



**Waiting to  
be seen.**

**Demanding  
to be heard.**

**Parent Recommendations to the CA  
Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission  
on Early Childhood Education**

**Fall 2018**





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*Photos in order of top to bottom: Bay Area, Fresno, Inglewood, San Fernando Valley*

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## Introduction

The California Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) on Early Childhood Education seeks to improve the child care system by putting system reform ideas into action. As part of this process, the BRC is drafting a report with a set of recommendations to improve the child care system. The BRC believes that parent input is critical for drafting recommendations that are authentic and will truly make a difference in the lives of California's parents. Therefore, Parent Voices partnered with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to talk with and listen to parents in order to understand what they believe is needed in order to improve California's child care system. Parent Voices and SPR see parents as experts around child care reform and conducted this project to bring parents' wisdom to the BRC's report and subsequent recommendations.

# Overview of Parent Focus Groups

To collect parent input, Parent Voices and SPR facilitated four focus groups in the following locations<sup>1</sup>:

<b>Los Angeles (Inglewood)</b>	<b>Los Angeles (San Fernando Valley)</b>	<b>Bay Area (Hayward, Contra Costa Oakland, San Francisco)</b>	<b>Fresno</b>
<b>7</b> mothers	<b>8</b> mothers & <b>2</b> fathers	<b>9</b> mothers	<b>7</b> mothers

All parents were either current or former recipients of subsidized child care. Parents from each focus group had experience with all three types of child care settings: (1) center-based care; (2) family child care; and (3) family, friend, and neighbor care. Parents had from one to eight children (including foster kids) representing ages ranging from infant to adult. Furthermore, translation was provided for Spanish speaking parents during the Fresno and Bay Area focus groups.

With parents’ permission, all focus groups were recorded and transcribed. SPR coded each transcript for key themes related to parents’ hopes and wishes for a what a quality child care system looks like, recommendations for improvement, and messages to policymakers. Each focus group was compiled into a write-up synthesizing the key themes and quotations from each discussion. This report summarizes these key themes and recommendations across all four focus groups. For additional detail and parent quotations gathered from the focus groups, please refer to the write-ups provided in the Appendix.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the Camp Fire in Northern California, our planned focus group was cancelled. We wanted to ensure the voices of the rural north were included, but we were unable to meet with parents before the finalization of this report. As we move forward with implementing recommendations, we will reach out to our partners in the rural north to incorporate their feedback and ideas. The devastating fires across California have had tremendous impact on families, the early educators we depend on, and on entire communities. We wish them all the best in the recovery process and will be sensitive to their healing as we reach out in the future.



# The Ideal Child Care System – As Described by Parents

Each focus group opened with a discussion of how parents would like to experience the child care system. The focus group facilitators asked parents to describe their ideal (i.e. “anything is possible”) scenarios for accessing and maintaining quality child care. Below we highlight key themes emerging from parents’ discussion of their ideal child care system.

**Extensive and accessible outreach around child care during pregnancy.** Before their child is born, parents want to be prepared for their child care needs. Therefore, outreach about child care resources is ideally provided during pregnancy. For example, prenatal appointments automatically include information about child care options, and doctors are knowledgeable about how to connect parents with social services and child care resource and referral agencies to help access child care and other parenting resources. Furthermore, hospitals and birthing centers are trained to provide child care information to expecting and new parents. The way in which this outreach is conducted reflects the diversity of parents in the community; this means that information is provided in multiple languages, and cultural navigators work with parents new to the United States to ensure that they understand the resources available to them.

**Easy enrollment and a seamless verification process.** Parents want to receive child care services at the time that they enroll in any child care

subsidy program. In other words, they would like there to be no delay between the time that they enroll and when they actually receive their subsidy. Furthermore, special needs children, children in foster care, and parents with disabilities should be easily accommodated during the enrollment process. For example, parents of foster children often do not have original birth certificates and other documentation needed to enroll their child in child care, and their circumstances should not delay service provision. Once parents enroll in the child care subsidy program, they should easily retain their subsidy when moving to a different county or when transferring from Stage 1 to Stage 2.



I would love to see a culture of positivity happen within child care, or just be ‘hey, congratulations that you're even thinking about child care. We know it's going to be a bumpy ride and we're here to help you blast off.’ Do a little life coaching with us.

– Bay Area Parent

**Friendly and helpful caseworkers.** An ideal experience with county caseworkers and child care subsidy case managers is one that makes parents feel supported and not judged or put-down. Interactions with caseworkers should reflect a culture of positivity in which caseworkers are respectful, patient, and empathetic to parents' unique contexts. Moreover, policies and procedures for enrolling and recertifying should be consistent across all caseworkers and across all counties.

**Convenient, thorough, and inclusive processes for selecting a child care provider.** To help parents select and establish trust with a provider, they would like to be able to take a free tour of the provider's facility. Additionally, parents would like to be able to easily access information about the provider online, including: the provider's schedule, child care philosophy, special certifications, and parent reviews. Also, parents would appreciate having formal and informal venues to talk with other parents about their experiences with potential providers.

Ideally, child care options would be located near the parents' work, home, and/or school and have flexible hours (including nights and weekends). Similarly, parents dream of a world where all providers accept subsidies, practice special needs inclusion, and are trained in trauma informed care, child development, and understanding implicit bias.

**Affordable, safe, and enriching child care facilities.** In an ideal world, all children have access to quality child care. This care would be aligned with the parents' cultural and linguistic backgrounds (as explained in the preceding quotation) and would have a low child-to-teacher ratio. Moreover, family, friend, and neighbor care would be easily accessible for parents who would like this option, and providers would be fairly compensated. All providers would offer nutritious food, a stimulating curriculum, and a firm policy around caring for sick children. And, providers would automatically offer daily check-ins, progress reports, and webcam access via apps or online.



In my dream world of child care, we have flexible child care centers that work on the weekends, that work in the evenings, because some of us have weekend jobs. Some of us work at night, and it puts children in dangerous situations because you're having to try and figure out 'What am I going to do with my child?' And you may not make the best decision to where to have your child because you're so desperate.

**– Bay Area Parent**

Because you cannot be speaking Spanish [to your children] all day [while you are working]. And you do not want your children to lose that...With mine, so they answer me in English, I say, 'I do not understand you, tell me in Spanish to understand you.' But I tell them, 'I do not understand what you say'...And then at school they speak only English. Only English. And then if they go elsewhere, they speak only English.

– Fresno Parent

## Parents' Child Care Realities

Parents painted a clear and specific picture of their ideal child care system. However, for most parents, this ideal situation was far from their realities. Parents outlined several challenges that they encountered when trying to access and maintain quality child care. Parents' experiences and critiques of the child care system are summarized below.

**Challenges with enrollment.** In general, parents have difficulty with finding out about child care resources. Most parents learned about child care



I struggled a lot to be able to get help to take care of my children. In welfare I asked for child care but they said no, because my children needed to have social security cards. Since I am [undocumented], my children are [undocumented], we do not have social security cards. So, that was a limitation... they were not eligible. So, my children suffered more.

– Fresno Parent

resources informally (through friends and family) and after their child had already been born. Furthermore, immigrant parents face barriers to child care enrollment due to their documentation status. And, for subsidized child care, parents often are placed on a lengthy waiting list before receiving a subsidy. One parent stated that she was on the waiting list for over ten years, forcing her to choose less desirable child care options, such as care from her elderly relatives. For parents that receive child care resources through CalWORKs, there is an unreasonable and lengthy gap between the time the subsidy is granted and when the subsidy is actually received. Enrollment problems are often exacerbated for rural parents, as they have a limited number of child care providers in their area, most of which do not accommodate non-traditional work hours and are not located near parents' employment.

**Challenges with maintaining child care.** For most parents, the process to keep their

affordable child care represented another set of challenges. Primarily, the recertification process is extremely burdensome. One parent reported that she must take time off work to get signatures on all the necessary documents. Another parent with a medical condition explained that he must pay the doctor \$25 every time he needs a signature for his child care recertification paperwork. Moreover, the daily time logs required for the California Department of Education (CDE) administered child care programs are cumbersome for parents, as they must write different child care pick-up and drop-off times, even if they arrive at the facility at the same time every day. Any small error with the time log entries can result in unnecessary gaps in child care or delayed payments to providers. Furthermore, caseworkers can make the paperwork process even worse through late and incomplete communication on family fee requirements and paperwork demands. Parents also struggle to maintain child care when they have a second child; the system assumes that parents will take leave once they have a second child and automatically takes the subsidy for the first child's child care away. Specific to parents that receive child care resources through the Migrant Program, they are mandated to move to a new county every twelve months, which causes breakages and gaps in child care or removal of their children from child care programs altogether.

**Challenges with finding the right provider.** Several parents encountered providers with unsafe facilities and poor qualifications, thus forcing parents to find another provider. This constant search for the right provider is often made worse by the limited hours offered by most providers. Many parents work outside of traditional business hours, and they struggle to find a provider that can meet their scheduling needs.



I'm a single parent, so I'm on a budget, and you want me to pay like a hundred and something dollars, and you're [the caseworker] just now telling me? That's not in the budget this month. And if I don't have it, my child can't go to daycare? That's a problem.

– Inglewood Parent

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The case worker I had, I guess they had to let her go. So they lost all my paperwork, they had to go back, re-find everything, and then, I guess they spread out everybody's stack, and then half of my paperwork went to one case worker and half to another case worker. So I had two different case workers calling me. I was going to say, 'I give up', luckily I know three people that work [at the County], so I had to use my resources.

– Inglewood Parent

**Challenges with case workers.** One parent commented that case worker practices create a “culture of fear.” For example, case workers will demand documentation for sensitive issues such as domestic violence, which can put the parent at risk of further violence. Furthermore, parents experienced questioning from case workers on the parents’ family structure, which made some parents feel that case workers do not acknowledge or respect alternative family structures. In general, parents feel that case workers treat them unfairly and without sensitivity. In addition to poor treatment, some case workers’ practices are inconsistent and can therefore create more work for the parent. As an example, some caseworkers will allow parents to recertify via email, while others mandate that parents drop off paperwork in-person. Many parents told stories of constant frustration and confusion when trying to work with their caseworker.

