



# Pathways to Prosperity: Report From a Convening on Economic Security for Families With Infants and Toddlers

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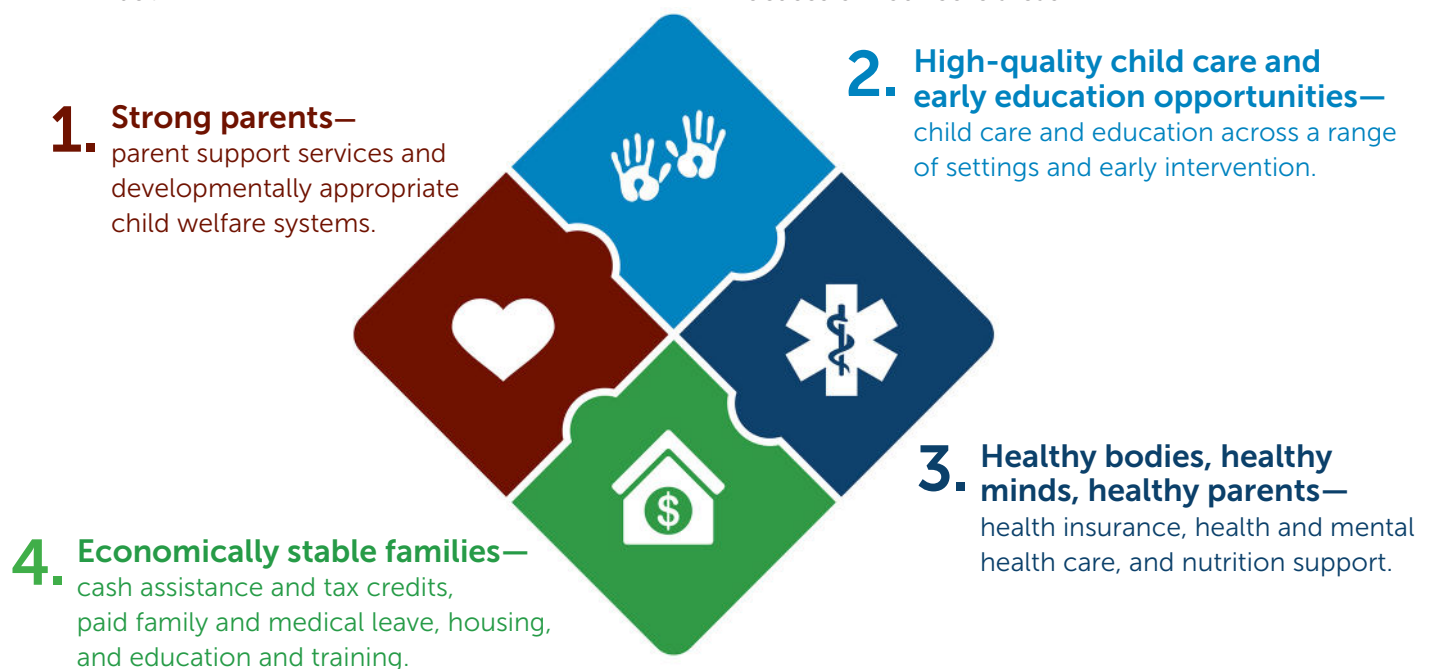
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*In October 2021, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and ZERO TO THREE convened a group of state leaders and national experts to discuss strategies to promote the economic security of families with infants and toddlers. Four policy areas were addressed: cash assistance and tax credits, paid family and medical leave, housing, and education and training. Together, panelists and participants discussed the history of support in each of these areas, recent laws and legislative proposals, and examples of innovative practices. Three themes emerged from the discussions: (1) It is important to focus on both the “whole child” and “whole family” when addressing the economic security of families; (2) It is essential that we understand our past and create the future so that the next generation of policies and practices are anti-racist and promote equity; and (3) The field of early childhood can play an important supporting role in creating pathways to prosperity by building relationships, making sure the child development case for economic security policies is understood, and working in collaboration with those focused more directly on economic justice opportunities for families.*

Innovative policies and programs that promote economic security for families with infants and toddlers are emerging across the country. By creating and getting families onto pathways to prosperity, the harmful long-term consequences of poverty on the development of young children can be avoided. With this understanding, local, state, and national advocates are increasingly calling attention to the intersections between early childhood and economic security policies, and they are working to advance investments in both.

