

California Child Care

STRUGGLES

during the COVID-19 Pandemic

READ THEIR
STORIES FROM
ACROSS THE
STATE



MomsRising.org
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Giving kids the best start

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Dear Leaders,

The hardships and devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted many powerful truths. We learned that we are all deeply connected, and our health and well-being is tied closely to that of our neighbors. People power the economy and livable wages make a difference to keep roofs over our heads and food on our tables. For parents and caregivers to make it to work, they depend on critical essential work for something that we have long undervalued in our country—child care.

Every day across California we learn more about the importance of child care in the lives of children, families, and our communities. When parents must work, go to school, or take care of other responsibilities, child care programs provide children with loving, nurturing environments that support their growth and development. When child care is closed or otherwise unavailable, children and families feel this loss of connection and support in their lives. Moms like Sarah in Citrus Heights who shared:

“I was about to start a new job when Covid-19 hit. When my job evaporated, my husband was able to get unemployment thankfully.

I began working from home part time. I was unable to find a full time job in my field and my husband ended up going back to work when his unemployment ran out. Now I am at home, trying to juggle a 20 hour a week work from home job, without child care. I can’t afford high quality child care with the pay rate I have, and I am concerned about sending my son anyways because he is too young to understand about Covid-19 precautions or to wear a mask.

We are isolated from our families and friends. If our student loans become due again in January and I’m not sure how we could possibly pay them. I’m in a conundrum of not being able to work more because of lack of affordable child care, and not being able to pay the bills because of inability to work full time. I often feel like I am not doing the best I can for my son either because I have to work instead of playing with him 4 hours each day. I am isolated, exhausted, and getting depressed. It feels like this will never end.

We need to accomplish the recovery and stabilization of the child care industry immediately. As detailed in the [California Master Plan for Early Learning and Care](#), the need for a more robust system of early care and learning in the long term is critical to our path to stabilization and advancing whole child development. Child care is a top issue for California families, and they want it to be a priority for elected leaders and in funding decisions. About [80% of California parents and guardians with young kids](#) are concerned about the availability of quality and affordable child care. And the crisis is worse for families with infants and toddlers. Less than [one in five of California’s infants and toddlers](#) living in poverty are enrolled in subsidized child care.

Prior to the pandemic, California families often struggled to find and afford child care options that met their needs. At the same time, child care programs operate on razor thin margins. As programs permanently close and others pivot to operate with new regulations to keep children, families, and educators safe, the costs of providing and paying for child care are likely to increase. Given that millions of people have lost their jobs and incomes, families cannot afford to pay more. Since our economy, powered by working families, cannot expect to recover from this recession without public investment in child care.

For too long, child care workers too have propped up our fragile child care system. Despite the unaffordable sums families pay, child care workers are among some of the lowest-paid workers in our country. They often struggle to make ends meet and feed their own families. Child care providers are also in crisis. Many family child care homes and more than a quarter of child care centers indicate that they have been unable to pay themselves or staff at one point. The pandemic caused thousands of child care workers to lose their jobs as programs close or operate at reduced capacity. In fact, approximately one in five child care providers reported having missed a mortgage rent payment.

The stories included here demonstrate an important stark economic and social reality—child care is an essential thread in the fabric of our communities on the brink of collapse. It’s an integral part of our public health infrastructure and the backbone of our economy. Our children need loving, nurturing relationships to grow and develop, parents need support to raise their families and get to work, and child care workers and early educators deserve livable wages and resources for their valuable labor.

And while the recent COVID-19 relief coming to our state’s child care programs is a critical downpayment, additional stabilization and long-term funding will be critical to ensure that all children, families, and communities can thrive. Please read these stories below from families and early educators from across California as we chart a path forward that supports families, an equitable economic recovery, and a brighter future for our children.

Sincerely,

Donna Norton

Executive Vice President, MomsRising

MomsRising/MamásConPoder would like to acknowledge and thank our partners from Early Edge CA for their support and input on this storybook.

We don't have child care now with two adults in school and working, two school aged kids at home needing to be homeschooled, and one of the kids has an IEP. We can't manage this much longer. We are also under the local poverty line, so our options for paying for care are extremely limited.

– **Jessica, Millbrae**

I am a sole proprietor and a single mother. I have been in business for over 20 years as a photographer. With the economic crash I feel I will not have the business coming in as I will likely be one of the services people let go of in effort to survive. Yes, I can take a loan, but how will I pay it back if now there are no clients coming in.

As a sole proprietor I am not able to collect any unemployment support. I really don't know how I will be able to keep on paying my mortgage and take care of my son moving forward. I am the sole provider for my son. Our leaders need to look to better ways of helping people like me stay afloat. Thank you for listening.