**Challenges with affordability.** The current child care subsidy structure does not consider differences in costs of living across counties.

As a result, for many parents, the child care subsidy is too small given the cost of living there. Parents are afraid to go over the child care subsidy income cap even for one month because they are worried that they will lose their subsidy. This has resulted in parents not accepting work bonus checks; and, before the 85% of state median income policy was implemented in 2017,



many parents had to ask for lower pay or deny a raise to continue receiving affordable child care.

# Parents' Recommendations

Through reflecting on their ideal child care system and considering the challenges faced when accessing and maintaining quality child care, parents offered recommendations for improving the child care system. These recommendations are organized in categories that reflect the overarching themes highlighted in the preceding narrative. Furthermore, parent quotations are included at the beginning of each category to help explain the rationales and perspectives underlying the recommendations.



## Learning About Child Care



I think some of the bilingual [caseworkers] can help with translation. But, there should be a cultural connection to help us to understand. Maybe if somebody who came from our country can work with us and explain the systems, that would help. It's different from somebody that lives here or born here, even if they speak Spanish.

– Bay Area Parent

When you first arrive from another place, you know no one, you know nothing, and you lack a lot of information. It's just that— first, you arrive looking for what you have available. People who can help take care of your child and asking where to find a job. There should be more information. I don't know, at the bus stations, on the radio.

– Fresno Parent

1. Advertise child care resources in easily accessible places such as hospitals, buses, doctor's offices, and television. This outreach should be provided in multiple languages and also through cultural navigators.
2. Train prenatal doctors to inform parents about child care options and connect them with social services and child care resource and referral agencies.
3. Similar to a Lamaze or child birthing class, create a workshop for parents that includes information about available child care and social services, understanding of child development, and non-violent empathy skills to address challenging behaviors.



## Applying for a Child Care Subsidy



I had to wait 40, 50 days [for the child care subsidy], and I lost the ability to go back to my job. And I was even telling the caseworker while I was applying for CalWORKs ‘I’m only applying to get your child care. I need child care.’ I have a possible job waiting for me. I don’t need to go through the workforce program.

– **Bay Area Parent**

I was on a wait list for ten whole years, maybe eleven, and just waiting updating, updating, I went bananas. Updating, updating, updating, so it was a long process and it was really hard because I had my ailing grandmother caring for my kids and she has dementia, and I have to check on grandma; so, I’m at work and I’m nervous, calling all the time.

– **Bay Area Parent**

4. Allow parents to sign up for a child care subsidy when they are 6 months pregnant.
5. Allow for automatic child care authorizations upon approval of CalWORKs to remove delays in child care access.
6. Have child care case managers and resource & referral counselors at county welfare offices streamline and speed up child care authorizations.
7. Create an emergency child care subsidy program for victims of domestic violence.

## Recertifying and Determining Subsidy Eligibility



So, I had my child on a Monday, went back to school on that Tuesday. [The subsidy provider] stopped my child care subsidy. They stopped it. I'm thinking, 'Why did my provider stop the subsidy?' That's why. Because, [The subsidy provider] didn't pay her. They didn't pay her, because they said I wasn't going back to school. I was like, 'No. I went back to school.' Once my worker got with them, then they fixed it, but there was that gap.

– Inglewood Parent

I guess so many people don't realize how stressful it is, because, it's already hard enough trying to find good child care, especially in LA. There's a lot out there, but there's limited good child care. And then you're already struggling with, I got to go to work, I got to take care of the baby, I got to cook, clean, I got to do all this, and then take care of yourself. So, you're already stretched thin, and then you have a caseworker who's just like, 'I need this paperwork and you didn't do this.' And I'm just like, 'Had you asked me that in the beginning, when I was applying.' Or, give me some notice and don't say you need it by the end of the week and it's already Wednesday.

– Inglewood Parent

8. Create a seamless paperwork process for moving from Stage 1 to Stage 2, when adding a second child to an existing subsidy, and when transferring child care subsidies across counties.
9. Streamline recertification paperwork so that employment can be verified through pay stubs and tax returns.
10. Remove parent needs requirements and follow the child to determine eligibility.
11. Allow all recertification paperwork to be provided via electronic means.
12. Ensure that subsidies follow parents across counties; parents do not need to reapply if they move to a new county.





## Determining how Much Parents should Pay for Child Care



With my second child, I couldn't afford paid family leave [the reduced paycheck supplied by family leave was not enough to make ends meet]. I literally was put on bedrest, but I was still working from home. Literally, that's what happened. I went into labor, had my baby on Saturday morning. I was supposed to get discharged Monday morning, but that didn't happen, so that was the only day I took off, and then Tuesday I was back to work.

**– San Fernando Valley Parent**

13. Mandate paid family leave for one to two years, with the first year being at 100% of the parent's income. Paid family leave should be based on the city where the parent works, not the headquarters of the company which could be out of state.
14. Increase the reimbursement rates of the subsidy to better reflect local costs of living.
15. Do not count one-time bonuses toward parents' income.
16. Allow deductions (such as housing costs and medical insurance) when applying for child care or when assessing family fees. Policies should be consistent with other social service programs.

## Working with County Social Services



I think that we need to look at cultural sensitivity. I think that even whether you're born here or not born here, families have all these different cultural dynamics. We look at LGBTQIA families. Where do they fit in this process and in the navigation in this system? So, let's look at cultural sensitivity in the language, how people are being talked to, and also what resources for child care that are available.

**– Bay Area Parent**

And so going to social services was just a terrible experience and it wasn't ... I didn't feel like ... You're already feeling like you're at the bottom of the barrel because you had to get to that point. And so for you to be treated like trash that rolled up inside the gutter, it's just not helpful.

**– Bay Area Parent**

17. Improve the quality of county social services offices through offering child care onsite, outdoor playgrounds, breastfeeding facilities, and gender-neutral bathrooms.
18. Ensure forms are gender neutral and more inclusive for LGBTQIA+ families.
19. Mandate ongoing empathy and sensitivity training for case workers and child care subsidy case managers.
20. Ensure case managers are offering travel time allotments that truly reflect parents' travel times rather than a 30-minute general allotment.

## Ensuring High Quality Child Care Environments



One of the challenges for me was, I had a provider who, when we first met I did my tour and I did my visit, and everything was all shiny and cute, and then I found out later that this person was drinking while they had the kids and they were in possession of other [illegal substances]. And so, the reality is the state/county is not following up with these providers, the oversight is not there.

**– Bay Area Parent**

I was talking about a parenting class I went to, it's called Eco Parenting, and it teaches non-violent empathy skills for kids. I feel like that should be incorporated with the provider's program, because it's so important, and it's so supportive to continuing to provide the care for the children.

**– San Fernando Valley Parent**

21. Improve the timeliness and quality of child care facility inspections.
22. Facilitate partnerships between providers and child development organizations to offer parenting courses at the provider's location.



## Supporting Child Care Providers



But what I like about the provider is that there, since a very young age, they start drawing, writing the alphabet, their name. So by the time they go to school— Because, in my case, my girls went to child care at a much older age, so later in school they struggled a lot. This is due to the language but also— they didn't learn to read almost until third grade. And my other child, the boy, he was in child care from a very young age. So, in kindergarten, in first grade, he already knew how to read. And I think that helped him, the things they taught him at the provider helped him. Because they follow a routine.

– **Fresno Parent**

Trust me, just because it has a label of family, friends, doesn't mean we're not being picky of who we choose, we're being very selective... in order to get that quality person that we trust, well the [county/state] is going have to pay quality too.

– **Inglewood Parent**

23. Incentivize individuals and offer pathways to become providers, especially in rural areas and for bilingual providers.
24. Mandate ongoing education for child care providers and provide training for providers while offering additional pay for meeting these requirements.
25. Increase salaries for both exempt and non-exempt child care providers.



## Selecting the Right Provider



I remember when I would take my kids to the provider, it was another parent ... We would bump into each other in the parking lot, and she would say, 'How do you like it here?' And she would tell me some things that she didn't like. And I would think, 'I don't know. I feel like I have to move my kids out of the program.'

– **San Fernando Valley Parent**

26. Provide easily accessible online child care facility records so parents can easily access any reported complaints or violations.
27. Offer support for parents when selecting providers. For example, facilitate parent meet ups to discuss child care options and advertise counseling services for selecting a provider.
28. Develop an application or online database that provides more comprehensive information about child care providers in parents' communities. Information could allow a parent to filter based on: (a) whether the provider take subsidies or not; (b) if the provider has current availability; (c) provider hours of operation; (d) whether the provider offers meals or diapers; (e) if the provider offers care on nights or weekends; and (f) the languages spoken in the facility. Provider profiles could include pictures and videos of the program, philosophy of the provider, certifications and educational background, background checks, easy link to licensing for violations, and reviews by parents who have used the program. Parents could also apply for child care assistance online.



## Reforming Existing Policies



And I decided back in 2012-2013 I want to go back to school. My worker said, "We don't help the Master's program, only for Bachelors. And I said, 'But I want to get a Master's degree, what do I need to do?' So she said, 'If you work part-time, we can save your information and you're working part-time, you're still on the program, then you can go to school.' So that was a challenge. Go to school full-time, and work part-time, to show that I was working doing an activity, so that I could qualify for the child care program, and still go to school. It was hard!

– **San Fernando Valley Parent**

And there are programs for migrants, but the program for migrants requires for you to move every year, every 12 months – from one place to another, that's very hard. It is very hard on the children to move that many times. It is already hard to take them from one country to another, so then moving from one home to another, from one town to another [is very hard].

– **Fresno Parent**

29. Clarify or reform migrant child care regulations to not require a parent to move out of the county within 12 months to remain eligible for services.
30. Enforce and implement 2017 policy changes around variable income and 12-month eligibility.
31. Increase funding for child care so families are not on waiting lists, can access services without enrolling in CalWORKs, and gaps in service provision are minimized.
32. Offer support for students pursuing a Master's degree; allow parents to receive beyond two semesters of support.