[Building Strong Foundations for Families](#) is a project of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and ZERO TO THREE (ZTT), with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Together, CLASP and ZTT developed the Building Strong Foundations Framework to promote federal and state policies that comprehensively address the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families. The Framework builds on and connects to the policy and advocacy efforts of both organizations and focuses on four core areas:





Importantly, the Building Strong Foundations Framework is grounded in advancing racial equity. According to Jamie Colvard, Director of State Policy at ZTT, “We know that strong policies and systems can be a tool to disrupt and dismantle institutional racism, promote equity, and ensure all children get a strong start in life.”

In October 2021, CLASP and ZTT hosted a 2-day virtual convening for Building Strong Foundations state teams and other advocates, administrators, and stakeholders who receive technical assistance from CLASP or ZTT. The goals of the convening were to:

- better understand economic security policy and the intersections with early childhood policies;
- learn about best practices in states that reflect needs of families and communities; plan for and support effective implementation of relevant federal policy; and
- understand the role of early childhood stakeholders for promoting policies that support economic security for families

with infants and toddlers. The convening occurred at a time when Congress was actively considering the Build Back Better Act, which could result in significant enhancements to traditional safety net programs.

Panel discussions featured national experts and local, state, and federal advocates, and provided a deep dive into the following topics:

- cash assistance and tax credits
- paid family and medical leave
- housing
- education and training

This paper highlights the themes that emerged from the convening as well as key takeaways from each topical area. The hope is that early childhood stakeholders can more clearly see the role they can play in supporting the economic security of families and how this work is ultimately in service of stronger outcomes for our youngest children.

#### [Research on children and poverty](#)

highlights the harmful long-term consequences of poverty on children’s overall health and well-being. For example, poverty harms the developing brain, creates and widens opportunity gaps, and leads to poor physical, emotional, and behavioral health. Poverty also exposes children to environmental toxins including crime and violence that can have negative effects on families and the home environment.

Poverty is especially problematic for families with young children who face unique economic burdens. Parents of infants and toddlers have lower household incomes than their peers without children or those whose children are 5 years or older.



## THEMES

Three essential themes emerged from the convening:

1. The importance of focusing on both the “whole child” and “whole family” for addressing the economic security of families.
2. The need to understand our past and create the future so that the next generation of policies and practices are anti-racist and promote equity.
3. The acknowledgment that the field of early childhood can play an important role in creating pathways to prosperity by building relationships and working in collaboration with those focused more directly on economic justice opportunities for families.

### The importance of focusing on both the “whole child” and “whole family” for addressing the economic security of families.

Early childhood professionals, advocates, and policy leaders understand the importance of supporting the whole child. They know that young children’s development—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive—is interconnected and therefore attention needs to be given to all aspects of development. By focusing on the whole child, early childhood stakeholders can ensure that the comprehensive needs of infants and toddlers are supported and that their foundation for future development and learning is strong. They also know that children develop in the context of their family, so the well-being of the family has an impact on the environment and experiences of children. This is especially important in the earliest years when babies are most vulnerable to external forces and need a nurturing, safe, and reliable environment to thrive.

Just as support for children needs to consider the whole child, support for families needs to consider the whole family. All families have basic needs—food, housing, education, a living wage, access to affordable child care, transportation, and health care. Families with low incomes may need more targeted support. When families struggle in one or more of these areas, there are consequences for everyone in the family, and especially for the youngest members. A whole family approach helps to recognize and support

the overall well-being of the family including the importance of promoting family economic security.

While the early childhood field may understand the importance of a whole family approach, apart from Early Head Start and other programs specifically designed from a two-generation mindset, early childhood professionals, advocates, and policy leaders sometimes focus more narrowly on the developing child and trust that others are attending to the needs of the family. This convening elevated the idea that the early childhood field needs to hold a focus both on the whole child *and* the whole family. As aptly stated by Christin Davis, Infant Toddler Project Manager, North Carolina Early Education Coalition, “We need to look at the totality of the family and how to form another bubble of protection around them...how are we setting you up for success?”