– **Jessica, San Ramon**

My husband was furloughed from both jobs and as immigrants neither of us are eligible for unemployment. Luckily after two months he was able to go back to one of his jobs, but even at full time that covers our rent and about a weeks worth of food – and I cannot look for work as there is no affordable childcare available for our three children of 6 and under.

We are lucky that we had been saving to buy a car, because we are able to use that money instead to survive. We are also lucky that we are healthy and have a roof over our heads, but I worry that the longer this continues, the little savings we have will dwindle to nothing, and then we literally have no idea what we will be able to do. We know that we are not alone in this, and that hundreds of thousands of other families are in the same boat.

– **Anonymous, Sacramento**

I have two grandkids, toddlers. Their mom right now has brain cancer. My son needs help to watch them because schools and daycares are closed. Since there is no testing available to me, I am afraid to help watch them and transmit the disease to their mom. If I have it without my knowledge then their mom would probably die.

– **Marie, Tustin**



ZOE, CALIFORNIA

Since COVID 19 I have been laid off work. My son's care provider who worked with him and two other children still luckily has the other two kids to watch so she can feed her family.

The cost is so high that I was already working weekends so my partner could care for our son. We could only afford one day a week when we sent him to get care and our provider honestly deserves to make more than she asked for from us.

I don't know when I'll be able to go back to work safely as a therapeutic massage therapist or if I'll have enough clients to pay for rent, food and care. Thanks for listening to my story.

I am a single Mom, and I am an RN. So, with this pandemic, it has put me in desperation for childcare, as my daughter's daycare is closed, but I still have bills. Also, they're rationing our respiratory masks at work. Which is scary. When you actually have someone in respiratory isolation, you worry if people will come assist you in the event of an emergency if they don't have a mask to protect themselves.

– **Maya, Valley Village**

CALIFORNIA STANDS TO LOSE 51% OF ITS CHILD CARE SUPPLY



Source: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2020/04/24/483817/coronavirus-pandemic-lead-permanent-loss-nearly-4-5-million-child-care-slots/>

I am a first time mom with a newborn. For the past few years I have let my career take a backseat so I could complete my masters. Now that I'm looking to go back to work and finding a new job after having my baby and finishing my degree, childcare is a disaster. I already lived in a childcare desert. I'm in a rural area. My town does not have any infant daycare. The closest one is 45 minutes away.

The informal childcare providers who work as babysitters/nannies often come from families with essential workers or children who may go to school later in the year. How am I supposed to keep my baby safe while also starting a brand new full time job, hopefully from home? Taking care of a small baby is all-consuming, and I fear my career next steps will be severely impacted by the state of childcare during the pandemic.

This isn't to mention the absurd cost of childcare in this country due to lack of government action and support. As someone who has a degree in early childhood education and has worked in it before, I'm also deeply concerned about childcare workers. This was already a crisis in my community and county, and now it is devastating. Please, do something now!

– **Elena, Pescadero**

Please continue to keep California home! I am a mom of three girls that works in the public schools. I feel that if you ease the restrictions to soon, you will kill

a lot of people that would of been saved by having people stay home longer! If places open and schools open, then the people that have lung issues like me will be exposed to this virus! I will have to go back to work and deal with all that unnecessary exposure! Please be responsible and keep kids and places closed longer!

– **Yvonne, Sun Valley**

My husband and I are both working on community emergency response while our 10, 7 and 1 year old are home with us. We can barely breathe, although we are grateful to have secure income and housing when many don't. We must address basic needs and social-emotional health of families during this radical shift in our daily lives, while also making sure that we create equitable, sustainable solutions for the long-run.

– **Allison, Santa Cruz**

“...with our schools closed there is not enough time in the day to get in 16 hours of work on top of homeschooling two elementary aged kids.”

– **Allison, Santa Cruz**

We are a four-person family - both parents *can* work from home but with our schools closed there is not enough time in the day to get in 16 hours of work on top of homeschooling two elementary aged kids. It's impossible to do it all, and we're worried about paying for housing and food plus losing the money we had already paid for 10 weeks of summer camp and a flight to visit family.

It seems unlikely that any of that will happen, but I don't know if we'll get our money back - given the economic plummet, not sure if any of those businesses will survive to see another summer!

– **Shannon, Oakland**

I am a preschool director in Big Bear CA, we had to shut

our facility down due to the coronavirus pandemic. We will not be able to re-open unless funding is provided to help with the financial hit our facility has taken.