## Parents' Message to Policymakers

At the end of each focus group, parents were asked what they feel policymakers should know about their lives. Primarily, parents communicated that they are working hard to create the best life for their children. Parents are not receiving a subsidy because they are lazy; rather, they need affordable, quality child care to support their economic and social mobility. At the same time, parents are selective about their child care providers and while parents may need child care, they take care and caution in choosing the right provider.

Moreover, parents believe that child care is an investment, and having safe and enriching environments for children to grow and learn is good for society. Parents feel that legislatures do not understand the daily struggles of low-income parents. Policymakers must talk to and listen to parents in order to create changes in the child care system that promote family well-being and economic mobility.

I just feel like [policymakers] don't understand us because they're born into wealth. I don't know if all of them are like that, but a lot of them are born into wealth so they don't understand our struggles and they need to be more open to working parents that are just trying to make it. They're going on with their lives and totally different lives. Just be more open to us because we really just want to have a better life just like them.

– Bay Area Parent

# Appendix

**A. Los Angeles – Inglewood Write-Up**

**B. Los Angeles – San Fernando Valley Write-Up**

**C. Fresno Write-Up**

**D. Bay Area Write-Up**



# Los Angeles - Inglewood Focus Group Write Up

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**Name of Location:** Crystal Stairs, Inc.

**Name of Supporting Organization:** Community Voices

**City:** Inglewood

**Focus Group Facilitators:** Mary Ignatius and Laura Pryor

**Date of Visit:** September 14, 2018

**Focus Group Participants:** Seven mothers from the Inglewood neighborhood in Los Angeles with a range of 1-5 children each. All mothers were recipients of subsidized child care.

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## Ideal Child Care Scenario

Parents painted a very clear picture of the qualities comprising their ideal child care scenario. Parents explained (as described below) how they would like to learn about child care options, how they would like to go about selecting the right provider, how they would like to navigate the system, and their definition of child care quality.

### How Parents Would Like to Learn about Child Care Options

- **Child care resources are provided to families in the hospital** after the mother has given birth. Furthermore, child care options are offered and discussed during pre-natal care visits and during follow-up appointments.
- Child care resources provided to families contain several different options that make **child care accessible to all populations**, including: students, single-parent households, families with multiple children, and families with alternative work schedules.

### How Parents Want to Choose the Right Provider

- To save time, **parents want to know about a provider's hours prior to calling the provider on the phone**. Furthermore, parents would like a list of days that the provider is unavailable during the calendar year (i.e. winter break, school holidays). This information will help parents determine if a provider will match their work schedule.
- Parents want **all providers to write and advertise philosophy statements reflecting the provider's child care practice**. These statements include a brief explanation of the provider's approach for caring for youth, as well as any special credentials, strengths, or certifications the provider may have. Philosophy statements can help parents know if the provider is culturally aligned and shares the same values as the family.

*“But to have a history about [the providers], and even if they can do a write up about their philosophy, because I think even in-home daycare has some type of philosophy, like, how they feel about children. Because if you hear how someone feels about children or something, you can kind of get a feel of if that's the right fit for you.”*

- Families want to be able to **trust their child care providers**. Thus, ideally, parents can easily access provider’s records of violations and complaints to feel secure that their child is in a safe environment. Families want providers to offer a free facilities tour to new families looking to enroll their child. Furthermore, they would like workshops on how to address the anxiety they feel about leaving their children with child care providers they do not know.

### Definition of Quality Child Care

- As mentioned, families want to build trust with their provider. This can be built through **providers supplying daily check-ins and progress reports** on each family’s child. Additionally, parents want cameras inside the facility that show video updates throughout the day.
- Some families prefer a **small number of providers interacting with their child**. Furthermore, providers ideally have a **small provider-to-child ratio**.
- Families value providers that are on the cutting-edge of early childhood education programming and curriculum. Ideally, **providers undergo continued education** and integrate an educational curriculum into their child care programming.

*“That's one of the things that I love about where my son goes. She actually keeps taking courses. And it makes her different. It's one of those things like doctors. Doctors have to continuously be learning. Lawyers have to continually be learning, you just can't stop. And even when I worked as a manager, they constantly had us taking classes, and I'm like, 'Well yeah, even a caretaker should, too'.”*

- Families work very hard to keep their children healthy and want to ensure that their child is not exposed to illnesses while at child care. Thus, ideally, **providers have consistent and strict policies around caring for sick children**.
- In addition to providers ensuring quality child care, families believe that the state also has a role. Specifically, families feel that ideally, **the state performs regular inspections and site-checks**.

### Reality/Challenges

Parents discussed how their ideal child care scenario fell short of their actual experience. The points below outline the key challenges that parents face for accessing and maintaining quality child care.

## Accessing Child Care

- **Parents seeking child care are often put on extensive waiting lists.** One mother reported that it took her 10-12 months to obtain child care due to the time it took to get off of the waiting list. Because of this delay, this mother had to leave her job and was not able to successfully find a new job until she secured child care.
- Even for parents who are not on the waiting list, **child care can still be difficult to find.** One mother discussed how she spent days calling list after list of possible providers. This was a time consuming and inefficient process, especially for busy single mothers. One mother described her experience calling from a list of providers:

*“When I was calling [the providers on the list]...then it was well, ‘We don’t do these hours, we don’t do this’ and I’m like, ‘What?’, and also, ‘Right now we don’t have any spots open.’ Well then, what, why am I calling you?”*

- **Parents who work in the evening often must change their job** due to the lack of child care outside of typical business hours.

*“I had to let a great paying second job go because I couldn't find childcare in the evening.”*

- Often, child care providers take extended breaks during the holidays or during school holidays. However, many parents still need to work during these days, yet they are not able to include a second child care provider on their subsidy.

*“I was gonna say, that’s another issue because there are some providers who keep the school schedule so they’re closed on certain days like Columbus Day. But you still have to work on those days so it’s like you need that other provider to cover those holidays because you can’t take off that day. That’s a burden on you if the school’s out.”*

- When discussing child care options, parents felt strongly that **choosing family, friend, or neighbor care did not mean they didn’t care about quality.**

*“Trust me, **just because it has a label of family, friends, doesn't mean we're not being picky of who we choose**, we're being very selective, like you were saying with your three month, we're being very selective, with the reason behind so in order to get that person quality that we trust, well they're going have to pay quality too.”*

*“We’re single parents for a reason, like most of us...That makes a difference, why we’re very selective, we don’t trust as it is, we have trust issues...So trust me we do our background check our way, we don’t take the decision lightly.”*

*“She was saying her twins were born premature, and my son was premature and I was actually advised not to send him to a daycare....I had to wait eight months before I could send him ”*

## Navigating the Child Care System's Policies and Procedures

- Parents reported **inconsistent case worker practices**. Specifically, some case workers allow recertifications via email while others do not. Also, some case workers provide more detailed and informative information than others. Lack of case worker competence directly impacts the time it takes for families to receive child care.

*"My situation was a little different, the lady I had, I guess they had to let her go. So they lost all my paperwork, they had to go back, re-find everything, and then, I guess they spread out everybody's stack, and then half of one lady had half my stuff, then the other lady. So I had two different ladies calling me. I was going to say, "I give up", luckily I know three people that work here so I had to use my resources."*

- Families are subject to pay family fees on a sliding scale once their income reaches 40% of the state median income. **Some parents have a variable income (for example, substitute teachers) and receive surprising/unexpected family fees without notification** of a family fee increase. Most families are on a budget and a sudden increase in child care costs can be very problematic.

*"I'm a single parent, so I'm on a budget, and you want me to pay like a hundred and something dollars, and you just now telling me? That's not in the budget this month. And if I don't have it, my child can't go to daycare? That's a problem."*

*"I was substitute teaching, so it's like, whenever they have vacant if I'm assigned to a school for a month, which is the max I can work there, then yeah, there's a surge. And then next month, I only work a couple days, so they were charging me the parent fee, and then it wasn't changed, and I was like, 'But I don't even make that much anymore.'"*

- As parents discussed the difficulties with navigating the paperwork required to maintain their child care, they discussed the challenges that arose if something was wrong with their submitted paperwork. Specifically, parents noted that **payment to providers has been delayed without notification**. As a result, parents become vulnerable to losing their child care.

*"I didn't even get [the payment delay] in writing. I found out about it, because the child care provider said, 'They're not paying me, and I can no longer watch your child until you pay me.' And I was like, 'What are you talking about?'"*

- Another challenge of navigating the child care system is **judgement and poor treatment from county case workers**. One parent shared that she unexpectedly had to seek support for child care when she experienced domestic violence. The county case workers were not supportive of her situation, which made the navigation process even more difficult.

*"Because, I'm bruised and I had a cut lip, so I show up like ... Like I told her, "I've never asked for anything. Look at my social security. Never. I've always put in. I worked 15 years. I'm old. 15 Years I've put into the system." And she almost made me cry. She made me wait until the end of the day to file."*

*"I did feel, from county, very judged. Oh, my god, every time you go you feel so judged. Like, "What do you want? What do you need?" I have had one that's been amazing. Thank god she's been the same one. And a gentleman. Older man. Amazing. But everyone else has been like you're taking their money. That is not their money. They make you feel that. That's been through my experience the last few years, it's just very judgey."*

- Parents discussed the constant need to submit paperwork and recertify. This paperwork process puts additional strain on parents' busy schedules. Particularly, **paperwork demands often come up without enough warning**, adding additional strain to parents' lives.

*"The office that I work for is in Long Beach, but I don't work there. So, I would have to go through, because you don't want to fax it, it might get lost. It's your personal ... So, I have to take time off to go there and then if they're not busy, they'll fill it out, if not, you got to leave it there and you got to go back and get it. Because, [the subsidy provider] doesn't take it email. So, it's like, that's why we have email and fax nowadays. But, they won't accept it. So then I got to go back and get it."*

*"I guess so many people don't realize how stressful it is, because, it's already hard enough trying to find good childcare, especially in LA. There's a lot out there, but there's limited good child care. And then you're already struggling with, I got to go to work, I got to take care of the baby, I got to cook, clean, I got to do all this, and then take care of yourself. So, you're already stretched thin, and then you have somebody who's just like, "I need this paperwork and you didn't do ..." And I'm just like, "Had you asked me that in the beginning, when I was ... " Or, give me a notice and don't say I need it by the end of the week and it's Wednesday."*

*"I was stressed out at one time, where I was like, 'You know what? I'm just going to have take care of my baby and I guess we going to be poor and broke, because I just...it's stressful. It's really stressful."*

- Additionally, **parents have faced breakages in child care when giving birth to a new child**. In one case, the subsidizing agency assumed that a mother would take leave from school after she had her child and therefore stopped her child care subsidy. However, the mother went back to school immediately after giving birth and still depended on the subsidy to finish her degree.

