price, and with gentrification of lower income areas, locals are being priced out of their own neighborhoods. Even with subsidies, lower income families cannot afford proper childcare and, according to Public Advocate James in a New York Daily News article, “as a result they have to give up their jobs or they have to take a pay cut to care for their children.” The disparity between working parents’ needs and the City’s solutions for those needs is starkly visible.

The Public Advocate’s office reported in April that “nearly half of working parents miss an average of four days of work at least every six months because of child care breakdowns, costing U.S. businesses about \$4.4 billion a year in lost productivity and working families \$8.3 billion in lost wages.” Additionally, only 7% of women who work in municipal settings are guaranteed maternity leave, forcing them to use sick days.

But what happens when sick days are used up as well? This is a dilemma Diane can relate to. She has been called numerous times by her grandson’s day care center and had to leave work early to pick him up. At a stage in her life when Diane thought sick days would be her own, they are now shared with her grandson who has frequent hospital stays. Despite all this, she is still thankful for the child care center she found.

Diane lives in Brevoort Houses in the Bed-Stuy section of Brooklyn. While there are several day care centers very close to where she lives, there is an 18-month to two-year waiting list. Her housing complex itself has a day care center that would be incredibly convenient for Diane, but it also has a two-year waiting list. This leaves Diane having to travel much further to find an appropriate center certified by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

In the past three years, Public Advocate James, who is a staunch advocate of not only CWA Local 1180 but labor in general, has rolled out legislation targeting families where they need the most help. In 2015, the Public Advocate's office recommended that the City adopt paid family leave, which went into effect this past January. Legislation regarding paid paternity leave has also been recommended, but should not be used "as a bargaining chip" with municipal workers. New York City must protect basic workers' rights, reported the Public Advocate's office, "and ensure that the men and women who make our City run are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve." There are needs to be met, and James' office continues to advocate for the support and security that City employees have earned.

Her most recent bill takes workers' basic benefits a step further. In May 2018, a feasibility study and pilot project were announced, with the goal of providing on-site day care for municipal employees. Though the pilot program will take place in "one or more" City locations, the goal is to make way for "game-changing" resources for City workers that honor the dignity they deserve and helps families struggling with the cost of child care and finding a quality spot.

Families across the country are battling the same Goliath. A recently published article from the Public Health Post reported that 32.7 million children nationwide were cared for regularly by someone other than a parent or guardian, such as relatives, home-based daycare providers, and daycare center staff. The majority of American children need child care, as 60% of all households with children and 65% of households with children under age six have no stay-at-home parent to provide child care.

Interestingly though is that while the cost of care is impossibly high, child care workers more often than not earn poverty wages. Women, immigrants, and people of color are over-represented in the preschool workforce, so they have a special stake in reform, particularly as many can't even afford adequate care for their own families. Local 1180 represents some of these workers and has been fighting for better wages and increased benefits on their behalf.

Middleton said that the irony of the working mother syndrome is that many must work in order to help support their families, yet an increasingly large percentage of their take home pay goes directly toward child care. What remains in a paycheck barely justifies the means.

This is a conundrum that does not discriminate across race, financial status, or physicality. Catt Sadler, former E! News anchor, faced the brutal realities that working mothers deal with every day. As a single mom of two, she quickly found out that the deck was stacked against her.

"Women are already starting out at a salary disadvantage, but moms? Having kids and all the expenses that come with them puts us at yet

another disadvantage. A new study out of Princeton University finds that there's a sharp decline in women's earnings after they have their first child. Moms in America are being affected in a number of ways in the workplace. Researchers have called this phenomenon "the motherhood penalty," and found that parental status can effect perceived competence, salary, and more. We are often passed up for promotions, replaced while on maternity leave, and belittled, ostracized, and reprimanded with impunity for pumping at work while breastfeeding. As a country, our policies aren't exactly making it easy for moms to juggle parenting with a career. In fact, we're the only developed country without a federally mandated paid-parental leave, and our lawmakers continue to make deep cuts to subsidized child care. Our antiquated policies are effectively telling us "You can have babies, or you can have a career, but you can't have both." (see related Equal Pay Day 2018 story on page 14).

