



Ms. FOUNDATION  
FOR WOMEN



# RAISING OUR NATION



**FORGING A MORE ROBUST AND EQUITABLE  
CHILDCARE SYSTEM IN AMERICA**



**Ms. FOUNDATION**  
FOR WOMEN

The Ms. Foundation for Women is a nonprofit public foundation created to deliver funding and other strategic resources to organizations that elevate women’s and girls’ voices and solutions across race and class in communities nationwide. Since 1972, the Ms. Foundation has been working to identify and support emerging and established groups poised to act when and where change is needed. Our grants—paired with capacity building, networking and other strategic opportunities—enable organizations to advance grassroots solutions and build social movements within and across three areas: Economic Justice, Reproductive Justice and Safety.

Our work is guided by our vision of a world where power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, disability or age. We believe that equity and inclusion are the cornerstones of a true democracy in which the worth and dignity of every person are valued.

Copyright pending 2016, Ms. Foundation for Women

Ms. Foundation for Women  
12 MetroTech Center, 26th Floor  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

[www.forwomen.org](http://www.forwomen.org)  
[info@ms.foundation.org](mailto:info@ms.foundation.org)

Design and Production: Design Action Collective

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America's childcare system needs an overhaul. Many parents do not have access to the childcare they need in order to secure stable employment. Most providers earn low wages, often finding it difficult to make ends meet for their own families. Too many children do not have access to care of the highest quality, with negative consequences for their future prospects and those of our nation. Transforming the American childcare landscape requires new frameworks that cut across existing policy and organizing silos. It also demands changes in the practices of America's employers and a far greater public commitment to developing a more expansive and equitable system.

## Chapter One: Setting the Context

Developing a childcare system that works better for everyone requires confronting inequalities that are deeply rooted in American society. Chapter One examines the gender and racial inequities that the American childcare system both reflects and reinforces.

- Women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities including childcare, particularly in households where they are the sole earners.<sup>i</sup> Childcare access challenges have a particular impact on women's employment decisions and their ability to achieve economic security for themselves and their families.
- Women's role as caregivers and the inadequacies of the American childcare system contribute to gender inequalities in the labor market. Employers discriminate against women due in part to their role as caregivers, and childcare workers and others face low wages that stem in part from the gender-based devaluation of caregiving work.<sup>ii</sup>
- Women of color are highly concentrated in low-wage, unstable jobs and comprise an especially disadvantaged segment of the childcare workforce.<sup>iii</sup> Add to this their lower levels of wealth and higher likelihood of being sole earners, and childcare challenges often have a particular impact on their ability to achieve economic security.<sup>iv</sup>

- Racial politics and racist administrative practices have held back efforts to develop a more expansive and equitable system of childcare in the US.<sup>v</sup> So, too, has opposition to shifting gender norms. In 21st century America, transforming the childcare system goes hand-in-hand with embracing values of racial and gender equality.

## Chapter Two: Defining the Problem

The need for childcare in America is great, and there is a not-so-small army of center-based providers, family providers, and nannies aiming to meet those needs. However, despite the existence of public programs including Head Start, childcare subsidies, and public pre-kindergarten, inadequate resources together with flawed labor market policies lead to serious problems of childcare access, job quality, and childcare quality.

- Many low- and middle-income families are caught in a vicious cycle. Childcare access challenges make it difficult to secure good-quality jobs, while low-paying, unstable jobs prevent parents from accessing the childcare they need.<sup>vi</sup>
- Center-based childcare workers, family providers, and nannies face serious job quality challenges. Despite the valuable work that they do, childcare workers are among the lowest paid in the American economy.<sup>vii</sup>
- Access to high-quality childcare depends too much on how much parents are able to pay. Childcare quality is closely connected to job quality for childcare providers, as low pay and inadequate career ladders dampen incentives for investing in training and education.<sup>viii</sup>

## Chapter Three: Mobilizing for Change

Chapter Three sketches a framework for thinking about the way forward, drawing on the important work being done by Ms. Foundation grantees and other advocates, and focusing on two key goals: changing the frame—i.e., developing capacities and forging alliances that connect the dots among issues of childcare access, job quality, and childcare quality; and expanding the resource base—i.e., increasing public investment while enhancing the role of employers in building the kind of childcare system that America needs. The following are key policy and resource objectives around which policymakers and childcare and worker advocates should align:

### Childcare Access

- Make childcare affordable for all families – Expand eligibility, eliminate waiting lists, and reduce or eliminate co-payments through increased funding for publicly subsidized childcare.

- Broaden the scope of coverage – Expand and coordinate existing childcare programs to make services available all day and all year, to young children of all ages and parents with varying schedules.
- Improve the stability of coverage – Eliminate administrative barriers by allowing for periods of job search and streamlining application and verification procedures. Reduce the “cliff effect” by adjusting income eligibility rules.<sup>ix</sup>

## **Job Quality**

- Increase wages – Raise the floor through increased minimum wage standards, and cultivate high-road employer practices with respect to wages and other working conditions.
- Mandate fair scheduling – Require advance notice of work schedules and pay requirements when workers report to work but are sent home early. Establish the right to request flexible or stable schedules.
- Expand leave requirements – Guarantee and expand access to paid and unpaid family leave as well as paid sick days, ensuring that parents are able to care for children after birth and when they become ill.

## **Childcare Quality**

- Expand access to training for childcare providers – Subsidize higher education and other childcare-specific training for providers, helping them to provide higher-quality childcare services.
- Increase and stabilize pay for childcare providers – Reduce turnover by mandating higher pay and reimbursement rates for providers. Establish wage and career ladders so investments in education are reflected in increased pay.
- Enhance the attention that children receive – Where relevant, reduce child-to-caregiver ratios to the levels recommended by childcare experts, promoting improved safety and higher-quality care.