*"So, I had my child on a Monday, went back to school on that Tuesday. [The subsidy provider] stopped it. They stopped it. I'm thinking like, "Why she stopped it?" That's why. Because, they didn't pay her. And that's you saw she just got this year. They didn't pay her, because they said, I guess, I wasn't going back to school. I was like, "No. I went back to school." Once my worker got with them, then they fixed it, but it was that gap. "*

- **Filling out time logs is very cumbersome**. Parents must log every day and at a different time each day. For many families, they are on a set routine and not only is it

burdensome to fill out a timesheet, but they are in fact showing up at the same time every day.

*"I have three kids...at the same daycare. So I have to do three different time sheets. I don't have time to do that in the morning."*

- Child care regulations stating that a parent cannot live in the same home as the provider. This has raised challenges for parents, particularly around infant care. For example, **parents would like to pay their own parents to watch their newborn**, but this is not allowed under family, friend and neighbor care. As a result, some parents had to quit their jobs.

*"I had to quit my job, because they said no, I can't do that and I wasn't about to leave my three month old with a daycare provider I was like oh no, forget I'll just ... I'm not gonna send my daughter to daycare."*

*"Yeah it comes to the point where you have to quit jobs, and you can't go, jobs are there but you can't take it because of a little rule."*

*"Because when you have a premature child, they haven't gone through the fetal development yet, you have the trimester, if your child is premature they have to go through those certain trimester it takes them longer because they're out of the womb but they have to feel like they're still there in order to have a proper development. If you give them to someone who doesn't have that, type of bond or even just it's your mother so she has the same type of hormones"*

## Recommendations

Parents considered their current child care challenges in light of their idea child care scenario, and suggested the following set of recommendations:

1. Better pay for providers, particularly family/friend/neighbor pay.
2. Seamless/continuous paperwork when transferring from Stage 1 to Stage 2 child care and when adding a second child.
3. Consistently and timely pay for providers.
4. Providers are required to complete continued education.
5. Provider facilities are inspected annually and facility records are easily accessible online.
6. Families receive support around how to pick the best child care option; families have access to workshops and parent groups to help make child care decisions.
7. Employment verified through pay stubs.
8. Recent policy changes around variable income and 12-month eligibility are enforced and implemented.

## Concluding Thoughts: What do Policymakers Need to Know?

The following quotations exemplify parents' overall thoughts on what policymakers need to know about the realities of findings and keeping quality child care for low-income families.

*"I got a lot on my plate. I'm back and forth to court with my child's father, I'm doing this, trying to work. It's a lot. So, that's the last thing you need. Is to have to be concerned, and be even more stressed, about how you're going to take care of childcare. **Because, you need childcare in order to work. It's like a catch 22. I can't work unless I have childcare.**"*

*"I've worked more being on the system, then working."*

*"You have to choose your job to meet the schedule of your child care provider."*

# Los Angeles – San Fernando Valley Focus Group Write Up

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**Name of Location:** The Child Care Resource Center

**City:** Chatsworth

**Focus Group Facilitators:** Mary Ignatius and Laura Pryor

**Date of Visit:** September 15, 2018

**Focus Group Participants:** Eight mothers and two fathers from the San Fernando Valley area with a range of 1-8 children each. Seven of the families were current recipients of subsidized child care and one family was a former recipient of subsidized child care.

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## Ideal Child Care Scenario

Focus group participants were asked to describe their ideal child care scenarios and how they would like their child care journey to unfold from pregnancy forward. The points outlined below reflect parents' hopes and dreams for accessing and maintaining quality child care.

### Child Care Access

- **Child care outreach workers are abundant and available** to inform families about child care options prior to their child's birth. Parents can easily find out about child care options, similar to how other services are advertised.

*"There should be outreach to let people know [about child care subsidies], because I'm always telling people like go apply to CCRC, go apply. Just like when you get pregnant, they tell you about WIC and stuff."*

- Parents want to be as efficient as possible with their time and resources. Therefore, having quality **child care options that are close to home and/or work** allows parents to minimize travel time and child care costs.
- **Foster families also need child care, and the process for obtaining child care should be barrier free.** Foster families often have unique contexts and circumstances that should be considered when they apply for child care.
- Parents recognize the importance of child care, regardless of family background characteristics. Therefore, ideally, **child care is available and accessible to all families, regardless of income.**
- Many families have multiple children and therefore need multiple child care subsidies. Ideally, the **process for adding a second child into an existing subsidy is readily**



**available and seamless.** Parents do not have to go on the waiting list when adding more children.

*"If when you're pregnant again, say you're already on the program, because you're pregnant again. I heard that we must still wait. It's another waiting process. It should be easier to add the second and third child in."*

### Selecting the Appropriate Provider

- Parents appreciate and value the opinion of other parents when making their child care provider decision. It would be ideal to have a **system mirroring "Yelp" for child care provider reviews to help parents make child care selection decisions.** This review page should show different certifications, provider specialties, and parent opinions.
- In addition to an online or virtual application for selecting child care providers, parents also value face-to-face conversations with other parents. To facilitate these in-person conversations around child care provider selection, **families can ideally attend parent support groups at a location apart from potential child care providers.**

*"Because I remember I when I would take my kids to the provider. It was another parent ... We would bump into each other in the parking lot, and she would be like, "How do you like it here?" And she would tell me some things that she didn't like, and me too. And I was like, "I don't know I'd feel like I have to move my kids out of the program."*

- Families communicated the importance of getting an in-person sense for a provider's environment prior to enrolling a child. Ideally, **providers offer tours of their facilities for new families prior to enrolling.**

*"The touring of the school is really important, because that's when you get the feel for is this the right place."*

### Navigating the Child Care System

- Depending on a parent's income, they will pay a family fee in addition to the subsidy. Parents located in cities with higher costs of living may have tighter budgets than other families in less high-demand areas. Therefore, ideally, the **family fee reflects a fair payment structure that acknowledges differences in rent across locations.**

*"Yeah, so subtracting your rent, subtracting your basic needs. Subtract that, then see how much income I have, and then sort of base the family fee off of that."*

- Parents lead busy lives with many competing demands. To help minimize burdens on parents, **the child care recertification process should be easy to navigate, relatively seamless, and allow for consistent acceptance of documents via email or fax.**

## Child Care Quality

- Families want to establish and maintain trust in their child care providers. To help promote that trust, **providers should ideally have cameras throughout the facility and provide progress reports on their child** (i.e. including their eating and napping schedule).
- Parents want to ensure that their **children are given high-quality and nutritious food** when they are not in their care. Ideally, all providers have quality nutrition options to feed their children.
- Many parents attend child development and parenting courses and see this as connected to their child's provider. It would be ideal for **child care facilities and other parent/child development organizations to collaborate and offer parent workshops** at the child care facility.

*"And I was talking about I went to a parenting class, it's called Eco Parenting, and it teaches non violent empathy skills for kids. I feel like that should be incorporated with the provider's program, because it's so important, and it's so supportive to continuing to provide the care for the children."*

- Some parents have children that have gone through traumatic experiences. As a result, they may have certain behaviors that require a trauma-informed response from providers. Thus, ideally, **providers undergo training on trauma-informed care.**
- Regardless of the requirements for providers, all providers should ideally be qualified. Part of this qualification process should **be pursuing ongoing education around child development.**
- Additionally, provider facilities should be safe and welcoming for children of all ages. Furthermore, one parent suggested that part of facility tours should include a chance to talk to other parent's attending the program.

*" Make sure when they go into child care, they have a place where the parents can all talk without the childcare there. So the parents can tell you, 'This is what you're coming into. This is what they eat, how it is.'"*

## Reality/Challenges

Parents' descriptions of their ideal child care scenario were however, often far from the reality and challenges they experienced. The following points highlight the key challenges faced by parents.

## Child Care Access

- **Low-income parents stated that they were sometimes denied or put on the waiting list when seeking a child care subsidy.** One parent was put on the waiting list for a year. She was ultimately able to get child care when a provider called on the parent's behalf and requested that the parent receive a subsidy. For those parents that are on the waiting list or denied, they pay out of pocket and struggle to achieve economic stability.

*"Even just getting in the waiting list. A lot of people get denied. I know a lot of people that seem to qualify, but just got denied for whatever reason. And I'm like, "You should be able to get it. You're single parents or ... And I just don't know about the application process now. I think it's a little bit more difficult."*

- **Parents who work non-traditional hours struggle to find quality child care** that meets their schedule. Overall, there is a lack of child care options for parents with alternative work schedules.

*"Because for me, I work six days a week. So I need providers that are available for Saturdays...some Saturdays I can't work 'cause I don't have a sitter."*

- Additionally, some parents work more than eight hours a day or have long commute times. Several child care **providers are strict about their pick-up times and are unwilling to accommodate parents who may need a later pick-up time. Current regulations allow for travel time based on commute, but administrators often give a general 30 minute allowance instead.**

*"She won't go after 6:00. And [the provider's] kind of like, "Why can't you get off, and take 'em back to work?" He literally has the kids [at work] for half an hour more, an hour-"*

*"Considering also the driving time, 'cause I work far! I work in West LA, and I live out here in the Valley, so it takes me about an hour everyday to get there. I had to really fight for that travel time to get an extra hour of my child care, because I needed it."*

- Low-income parents who are also full-time students qualify for child care subsidies and are not required to work. However, once a parent moves beyond a Bachelor's degree, this support is not provided. Specifically, **low-income parents seeking a Master's must work part-time in order to receive a child care subsidy.**

*"And I decided back in 2012-2013 I want to go back to school. My worker was like, "We don't help the Master program, only for Bachelors. And I was like, "But I want to get a Master's degree, what do I need to do?" So she was like, "But if you work part time, we can save your information and you're working part time, you're still on the program, then you can go to school. So that was a challenge. Go to school full-time, and work part-time, to show that I was working doing an activity, so that I could qualify for the program, and still go to school. It was hard!"*

- Parents communicated that **the paid leave offered to mothers is not sufficient** when they also have to pay for child care for an earlier child. As a result, parents choose to not take paid leave and return to work immediately after giving birth so that they can retain their income.