– **Patrise, Big Bear City**

I am able to work from home but I know other parents are not so lucky. While juggling online learning and a full-time job isn't ideal, groceries, child care, and online learning during the COVID-19 crisis has been a struggle for my family. We have used the free school lunches to feed our family and my partner has been on unemployment insurance since March.

We won't be able to afford our rent when his unemployment runs out. When school re-opens in the fall, I'm not sure what we'll do about childcare but one of us may have to stay home to offset our expenses. My eldest daughter is autistic and she desperately needs a regular schedule and in-person interaction for school. It's not easy to find a childcare provider that is adept at caring for autistic children so we have tried to piecemeal our schedules together to have a relative always with her.

– **Denise, Livermore**

I have two children who were in full-time child care programs prior to the pandemic — one is 16 months old and one is 3.5 years old. My husband and I both work full-time but are very fortunate to have flexible jobs we can do at home. Both our kids' schools were closed for three months. It was difficult to manage but we made it work due to our jobs' flexibility. In mid-June, our younger child's daycare reopened part-time. We sent our child back immediately and have been grateful to have her back in school part-time — it's wonderful for her and us.

Our older son's preschool is still closed and we have no idea when it will reopen. The director seems totally overwhelmed by all the factors to consider when reopening (as I would be if I were her!). We can't imagine finding another school — in part because we just switched preschools in February and because the idea of finding an open spot now seems impossible.

So for now we are in limbo, continuing to try to work full time and care for one or both kids full time. All things considered, we are very lucky — but we are concerned about the state of the childcare industry and the almost randomness of what's open and what's not.

– **Jennie, San Francisco**

ACCORDING TO A RECENT STUDY

24% OF FAMILIES

SURVEYED WITH CHILDREN REPORTED

LOSING A JOB AND INCOME DUE TO A LACK OF SUITABLE CHILD CARE



Source: <https://socialpolicyinstitute.wustl.edu/safe-affordable-child-care-is-a-right-not-a-privilege/>

I am a teacher, so my job is heavily impacted. Students need to be in school, we all know that. However, safety is the most important thing, and if there is no guarantee that I or my students won't get COVID-19 and possibly die, then we can't go in to work. My own children are suffering from the lack of social interaction with peers to dealing with the multitude of distractions of being at home to try and learn.

The students at my school are socioeconomically disadvantaged and for some of them, school is the only place to get a daily meal! I worry that their families may contract COVID-10 because many parents are essential workers and are put at risk everyday just for a meager paycheck. My husband has been on unemployment because of the lack of work in his profession. We cannot make mortgage and other utility payments. We had decided to start saving for our kids' college educations this summer, but that plan is scrapped! COVID-19 is real and is not going away soon, no thanks to our president who continues the rhetoric that it's a liberal hoax. I cannot stand it anymore.

– **Laura, Northwood Hollywood**

Since the COVID-19 break out, I have to close my daycare. There was last three months, I have no income and no money for my rent and life. Also, I have two kids, I can not buy what they want except the

basic food for daily. Not sure when I could reopen my daycare and not sure how to counting my life.

- Alice, San Francisco

I am a Large Licensed family child care provider serving my community for over 20 years. Due to COVID 19 my enrollment dropped from 14 children to 5. We don't have benefits like other jobs. Child care is essential and what we do as licensed Family child care providers is one of the most essential businesses as without us people couldn't go to work.

I have been open this whole time through pandemic and providing child care for essential families. I am afraid of losing more clients as many of the parents can't afford and have lost their jobs.

- Benu, Concord

My childcare center closed during the stay at home order here in California, which means that my husband and I are desperately trying to balance working from home with caring for a three year old. I have taken partial FMLA at my job because I can't work full time. I am trying to make up work hours at night time, but worried about how the lack of sleep might affect my health. Our school informed us recently that they were closing permanently.

We don't know when or where we will be able to find a spot for our son in a childcare center, since those that are reopening now or this fall are doing so with fewer children to follow new health and safety guidelines. Those we have looked at are even more expensive than our previous care, where we shelled out \$20,000 last year. I'm losing income and really worried I will not be able to keep up my job without the support of childcare like the school my son was in before the pandemic hit.

- Stephanie, Los Angeles

Prior to the spread of the virus, I was working as a dental assistant in a private practice. My mother was my childcare for my 2 year old daughter. In California, dental offices were shut down for months. Unemployment insurance allowed my husband and I, with our combined incomes, to pay our mortgage, power, food, water.

With the allowance of dental offices to be open for emergency procedures only, my family had a decision to make. We were not willing to continually put my entire family at risk so I could work. We knew it would be a sacrifice during already uncertain times. I am

fortunate that I even have that option. To stay home and take care of my child.

