



Women and Child Care

Commission on the Economic Status of Women

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INTRODUCTION

Parents who work sooner or later ask, "Who will take care of my kids while I'm working? Both husbands and wives are asking this question as more married women enter the labor force. For both married and single parents, the question is often not an easy one to answer.

Women with children work outside the home more now than at any time in the last 30 years. In 1947, one in five mothers worked outside the home. Today two of every three mothers have paid employment. Because this trend is relatively new, working mothers, couples with children, employers and public policy makers are struggling to meet this ever-growing need.

The availability of child care services has not kept up with the demand created by women's entrance into the labor force. Informal child care arrangements are becoming less common because the pool of available caregivers, such as neighbors, friends and relatives is decreasing. Parents looking for formal child care arrangements often find long waiting lists and high fees and settle for services that are less

than what they really need or want. How will public policy play a role in meeting this growing need for child care services for working parents?

Parents have a choice of a variety of formal child care options and need to know how the programs they choose benefit their children. Who will set the standards for child care and how will those standards be assured?

Average annual child care costs are estimated at \$3,000 per child. Many single parents and low-income families pay as much for child care as for housing and food. How can quality child care services be made affordable for families of all income levels?

Child care services are paid for by parents when they can afford it. Federal, state and county-funded programs provide some low-income parents with assistance with child care expenses. The extent of government involvement in providing and paying for child care services is a major public policy question. Who will government programs serve and how will they be funded?

Employers are beginning to recognize the child care needs of their

employees by offering child care programs themselves, helping to pay for child care costs, or providing other benefits which can help parents meet their dual responsibilities as parents and employees. What role will employers play in meeting the child care needs of their employees?

Child care employees are among the lowest paid workers in the nation and nearly all of them are women. Most are not covered by the usual employee benefits. The child care industry has a high employee turnover rate. How will the growing need for quality, affordable child care be reconciled with recruiting and retaining qualified staff who are paid equitable salaries?

The public policy debate over child care presents issues central to economic justice for women. Women need to have equal opportunities in education and employment regardless of their status as mothers. To obtain equal access to the workforce, they need to find quality, affordable child care, they need to earn enough to pay for child care services and they need to be able to make appropriate choices for themselves and their children.