*“With my first one yeah. With my second one, I couldn't afford it. I literally was put on bedrest, but I was still working from home. Literally, that's what happened. I went into labor, had my baby on Saturday morning. I was supposed to get discharged Monday morning, but that didn't happen, so that was the only day I took off, and then Tuesday I was back to work.”*

*“Because with the paid family leave, my ... Based upon my family's needs here would still stay the same, and I was like ... Yeah, that's not going to work, because I'm not going to get my full check.”*

- Additionally, **foster parents face a specific set of issues when trying to obtain subsidized child care**. Often, they do not have the right paperwork or information needed to enroll. There is a clear lack of resources to help foster parents access the child care system.

*“Another thing too, as foster parents, even though it's my nephew, they do not provide birth certificate. They would just give me a copy... It takes months. So for me to come in and do the whole application stuff for a niece or nephew, they ask for social security card, they ask for the birth certificate, the medic help. I didn't have any of that.”*

### Navigating the Child Care System

- **Re-certification paperwork is extremely burdensome for low-income parents**. The amount of paperwork adds extra steps that places additional strain on parents' busy lives.

*“Once you get the application, the re-certifications are a drag! We have to submit the same stuff! I'm already, I'm fixing to print out a whole stack of birth certificates, because everywhere they want it. Is something going to change?”*

*“I think maybe it would help, maybe just submitting the tax returns would be a lot easier by myself. I don't get pay stubs, I get paid cash. So I'm self-employed. It makes it a little bit harder to have to provide the proof for myself when I don't have paycheck stubs.”*

- More specifically, **physically going to the county office to enroll and recertify is very challenging for parents or in some cases, they may be charged for collecting the forms**. Often, parents must take time off of work to complete the necessary recertification steps.

*“The CCRC cannot reimburse that \$25 dollars. So every year, [my brother] has to get another form from his doctor, and they charge \$25 dollars, and his doctor takes a week, sometimes 10 days to return.”*

- Sometimes, parents may forget a small step in the paperwork or make a small error. Instead of allowing parents time to correct the error, their child care subsidy may be cut off. This **lack of leniency with paperwork and detail required often results in holds and gaps in child care. When asked if they ever wanted to give their subsidy up because of the paperwork requirements, approximately 90% of participants raised their hands.**
- Parents also reported **rigid and inconsistent case worker practices.** Sometimes, case workers will lose important paperwork or allow email extensions to some parents but not others. This lack of consistency and disorganization adds additional obstacles for parents trying to navigate the child care system.

*“And they won't admit like that they lost it. And it's like, it's fine we're all human, but [don't blame the parent].”*

*“Be consistent. Like, her caseworker wouldn't give her an extension on an email or phone call, and our case worker did. She gave us another 10 days to get that returned.”*

*“They lose all the paper work, I don't know what the workers are doing. But in my case, every time I go [to social services], I will make copies, I will stamp it, I will make copies of the stamp. And I will need two copies.”*

- In July 2017, a new law went into effect stating that parents can keep their affordable child care until their income reaches 85% of the state median income. However, before this law was put into place, the ceiling on how much money parents can make forced some parents to reduce their income levels.

*“I actually had ... When I got hired, when I was done with my program in school, they gave me an offer by phone, and then I called my case worker and she said it was over the bracket. So I had to call HR and say, “I need to take this [lower] amount,”*

- Stage Two time logs require parents to check in and out of child care at different times every day. **Parents have busy schedules and find that the time logs are overly burdensome.**

### Child Care Quality

- **Families with children who have special needs reported an overall lack of providers** with special needs experience and qualifications. In one case, a provider thought she was qualified, but then asked a parent of a special needs child to not bring her child back after the provider realized she did not have the skills to care for him.
- Parents also reported stories of **neglectful and unjust provider practices.** In general, some parents found it very difficult to find a provider that they could trust with their child.

*“Then at the time, my daughter was three years old, so she would speak up. And then she would tell me, “Mom, the baby cried all day. Mom, they didn’t change diaper. So that’s how I [found out] because she would tell me.”*

*“Yeah, and since I was the oldest, they would have me make some pancakes, and I thought they’d be for everyone. But, they gave my brothers half an apple, and the family had [the pancakes]” – daughter of focus group parent*

## Recommendations

Parents reflected on their ideal child care scenario in light of the reality and challenges they face and produced the following set of recommendations.

1. Allow parents to re-certify via email.
2. Mandate consistent case worker practices.
3. Create more child care options for alternative work schedules.
4. Incentivize providers to offer more child care hours in a day.
5. Create neutral spaces for parents to talk about child care quality and child care provider selection.
6. Facilitate collaborations between child care providers and parenting resources.
7. Mandate ongoing training and education for providers.
8. Child care payment structures reflect the local cost of living.
9. Allow for longer travel time allotments, particularly in high traffic areas like Los Angeles
10. Allow for some documentation, such as birth certificates or medical forms to be collected one time and be stored electronically.

## Concluding Thoughts: What do Policymakers Need to Know?

When asked what policymakers need to know about child care for low income parents, parents responded with the following comments.

- **Parents are trying hard to make it** and get out of poverty, but the system often makes it difficult for them to do so.

*“What I really want them to know is to be a little bit more reality based, on what real families are going through, and the struggle in a way that we have kids, we have jobs, we go to school. We’re trying to better our self.”*

- **Child care is not affordable** for low-income parents, but it is necessary for economic and social mobility.

*“I would want them to know for sure childcare is not affordable. So it doesn't even seem possible for some people to get it, but it is fundamental. Like the kids, it doesn't matter the family situation or what not. They're safe, they're learning, and society's going to be better for that.”*

- **Child care is good for children and good for society;** all parents should have access to child care.

*“Well because we for sure, if it wasn't available, who knows where the kids are. Who's abusing them or what not. It could happen anywhere, obviously. Even in the centers. But, to facilitate a school and training, and what they've learned could teach these kids how to be in the world, it makes a huge difference. So, the alternative is no childcare, and people are still going to have babies, still going to have children, but they're going to be where?”*

## Fresno Focus Group Write Up

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**Name of Location:** Central Valley Services Network

**Name of Supporting Organization:** Parent Voices Fresno

**City:** Fresno

**Focus Group Facilitators:** Mary Ignatius

**Date of Visit:** September 26, 2018

**Focus Group Participants:** Seven mothers participated in the focus group. Each woman has one to four children and are current or former recipients of child care. These women all came from Fresno and surrounding cities.

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### Ideal Child Care Scenario

While reflecting on their child care journeys, the parents in this focus group discussed what they would like to experience throughout the process of finding and maintaining quality child care. Key points from this discussion are highlighted below.

#### How Parents Would Like to Learn about Child Care Options

- Primarily, parents would like to **find out about child care options when they are in the hospital or at the doctor's office.**
- While at the doctor's office, ideally, the **doctor should connect the parent to a social worker** who can assist with enrolling the parent in a child care subsidy program.
- Furthermore, **child care subsidy information is advertised in easily accessible places** such as the television and radio. This information is provided in multiple languages. Also, employers inform parents about various child care options that meet their work schedule.
- Government funds are enough to ensure that **no child is left on the waiting list.**

#### How Parents Want to Navigate the Child Care System

- When a parent gives birth, the **system offers up to one year of paid family leave.**
- Additionally, **child care options are readily available for parents that must go on disability leave.**



*"I think when you're pregnant is when you go to the doctor and they say, 'Ok, you're pregnant' and they send you to the social worker, who tells you what food you're going to eat and everything...They ask, 'Are you a single mom?' 'Do you have your partner?' That's when they can offer help."*

- Many parents in the Fresno area work in agriculture. As a result, their work schedule and location often follow the crops and the regulations put forth by the Migrant Program. To accommodate this work schedule and movement, the **child care system should be seamless from one county to the next**. Parents can smoothly move their child to a new provider in a new county. Furthermore, migrant parents need flexibility and care offered early in the mornings and late in the evenings because their schedule is unknown.

*" [I receive my schedule] that day. Because it can be twelve hours, depending on orders that one has to do. You always know what time you're going to enter, but never in packaging-you never know what time you're going out."*

*" We can leave 30 minutes early by not taking our 30 minute lunch break. But there is not an afternoon dismissal schedule, on all the days. There are different departure times"*

### How Parents Want to Choose the Right Provider

- Parents can **easily find out about child care provider quality through helpful apps or call centers**. For example, the app would include recommendations from parents, background information on the provider including background checks of criminal history, and a description of activities and resources offered at the facility.

*"Ok, like a rating that—you know—recommendation, like someone says, 'Oh this person is a good provider' and that way you get good feedback. So recommendations...Ok, so parents among parents - she has a good provider, she recommends, then you know, she shares that information with her so it's parents rating."*

- Additionally, **information on the type of provider and the subsidies that are accepted at the facility is easy for parents to find**. Furthermore, it should be clear if providers will enroll children without documentation.

*"Also knowing what kind of provider is this? How it works? Is it subsidized? Is it migrant?"*

- For parents to find out about the range of providers available to them, **providers should advertise their services on the internet**, such as a Facebook advertisement.

### Definition of Quality Child Care

- Parents have the **option of receiving text and photo updates of their child at least three times per day**. This will help the parent build trust and confidence in the provider.