The Public Health Post report referenced earlier also pointed out what most working mothers know: the need and cost components of child care are further complicated by the issue of care quality. "High quality care typically comes at high cost, and when that cost is a barrier to access, quality may be the only possible compromise. Unlike the need for care, which cannot be easily adjusted, or the cost of care, which families cannot change, quality is the component of child care on which families may have to compromise."

Local 1180 President Middleton said that it's already hard enough on mothers to leave newborn and small children at daycare without having to deal with the guilt of leaving them in a lesser quality setting because it is the only affordable option.

"This is 2018 and we are dealing with situations that should have been resolved years ago," she said. "When very few families can get by financially on one income, that puts both parents in the workforce and leaves no one at home to care for the children. Our most precious commodities are being cared for by strangers and the most qualified and most loving come with a high price tag, one that is way too often out of the reach of most New York City residents."

For Local 1180 members like Diane, there was no choice. While her grandson will always be her top priority, taking care of him physically and financially are two conflicting battles. Yet, she knows that to give him a supportive present and future, she needs to save as much of her salary as she can.

"Too many hardworking families cannot afford the ever-growing costs of care and end up sacrificing their careers as a result," Middleton said. "But for single-parent families like Diane's, there is no choice. Child care should not be a luxury just for the rich. Public Advocate James' proposal would be a definite step forward to closing the gap between affordable supply and increasing demand."

As a member of CWA Local 1180, Diane knows that the Union and committed representatives of working parents like Letitia James are paving the way for better benefits, so that the challenges of everyday care-giving — getting to school on time, picking up from school on time, fevers, and infections — don't force her and thousands of others just like her, to forgo pay or accrued days of leave.

## TIME FOR REAL PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES

President Gloria Middleton was one of only a select few who testified before the New York City Council at an April 30 hearing on Paid Parental Leave. She clearly explained how Local 1180 member often do not earn enough of a salary to even think about starting a family. Having to choose between children and a job is not fair. Dozens of Local 1180 members attended the hearing to show their support for both the Union and the cause. A portion of Middleton's testimony is below.

"I am here to speak on Paid Parental Leave for workers employed by New York City. My Local consists of 8,600 employees and 6,200 retirees, of which 80% are women and people of color. Many of Local 1180's members wish to start families, but given the high cost of rent, health care, and the general cost of living in the New York metropolitan area, delay doing so because they cannot afford it.

The average annual salary of my members is about \$50,000, which based on a 35-hour workweek translates to about \$27.50 per hour. Local 1180 members with 20, even 30 years of service, have passed a series of civil service tests that they must pay to take. Still, some are barely making a living wage.

An adult with one child making \$27.50 per hour barely qualifies as making a living wage, according to the Living Wage Calculator for New York County.

After years of service to the people of the City of New York, supervisory and administrative workers should be earning a real living wage — one well above \$27.50 per hour. When we rightfully seek to offer paid family leave benefits to City workers, they should not have to sacrifice pay increases.

Cheating City workers out of a pay increase to compensate for a progressive policy like paid family leave challenges the credibility of the City's true commitment to the new parental leave policy.

We hope that this City Council takes a look at the six weeks of paid parental leave available to about 20,000 City managerial employees. The policy, announced by Mayor de Blasio signed in January 2016 but retroactive to November 9, 2015, covers City employees who are not part of labor unions where such benefits must be collectively bargained. Without a union to calculate the costs paid by the workers in the form of a reduced pay increase, and the loss of paid days off, the City may have experienced a windfall at the cost of these managers.

Our union is prepared to negotiate with other unions to establish a citywide paid family leave program with our employer, the City of New York. But we must have a clear understanding of what our employer is offering and whether their commitment to progressive, civilized, parental leave policies comes at the expense of the workers or there will be a shared responsibility."