Most families must use childcare as there is no other choice. They must work to live, and take care of their children. Unemployment insurance should be available to families while we all navigate this time, and the federal boost of \$600. It is critical and essential to the citizens of this country who deserve to live with their basic needs met with dignity in a time of crisis.

The money I am receiving on unemployment is allowing us to live without the burden of financial fear for a little while until we figure out what to do. There are still plenty of other worries occupying our minds, but with this assistance my family is safe.

- Salmina, El Dorado

Both my husband and I have been laid off because of COVID19 and we live in Santa Clara County which has the highest number of positive cases. I am worried about paying my bills and rent, just keeping my family fed in the next few months or if this goes longer. Also, I am Filipino/ Asian and my husband is African American and my daughter will be impacted too in the future if we don't have fair testing or healthcare just in case we need to be treated.

- Eleanore, Milpitas

My husband and I work in Entertainment and are independent contractors. We do not get sick pay and if my husband's show ends, we can not survive on his unemployment check. When commercials stop shooting, I STOP getting commission. We have 2 children who are now home from school but already paid for full time preschool and won't be able to get that money back even though we need it now. Our savings is low from my husband's recent hiatus between contracts, our property tax bill and our upcoming taxes. We can't financially sustain for more than a couple weeks unemployed. We pay \$800/month for insurance. Can you cover our health insurance costs? We don't know where we could get a test if we need one. They don't seem to have enough in CA and we don't belong to UCLA medical group. I am worried about bills if this continues. I am worried about my husband's job and my own.

- Fleisher, Santa Clarita

I have been fortunate to have kept my job during the pandemic. It's been tough staying on top of work assignments while also caring for my 2 year old. As

grateful as I am I am burning out very quickly. Thank you Governor Newsom for all you have done, but we need everyone on the same page if this is going to ever get under control.

– **Margarita, Hawthorne**

I am a mom of two kids, ages 5 and 8. I lost my job in April and have been on unemployment ever since. My husband works in healthcare, luckily, but even he was laid off when the pandemic started. The only way we survived was from the stimulus money and extra unemployment funds. He now has taken 2 full time jobs to support us and works 6 days a week, 12 hour days. I would be looking for work but since our children need to do school from home now, we really don't have that option.

I would love to rely on our families, but our parents are all in their 70's and with my husband working in health care it just isn't safe to expose them. This pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives. We feel lucky to have our home, and one person with a stable job, but none of this is easy. I feel horrible for all of the small businesses and restaurants impacted, as well as my entire industry which was catering and events.

Everyone I know and worked with is out of work and there is no end in sight. We need to get this under control, we need another round of stimulus and to extend unemployment benefits. We need to find a way to get kids back to school and care safely!

– **Ceanna, Oakland**

I was about to start a new job when Covid-19 hit. We had just relocated to a new area and my husband had left his job to stay at home with our then 5 month old son. When my job evaporated, my husband was able to get unemployment thankfully. I began working from home part time. I was unable to find a full time job in my field and my husband ended up going back to work when his unemployment ran out.

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– **Sarah, Citrus Heights**

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Now our student loans are coming due again in January and I'm not sure how we could possibly pay them. I'm in a conundrum of not being able to work more because of lack of affordable child care, and not being able to pay the bills because of inability to work full time. I often feel like I am not doing the best I can for my son either because I have to work instead of playing with him 4 hours each day. I am isolated, exhausted, and getting depressed. It feels like this will never end.

– **Sarah, Citrus Heights**

The size and scope of the impact of this public health crisis on the child care sector and the families who depend on it is profound and growing.

Families and early educators are struggling now and will continue to struggle even after this crisis passes if we don't act now. Parents and caregivers also need protections like paid sick days and paid family/medical leave for all child care needs and prevent job loss.

Thank you for taking immediate action.

MomsRising.org is an online and on-the-ground grassroots organization of more than a million people who are working to achieve economic security for all families in the United States.

MomsRising is working for paid family leave, flexible work options, affordable childcare, and for an end to the wage and hiring discrimination which penalizes so many others. MomsRising also advocates for better childhood nutrition, health care for all, toxic-free environments, and breastfeeding rights so that all children can have a healthy start.

Established in 2006, MomsRising and its members are organizing and speaking out to improve public policy and to change the national dialogue on issues that are critically important to America's families. In 2013, Forbes.com named MomsRising's web site as one of the Top 100 Websites For Women for the fourth year in a row and Working Mother magazine included MomsRising on its "Best of the Net" list.