- Quality **child care is available at all hours and all days of the year** to accommodate parents' work and school schedules. Parents who work in agriculture often hold irregular hours, including nights and weekends. Ideally, providers can and will accommodate their alternative schedules.
- **Every school has an after-school program until 7pm** that includes nutrition. Furthermore, parents are allowed to use their vouchers to find after-school care for their children.
- **The provider is a cultural fit for the child and the parents.** This means that the provider can help the child learn both English and their parents' language (if not English).
- Child care providers offer **high quality nutrition options.**
- The child care **provider follows an early learning curriculum and can assist children with their school assignments.** Moreover, providers are proactive about asking children about homework and ensure that children complete their assignments.

*“But what I like about the provider is that there, since a very young age, they start drawing, writing the alphabet, their name. So by the time they go to school— Because, in my case, my girls went to child care at a much older age, so later in school they struggled a lot. This is due to the language but also— they learned to read almost until third grade. And my other child, the boy, he was in child care from a very young age. So, in kindergarten, in first grade, he already knew how to read. And I think that helped him, the things they taught him at the provider helped him. Because they follow a routine.”*

*“Not all providers are the same. Some do not help with school activities, and they do not ask the children if they have homework.”*

- Child care providers are qualified, and **the facility is safe.**

*“First and foremost, you look into the fact that you have a good provider, that your child is going to be safe.”*

## Reality/Challenges

As parents reflected on their experiences with the child care system, they brought up several challenges that illustrated the reality of their situations. These challenges are outlined in the points below.

### Accessing Quality Child Care

- Most of the parents participating in this focus group immigrated to the US from other countries and often move to and from different counties. Several **parents were not told about child care resources** when moving to Fresno. One parent stated that she stopped receiving cash aid when she moved to Fresno and nobody informed her that she still

qualified for child care services. In general, parents are not given sufficient information about child care resources.

*“No, one of my classmates actually told me, like, ‘Hey, you should apply.’ And I applied. You have to really self-advocate.”*

- In addition to parents not receiving enough information, some parents explained that they were told mis-information or provided no information at all. Specifically, **parents were given the wrong information regarding where their child care voucher could be accepted.**

*“ I had never asked for 3 days of sick leave, and even though one of my children had his appendix operated on, I asked for a week to be with my son and in fact I was pregnant with my other baby. I was not paid for those sick days. And my son was operated on and my employer never notified me that I had the right to ask for sick days.”*

- Parents discussed **the meaning of cultural and linguistic preservation. When asked if they feared their children will lose their language and culture, 100% of the participants raised their hands.**

*“ Because you cannot be speaking Spanish all day [while you are working]. And you do not want them to lose that.”*

*“With mine, so they answer me in English, I say, “I do not understand you, tell me in Spanish to understand you. But I tell them, “I do not understand what you say...And then at school she speaks pure English. Pure English. And then if they go elsewhere, they speak pure English.”*

- Rural towns, such as those outside of Fresno, offer a **limited number of providers.** Parents are therefore left with options that do not meet their quality and schedule standards.

*“There’s only 3 providers. The one stopped, so then there were 2 providers. And one I didn’t feel comfortable with, so then she was my only choice.”*

*“And you cannot stay at work because something happens with the provider, you depend on the provider, you have to get off work suddenly. It has happened to me many times, I’ve been very close to losing jobs, I have even become sick due to the stress of not wanting to lose the job, because of the providers – there is no one, you can find no one to take care of the children.”*

- Parents reported that some **providers will not enroll their children if the child or their parents do not have documentation or social security cards.**

*“I struggled a lot to be able to get help to take care of them. In welfare I asked for childcare but they said no, because my children needed to have social security cards. Since I am an immigrant, my children are immigrants, we do not have social security cards. So, that was a limitation. I had to pay for someone to take care of my 2 boys. Back then I was a single mother. I called different places, but they always required for my children to have social security cards. Right now I can’t remember the*

*names of the places that I called asking for childcare, but they said that my children had to have social security cards, otherwise they were not eligible. So, my children suffered more.”*

- Because parents’ schedules change week-to-week and sometimes day-to-day, it is difficult to find a provider that can accommodate shifting schedules and weekend hours. Parents are also trying to balance school schedules with work schedules so they can learn English and obtain a better job. However, **balancing school, work, and child care schedules is incredibly difficult.**
- In many cases, **parents have turned down jobs because they cannot find a child care provider** that accommodates their work schedule.
- Parents commented on how some child care providers are not qualified and do not have a safe environment.

*“ I was going to change from a home, because sometimes my child told me that they gave her pinches... Who are watching the children, right? Let nothing bad happen. But in family child care, even if they have a license, you do not know how safe your children are.”*

### **Navigating the Child Care System’s Policies and Procedures**

- When parents move from one county to another to accommodate the Migrant Program and/or their job, they have **lost their child care and were forced to reapply.** This has resulted in gaps in service and inefficiency for the parent.

*“I got it in Merced— the financial help to be able to overcome a problem that I had. And I started working. They helped me— they soon sent me help to take care of my child. And they were helping me with all that, stamps, food, MediCal, money, childcare— I started to thrive. They offered me a job here in Fresno. When I moved here, a friend of mine helped me to take care of the child. This was only during my adjustment period. Here I applied to other places, but they didn’t tell me that I could notify about what I had left back in Merced. So, I notified them late, 2 years later— After leaving Merced, I couldn’t get any help.”*

- Parents discussed how **some providers can set very strict pick-up times** that do not accommodate their work schedules. Because there are so few providers in these rural areas, parents do not have more flexible child care options.

*“So I had to commute to Hanford and if I wasn’t back in Huron by 5:30, then they were going to stop my services. So I had to move to Hanford.”*

- Given the typical income for a parent working in agriculture, **child care is not affordable.** One parent stated that she spent \$800 per month out of pocket for child care, which equated to her monthly cost of rent.

- The **pre-July 2017 cap on income was problematic**. Parents reported that they would exceed the maximum income to qualify for a subsidy, but they still could not afford child care without the subsidy.
- **Updating contact information is cumbersome for parents who move frequently**, such as those in the Migrant Program. As a result, breakages in service provision happen.

*“One problem that we see is that they return the mail to us, because if you write your address wrong, or if you move, or your income changes, all this changes, and it is your responsibility to update your information in the program. Otherwise, they are unable to do modifications unless you call and update your file. You have to call them, again, and again, and again. Parents don’t have time for that.”*

- The Migrant Program offers subsidies specifically for migrant agricultural workers. However, to qualify for services, parents must move to a new county at least once during a twelve-month period. However, this **constant moving is often not necessary to work in agriculture and results in parents having gaps in service provision and overall instability**.

*“The qualification, you have to be migrant, so you have to move every 12 months or else you don’t qualify.”*

*“Because locally—the season for the tomato is like, you know, summer. And then you have a different fruit. So, ok. Tomatoes here, the other factory for lettuce, whatever. Garlic is over here. This is done, ok. So here, but all are in nearby cities. So, you don’t necessarily have to move when the season changes.”*

*“And there are programs for immigrants, but the program for immigrants requires for you to move every year, every 12 months – from one place to another, that’s very hard. It is very hard on the children to move that many times. It is hard to take them from one country to another, moving from one home to another, from one town to another.”*

*“That was also my experience, when I arrived from Mexico, I applied to the immigrant program, but after a year I lost it since I was not able to migrate somewhere else.”*

*“Because a child goes to a school, you have to move to another place and change them from school...we want stability.”*

- **Child care in the summertime brings a distinct challenge** because children are not in school and do not have access to after-school programs. Parents do not know where to send their children in the summer, especially if parents do not have friends or family nearby.
- Parents sometimes **struggle to find providers that are a good cultural fit**. Specifically, parents fear that their children may lose the ability to speak their native language if they are not with a multilingual provider.

*“My children, when they answer me in English, I say, “I do not understand you, tell me in Spanish to understand you.” And then at school he speaks pure English. Pure English. And then if they go elsewhere, they speak pure English.”*

- Parents who work in agriculture have schedules that often change weekly; parents do not know their schedules in advance. Often, parents will receive their schedule the day of, and their work shift could be for up to twelve hours. Therefore, it is **difficult to find a provider with flexible and weekend hours.**

## Recommendations

Given parents’ perspectives on both their ideal child care scenario and their reality, the focus group conversation produced a set of recommendations for improving the early learning system.

1. Clarify or reform migrant child care regulations to not require a parent to move out of the county within 12 months to remain eligible for services.

2. Allow all children, regardless of their documentation status, to access child care.

*“Ok, so in general, what I wish, ideally, would be that no child is on the waiting list. That there is enough funds so that every child can access the services.”*

3. Offer support and incentives for individuals to become child care providers and extend the hours of existing providers to provide more non-traditional care hours, particularly in rural areas and particularly for bi-lingual child care providers.

4. Provide support to providers to improve their skills and continue their education related to child development.

*“And that’s because—it goes back, again, there needs to be funding for staff to go out and train because that’s why she’s doing good, because she’s part of the provider network and the staff go out and train the providers. They go with books and activities and all that, so if there’s no staff—no money for staff to do that, then it affects the quality”*

5. Advertise child care in accessible places and in multiple languages.

*“When you first arrive from another place, you know no one, you know nothing, and you lack a lot of information. It’s just that there, you— first, you arrive looking for what you have available. People, who can help take care of your child, and asking where to find a job. There should be more information. I don’t know, at the stations, in the radio.”*

6. Train case workers to provide comprehensive information about child care resources that are culturally and linguistically accessible

7. Mandate employers to provide at least one year of paid family leave.

8. Provide training for providers on how to work with children who have special needs.
9. Mandate regular inspections of provider facilities.
10. Create seamless systems for transferring parent information across counties.
11. Put employers in touch with child care subsidy administrators so the recertification and outreach process is more efficient.

*“To send the information from the workplace— so, there should be a direct contact between your employer and the childcare services. So that we could have permission to be able to do— to take care of these matters. To have your employer give you permission without a penalty— — that could harm your work and to be able to keep doing your work at ease. My employer also has information from here, but he doesn’t— they do not put us in contact directly with these programs and let us, parents, be able to keep working at ease.”*

*“Families want information about their rights and it should be provided with cultural sensitivity and in accessible languages.”*

## Concluding Thoughts: What do Policymakers Need to Know?

Parents closed the focus group conversation with the following concluding thoughts.

