

## Early Childhood Education Teachers Deserve Worthy Wages, too!

*Child Care Advocates Push to Increase Workers' Wages  
during national Worthy Wage Day*





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Seattle, WA – Washington state is in the middle of a vehement dialogue about the need to increase public school teachers' wages. The debate centers on how we recognize the importance of the teaching profession. This debate needs to be resolved and extended to the people who care for young children – child care teachers. Each year, May 1<sup>st</sup> is designated national Worthy Wage Day – a day to build community awareness and highlight the importance of quality care for children and its relationship to worthy wages for child care work. Several child care centers in King County will close on Friday, April 30<sup>th</sup> in recognition of Worthy Wage Day in order for teachers and family providers to train and strategize about how to increase child care workers' wages.

The most essential component for quality child care is the quality of the caregiver. However, child care workers are poorly paid, turnover is rampant (averaging 40%), and career ladders are nonexistent. Early childhood education is undervalued and underpaid. Child Care Works for Washington (a coalition of child care advocates), in partnership with the Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI), is advocating for development of a statewide child care career and wage ladder in order to build a ladder to the middle class for early childhood education teachers, and in turn to raise the quality of care for children. EOI designed the pilot career and wage ladder in concert with the Childcare Union Project and DSHS's Office of Child Care Policy last summer. Pay increments for early childhood education teachers would be based on experience, responsibility and education. Establishment of the career ladder is a top priority for child care advocates.

"I've experienced firsthand the devastating effects on young children of high turnover in child care centers. The only way to keep good teachers in the field is to treat us like professionals, which is what the career and wage ladder will do. Our community owes that to children," noted Bahia Rowan, teacher at Able Child Day Care and a leader in the Childcare Union Project, sponsored by District 925 SEIU and Seattle Worthy Wages. As a mechanism for vying for higher wage standards, several child care centers have unionized as part of the Childcare Union Project. Studies have demonstrated that union representation brings wage setting into the open and helps ensure that employers rely on objective factors – skill, effort and responsibility – to set pay rates. A study on "Working Families and Equal Pay" by the AFL-CIO Working Women's Department and the Institute for Women's Policy Research, found that among full-time workers in Washington state, women represented by unions earn an average of \$129, or 27.4% more per week than women with nonunion jobs (\$600 versus \$471). The vast majority of child care workers in Washington state and nationwide are women. For a copy of the Equal Pay study contact the EOI Communications Director at

 (206) 633-6580  or call the AFL-CIO at  (202) 637-5064 .

### Mechanisms for Increasing Early Childhood Education Teachers' Wages

1. **Implement the pilot Career and Wage Ladder.** Governor Locke is considering allocating \$2 million for a pilot career and wage ladder for the next biennium. The pilot will cover 50 child care centers and 500 teachers across Washington state. The pilot program is the first of its kind in the nation where government funding will finance wage increments based on education, while participating centers will pay for increments based on experience and responsibility. Participating centers must agree to implement the career and wage ladder and accept subsidized low-income children. EOI suggests that the state's Office of Child Care Policy monitor the child care centers in the pilot project, and test these centers for quality care in comparison to a control group.
2. **The King County Council will be considering legislation to fund wage enhancements for workers at centers that contract with the county for the care of children from lower income families.** The County is subsidizing the children of working low income and lower middle-income families. However, it has not addressed the poverty-generating wages of child care workers. A pilot program of wage supplements for child care workers in King County could cover 20 centers with 200

teachers caring for 100 children. With total enhancements capped at \$20,000 per center, the annual current expense for the County would be \$400,000. This is only 21% of total child care programs funded by the County.

3. The City of Seattle is considering establishing a \$200,000 wage pool for child care workers.
4. The Child Care Union Project, the Child Care Employers Association, and EOI are applying for federal block grant "quality" funds that would finance a collaborative employee/employer project to raise child care workers' wages.

**for more information about Worthy Wage Day contact Laura Paskin, EOI Communications Director**  
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