- Parents who are stuck in the system **do not have time to advocate for their rights** because they are just trying to survive.
- **Rural areas need more providers and more child care options.** Opening new child care facilities is good for the community and good for the economy.

*“If one cannot work, you are not helping the taxes nor the system, you are not helping for the environment to improve. Because you are stuck in a situation where you cannot work. Then, you become— you need financial support, you need stamps— so, it makes everything worse because you are not able to work. If you don’t have someone who can take care of your children, how are you going to do that? Anyhow, to be able to progress and help the community we need more jobs, also for the providers, so that one has the possibility to go on. And also help the system grow.”*

## Bay Area Focus Group Write Up

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**Name of Location:** California Child Care Resource and Referral Network

**Name of Supporting Organization:** Parent Voices San Francisco

**City:** San Francisco

**Focus Group Facilitators:** Mary Ignatius and Laura Pryor

**Date of Visit:** October 1, 2018

**Focus Group Participants:** Nine mothers and one daughter from the San Francisco Bay Area with a range of 1-4 children each. Three mothers live in San Francisco, three mothers live in Oakland, two mothers (and daughter) live in Hayward, and one mother (joined by phone) lives in Pittsburg. All mothers were recipients of subsidized child care.

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### Ideal Child Care Scenario

Parents at the focus group had a very clear vision of their ideal child care scenario. This scenario followed the child care process since before their child was born all the way until 18. The points below outline parents' hopes and wishes for the child care system.

#### How Parents Would Like to Learn about Child Care Options

- **Parent access to child care begins before their child is born.** For example, hospitals, pre-natal appointments, and birthing centers all provide information about child care options to parents.

*In the dream world it is like, 'You have a baby. Here's a voucher.'*

- Outreach to parents about child care mirrors other public efforts to disseminate information. For example, similar to a job fair, **the city or the county hosts a "child care fair"** in which parents learn about various child care options and how to navigate the system.

*"I think that the [city/county] should have some kind of child care fair. Like how they have these wedding events and you can meet all the vendors. And you can go to all these different events where you meet all these different companies and that kind of stuff. I think they should do the same thing for child care. Maybe twice a year or something so people who are pregnant or planning on getting pregnant can go in and get information about that kind of stuff."*

- Furthermore, parents are exposed to and reminded of child care options through **easily accessible advertisements** such as buses, internet ads, and television commercials.



*“So kind of like, right now they're promoting normalize breastfeeding. So it's all on the buses. So the same thing like childcare, all this stuff, just promoting childcare. So people just start getting used to it.”*

- These advertisements for child care are provided in multiple languages. Furthermore, **Cultural navigators help immigrant parents** understand and use the child care subsidy system.

*“I think some of the bilingual people can help with translation. But there should be a cultural connection to help us to understand. Maybe if somebody who came from our country can work with us and explain the systems, that would help. It's different from somebody that lives here or born here, even if they speak Spanish.”*

### How Parents Want to Navigate the Child Care System

- Parents applying for child care subsidies do not get put on a waitlist. Instead, child care subsidies are approved at the same time CalWORKS is approved.; all social service programs start at the same time for the parent. Once a parent signs up for child care, **there is no delay in service provision**. Navigating the child care system is not confusing.
- The process for obtaining child care should be the **same for children with special needs**. Parents do not have to jump through any additional hoops to receive a child care subsidy for a child that may have special needs.
- When a parent obtains child care, **there are no gaps in the system and services are seamless**. The system follows the child to determine eligibility, as opposed to following the parent. At the same time, parents' child care choices should be honored and respected.

*“Where the system is broken because the system follows the parent to determine eligibility for childcare. When the system should be following the child to determine their eligibility for childcare. So we need a system that follows the child to determine eligibility. Regardless of what the parent situation is. The reason why I say this is because we have parents who are working. We have parents that are trying to attend college. We have parents that are domestic violence survivors who need therapy. We have parents that are also incapacitated because they have a situation where they have a medical diagnosis. We have ADA disabled parents as well as children with special needs. Or you have a CPS case parent, family. A homeless family. Or family that's been reunited after being in foster care. I think we need to look at those type of layers. And I feel like if we had a system that actually followed the child, it would just take those gaps away. No child should have to wait.”*

- **Child care policies are consistent across the state**. For example, a parent from Alameda should be able to receive the same services as a parent from San Francisco.

- Parents experience **case workers that are judgement free and treat them with respect and dignity**. The case workers exude a culture of positivity and are fair to all family structures.

*“I would love to see a culture of positivity happen within childcare or just be ‘hey, congratulations that you’re even thinking about childcare. We know it’s going to be a bumpy ride and we’re here to help you blast off.’ Do a little life coaching with us.”*

- **Social services offices are welcoming spaces for parents of all backgrounds**. Offices have INS-Free Zones signs as well as gender neutral bathrooms, especially for transgender and non-binary parents. All forms include non-binary gender options. For example, instead of “Name of Mother and Name of Father” it would state, “Parent 1 and Parent 2 with an option to mark a box that states Parent 2 is not in the picture. Additionally, social service offices have an outside playground or onsite child care for children.

### How Parents Want to Choose the Right Provider

- When selecting a potential provider, **parents have the option to meet the provider one-on-one** to discuss the facility’s curriculum and the provider’s approach. The provider also offers tours. Alternatively, parents can go to an online source to learn more details about the facility.
- **Child care subsidy vouchers are accepted at all child care facilities**. Therefore, parents can choose their provider from a range of high-quality options. Parents do not have to settle based on where their vouchers are or are not accepted. The amount of the subsidy should also be increased to meet the true cost of the market, otherwise the most child care options may be out of reach to a low income parent who cannot afford high co-payments.
- Additionally, **child care facilities are co-located at high schools** so parents with older children or teen parents can easily access child care.

### Definition of Quality Child Care

- For many parents, quality child care not only means a safe and enriching environment, but also **flexible hours, including nights and weekends**. Many parents have alternative works schedules and require child care options with non-traditional hours.

*“We can access child care by following the child’s eligibility, the child is eligible regardless of what the activities are of the parent, the child is eligible and then they honor the parents’ choices.”*

*“In my dream world of childcare, we have flexible childcare centers that work on the weekends, that work in the evenings, because some of us have weekend jobs. Some of us work at night, past pm, and it puts children in dangerous situations because you’re having to try and figure out ‘What am I*

*going to do with my child?' And you may not make the best decision to where to have your child because you're so desperate."*

- **Child care facilities practice inclusion.** Providers are open to and skilled at caring for children with special needs.
- **Quality child care is available in parents' neighborhoods.** Parents do not have to travel out of their way to pick up and drop off their children at a child care facility.

*"The other thing is, you shouldn't have to feel like you have to go outside of your neighborhood to find quality, and that's another thing, if you don't have transportation, even if a slot opens up on the R&R, the wait list, some parents turn it down, like are you kidding me? My job is over here, I have to go all the way on the other side of town to drop my child off and go all the way to the other side of town for work, and you don't have a car to do that? That's crazy."*

## Reality/Challenges

Parents' vision for their ideal child care scenario was informed by the reality of their child care situation and the challenges they faced navigating the system. The points below outline those key challenges that reflect parents' realities.

### Accessing Quality Child Care

- **Parents that have immigrated to California are often not willing to sign up** to receive a child care subsidy because they are intimidated by new immigration laws.
- **Outreach about childcare subsidies is poor.** Many parents did not know that resources existed.
- **Several providers do not offer a safe environment,** and the county/state does not provide adequate oversight to ensure safety in every provider's facility. As a result, there are several child care providers with persistently unsafe environments.

*"One of the challenges for me was, I had a provider who, when we first met I did my tour and I did my visit, and everything was all shiny and cute, and then I found out later that this person was drinking while they had the kids and they were in possession of other stuff. And so, the reality is the state/county is not following up with these providers, the oversight is not there."*

- Furthermore, parents feel that **existing child care options do not offer adequate mental health services** for youth.
- Parents often need to wait on an **extensive waiting list to obtain a child care subsidy.** One parent reported that she had to wait ten years to get off of the waitlist. As a result, her older children often cared for the younger children, or the children would be cared for by their elderly grandmother.

*“Yeah, I was on a wait list for ten whole years, maybe eleven, and just waiting updating, updating, I went bananas. Updating, updating, updating, so it was a long process and it was really hard because I had my ailing grandmother caring for my kids and she has dementia, and I have to check on grandma so I'm at work and I'm nervous, calling all the time.”*

- **The subsidy amount is very small in relation to the cost of child care.** Often, the subsidy combined with private scholarships is still not enough to pay the full cost of child care. Child care options become limited when parents can only afford a select number of providers. Parents feel like they are “working for the child care.”

*“And a lot of parents do that because I think they're at their end. And they're like, ‘I thought I could figure out childcare without the subsidy with all this.’ Because I was gonna go back to work. But then they realized it cost so much money. That they would actually go into debt with their job. And that's where I was at.”*

*“I feel like you have the parent who's on CalWorks trying to get off CalWorks and needs childcare to get off. Then you have the parent who has a job and has to leave their job and get on CalWorks just to get childcare. That is ridiculous. We're creating recidivism. We're creating recidivism of poverty.”*

*“I was working for the childcare. I worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week, and I still couldn't afford childcare because I had to pay my mom.”*

- Because providers know that many parents are desperate for affordable child care, **parents stated that they have been taken advantage of by providers.** For example, one mother shared how her provider that cared for her children in the evenings would not open her door until midnight, even if the parent arrived earlier, thus forcing the parent to pay more money.

*“What happened was I would get off at 11 o'clock at night. The provider lived near that BART station and I would get her from the childcare and the lady wouldn't open the door until 12 o'clock midnight. And I had to call the police, which routes you to the highway patrol and when 12 o'clock midnight came and the police came and she opened the door. So it's like when you talk about quality, she wanted her money.”*

### **Navigating the Child Care System's Policies and Procedures**

- Parents want to be able to look for and start a job as soon as possible. The availability of child care directly impacts the speed of that process. **Parents experience a significant time gap between the time a parent applied for a child care subsidy and when the subsidy was actually received.** Parents commented that this delay was very problematic for their employment situation and overall stability.

*“I can work or go to school, you have to have already started those things. But then you have to have a series of appointments that are like a month apart. First you meet with the worker. Then you go to whatever the SSA office [county welfare department] is and then you go to Child Care*

*Links [child care subsidy administration agency]. And then you know, all these things. So after 45, 60 days, you could have been working. But you're still chasing your tail."*

*"So when I was actually approved, from that day like, okay you approved, it was like two to three months! And then I kept saying, 'What can I do to fast forward and move this?' I told them, I said, 'I have a job waiting for me in three weeks, four weeks.' And they were like, 'No, you just have to wait.' And I'm like, 'Wait, but I thought the whole point of this service was get me employed.' And it's just so funny because the system, in a way, it makes you believe it's a lie."*

- Furthermore, **case workers encourage parents to sign up for CalWORKS just to get child care**; however, they may not need the additional benefits. As a result, parents must complete an extensive amount of paperwork and in many cases, must complete the Welfare to Work program when it may not be necessary.

*"I had to wait that 40, 50 days and I lost the ability to go back to my job. And I was even telling while I was applying for CalWorks, 'I'm only applying to get your childcare. I need childcare.' I have a possible job waiting for me. I don't need to go through all this workforce thing."*

- Parents communicated that they already feel self-conscious and vulnerable when seeking assistance. The social services caseworkers often exacerbate these feelings through rude, judgmental, and unhelpful behavior. As a result, **parents feel that they are treated like a statistic**.

*"I remember on the birth certificate, it says only one parent, I was grilled by the person when I was applying for childcare, 'So, what about the father, what about the father, what about the father?' All these things, and what was sad to me about that is they were assuming so many different things about me: my sexuality, my gender, the society of this world. So, the childcare system, to me, that's very interesting that it can be very, very heteronormative, and that's very unfair to LGBTQ parents, it's very unfair to parents who are single parents or solo parents by choice."*

*"And so going to social services was just a terrible experience and it wasn't ... I didn't feel like ... You're already feeling like you're at the bottom of the barrel because you had to get to that point. And so for you to be treated like trash that rolled up inside the gutter, it's just not helpful."*

*"Parents get scrutinized, we get stressed out, it makes you almost want to give up. You get so stressed out, you get dehumanized, you're not talked to with dignity. "*

- In addition to poor treatment, **parents feel that child care services are fear-based**. For example, if a parent is claiming domestic violence, they must show proof; however, it may be unsafe to retrieve this documentation. Parents report that there is a lot of pressure from social services agencies to disclose sensitive information that parents are often not comfortable sharing.

*"When you apply for CalWORKS they ask you for the father's information and say, 'We're going to make him pay for the service we provided you on the tail end.' And then all throughout the CalWORKS time, I would get letters from Child Support saying, 'Do you know or have you seen? Have*

*you heard ...?' Blah, blah, blah. All these things and wanting me to go ... Have my put myself in jeopardy to go look at him for that. So it's very much ... Like I said, for me, I just felt like very fear based."*

- One parent explained that she encountered **unfair legal practices associated with CalWORKs**, specifically around the policies and procedures for identifying as a single parent. She knew of a family in which the father, who was there without the mother's permission, was sent to jail for being present at the mother's home when she had claimed she was a single parent.
- Parents also feel like **the process and paperwork for obtaining and maintaining child care is very cumbersome**, which is an added stress for busy parents. Parents stated that going through all the paperwork and processes to keep the child care is like a full-time job in and of itself. Many parents get so frustrated that they ask themselves "Is it worth it?" to try to find quality and affordable child care.

*"As much as I've done, and I've been with Parent Voices for over 10 years now doing childcare advocacy work, it still was so confusing for me to get it with my son, and then once I kind of got the system navigation down to get him childcare, it was a whole other ballgame because I had a daughter with special needs, so I had to learn how to navigate the system all over again with other layers and changes to my family, and it shouldn't be this confusing. Even the smartest of the smartest in this room have been confused by the child care system."*

## Recommendations

Specific policy recommendations emerged from the parents' discussion around their ideal child care scenario. These recommendations are as follows:

1. **Child care subsidy programs should be heavily advertised.** These advertisements should be accessible to all communities, languages, and communicated through cultural navigators when appropriate.
2. **Parents can sign up for child care subsidies when they are pregnant;** this is consistent with other programs such HUD-provided services.

*"Even with the housing authority. You can put on a member, as long as you are over six months pregnant. So even HUD, federal HUD, will allow you to put an extra member as long as you are more than six months pregnant. So that's crazy to me that you can't do that with child care"*

3. **The child care subsidy offers an incentive for parents to attend ECE courses.** This incentive would allow parents to have the resources to learn important information about child development.

*“I also feel that not every parent comes from an early childhood education background, so those of us who have ECE knowledge are going to know what to look for. For parents who may not have that ECE knowledge, how come there isn't some kind of incentive for parents when they're either going through the birthing, prenatal process or they've already had their child, like 'you know what, you can be exempt from the time clock' or 'you can get that paid leave for a year off from work, but we ask that you at least attend every so often early childhood education workshop or a class,' because I think that as parents, every parent should have ECE backgrounds, because you're working with your child. It would help you so much and lessen the stress.”*

- 4. Parents with children under the age of two should be able to apply for child care at the location of their choice.** In other words, the case worker should meet the parent at a location that is convenient for the parent; this may be the lobby in an apartment building or a public park.

*“In San Francisco, the way that they run EBT. Is that a lot of the EBT people will come to you. Because we want to make sure we put food in your mouth and that's what federal government, I mean city government thinks. I think that should apply to anyone applying for CalWORKs under age two. So maybe you don't have to go to CalWORKs office.”*

- 5. Paid family leave is offered for one to two years.** Two years is consistent with WHO policies for breastfeeding. Furthermore, at least the first year of family leave is paid at 100% of the parents' salary. Perhaps identify a way to combine CalWORKs and Paid Family Leave that could at least help a low-income parent get to 100% wage replacement.

*“CalWORK says that if you have a child 2 and under, you're exempt, automatically click the box. I asked them one time, 'Well, why is that?,' and they said 'The World Health Organization says minimum 2 years breastfeeding.' So, they want to make that open and available, and so I think the same thing with paid family leave. So if CalWORKs has that two year mark, that should be across the board, and I would say that if the World Health Organization says it, CalWORK says it, just to follow that. So I would say two years paid family leave, period.”*

- 6. Child care subsidies should be offered to parents who have a moderate income.** Furthermore, the subsidy amount should be relative to the SMI in each county.

*“I think we should have low to moderate income parents on the childcare subsidies, and I know that can be controversial with the state, but the thing is, I think it's sad when parents have to say no to a pay increase because they'll lose their childcare support. It should go up to moderate income, period, across the state, hands down, middle income families, there are a lot of them that are paycheck to paycheck as well, and if they lost their job, it doesn't mean they're not employable. So, I actually think it should go up to moderate income, and again it would be based on per county.”*

- 7. Social services offices are welcoming and inclusive places.** This means that child care is provided on site, gender neutral bathrooms are provided, and forms reflect all family structures. Furthermore, breastfeeding is normalized and accommodated through breast feeding stations (such as [Mamava](#)) in CalWORKS offices.

*“I remember when I was applying for CalWorks I was told to cover up, which is actually illegal. So I think they should have signs saying, ‘You can breastfeed however you want. It’s your legal California right.’”*

*“I had to feed, chest feed my baby every 15, 30 minutes, right? They’re so little. And at the same time, the CalWorks person is like, ‘Oh, sorry. I have to stop.’ We literally stopped what we were doing and she had to leave.”*

**8. The child care system should practice cultural sensitivity,** and practices should reflect an openness and acceptance of all family structures.

*“I think that we need to look at cultural sensitivity. I think that even whether you’re born here or not born here, families have all these different cultural dynamics. We look at LGBTQIA families. Where do they fit in this process and in the navigation in this system, so let’s look at cultural sensitivity in the language, how people are being talked to, and also what resources for child care that are available.”*

**9. All child care providers are paid at least minimum wage,** regardless of whether they are exempt or non-exempt.

**10. Child care subsidies should be available until children are 17 years old.**

*“My dream would be... you know, because I noticed 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, at that age group they’re still children. So, I think that at that age group, it’s really hard for them to stay focused and they can lose track or lose sight of dreams or whatever have you, and they may be left alone a lot, which helps them get in trouble, so my dream would be to have childcare maybe until 17. Because my daughter was left alone a lot, and it’s kind of hard, but that’s how I feel.”*

**11. Child care should be universal,** regardless of a parents’ background.

## **Concluding Thoughts: What do Policymakers Need to Know?**

At the close of the focus group, parents reflected on the key points that legislatures need to know about the lives of parents when making policy decisions.

- **Legislatures do not understand parents’ struggles** and do not know what is best for low-income parents. Legislatures need to engage meaningfully with the community to gain a deeper understanding of families’ lives.

*“I think because they live in such a different world than we do, I think if they are able to see a day in a life some kind of way into a life of different cultures, something like that, like a video of a day in a life, different cultures, for example, different demographics or genders, then they kind of get a peek into what are the challenges of one’s day. They can ... Because they really can’t relate or understand.”*

- **The child care system is broken, but it can be fixed.**



*“So that's literally where the system failed me. And if it didn't, if I got into CalWORKS right away, I would've been off to CalWORKS in a month or two instead of ... How long I been on it now? Ever since the baby was four or five months. A few years.”*

- **Child care is important for society;** legislators should look at it as an investment.
- **Child care needs to be equitable and inclusive.**
- **Legislators should work to correct the system, not the families.**
- **Parents are working hard to better themselves;** they are not lazy or asking for handouts.

*“I just feel like they don't understand us because they're born into wealth. I don't know if all of them are like that, but a lot of them are born into wealth so they don't understand our struggles and they need to be more open to working parents that are just trying to make it. They're going on with their lives and totally different lives. Just be more open to us because we really just want to have a better life just like them. We were not born rich.”*

- **Stop putting all families in one box;** respect all family structures.
- **It is not easy for parents to find quality child care.** Often, older children or elderly grandparents end up providing care.