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**The need to understand our past and create the future so that the next generation of policies and practices are anti-racist and promote equity.**

The racist history of policy creation and program development has created an inequitable system that explicitly disadvantages people of color. In some cases, well-intentioned efforts to reduce poverty embedded racist ideas that can still be pervasive today. For example, driven by women college graduates who wanted to give back to the community, the American Settlement House Movement in the late 1800s aimed to eliminate poverty and did so by encouraging immigrant assimilation and the superiority of White American culture. In other cases, explicit discrimination guided policy and program decisions such as redlining, which denied housing loans to people who lived in certain neighborhoods, or the G.I. Bill that failed to benefit Black veterans as it did White veterans. Even the 20th century Mothers' Pension program was only for those who were considered worthy caregivers or deserving mothers. "Only three percent of families receiving the Mothers Pension were Black," said Ife Finch Floyd, Senior Economic Justice Policy Analyst at the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. These and other discriminatory policies have lasting effects, denying families of color the opportunity to achieve economic stability and build wealth across generations.



Changing the long history and structure of programs rooted in racism is not easy. We all must do our part to learn and acknowledge how past policies and programs were created to be inequitable and how the effects manifest today. To ensure we do not continue to perpetuate this inequity, we need to lean into efforts that will root out and change the structures that discriminate against people of color, and we need to create new policies that can provide a more equitable future for all families.

**The field of early childhood can play an important role in creating pathways to prosperity by building relationships and working in collaboration with those focused more directly on economic justice opportunities for families.**

Early childhood policymakers and advocates increasingly understand that family economic security cannot be an afterthought; it is fundamental to families' ability to provide a safe, secure environment for their infants and toddlers. All families should make a living wage that allows them to cover the basic needs of their family. At a minimum, they need paid time off to bond with their new baby, and the financial well-being to afford quality child care, housing, health and mental health care, and food.

Importantly, the early childhood community can bring the child development case to discussions about family well-being. They can speak to the influence on children's development of housing, nutrition, health and mental health care access, education, and training for the workforce.

From those working to shape policy at the federal, state, and local levels to those implementing programs in communities, it is incumbent on all early childhood stakeholders to build relationships, make sure the child development case is understood, and work in collaboration with those focused more directly on economic justice opportunities so to ameliorate poverty and ensure families and their children can reach their full potential.



## STORY OF BRIANNA CRUSOE

In 2018, Brianna Crusoe, mother of a 6-month old and a toddler, left her job at the casino and applied to the Women in Construction program at Moore Community House in East Biloxi, Mississippi. “I knew I was never going to be able to get ahead and provide for my family on the salary from the casino. My cousin showed me the Women in Construction flyer and I decided to step out on faith and applied,” said Crusoe. Three years later, Crusoe is a proud member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). Her new life suits her family—at the casino, she had to work evenings and weekends; now she is able to work regular business hours and that means she has time to play with her children on the weekends, help them with their homework, and put them to bed at night.

“I learned things in this program that I didn’t know I could do. I came in with no money, no financial help, and I kicked butt. I’m getting the same pay as these men out there; I’m stable now. I have health insurance, and vision and dental, too. And if I pass away today, my kids will have a death benefit. But the biggest thing for me was to have child care for my kids when I work. Knowing I had free child care let me know I could conquer anything,” said Crusoe.

Crusoe recognizes that her skills are in demand. IBEW will easily place her anytime she might need a new job. And Women in Construction is there to help her, too. She still turns to them if she has questions or needs to make connections.

“I was a struggling mother. This program gives women a second chance for stability and a career. It feels good to know that I have a career that will be here 10 years from now,” reflects Crusoe.

*More about the Women in Construction program is shared later in the education and training section of this report.*

## ECONOMIC SUPPORT POLICIES FOR FAMILIES

Convening panelists and participants focused on four policy areas—cash assistance and tax credits, paid family and medical leave, housing, and education and training. Highlights from discussions related to each of these topics follows.

### Cash Assistance and Tax Credits

*“Research has found that poverty has a detrimental impact for children, and cash assistance to families with young children can promote positive health, education, and economic outcomes for those children.”*

Ashley Burnside, Policy Analyst,  
Center for Law and Social Policy

Families with complex lives sometimes need extra financial support to weather times of economic challenge. According to Floyd, cash assistance can help reduce stress levels for par-

ents and contribute to more economically stable living overall. Further, cash assistance and tax benefits can help families meet basic needs such as child care, food, rent, utilities, and transportation. But all too often, cash assistance fails to reach the families who need it most and does not lift all families out of poverty. And tax credits may not reach the populations who face the greatest barriers to filing a tax return.

Panelists shared the history of policies related to cash assistance and tax credits. They noted that early welfare policies—from the Mothers’ Pension to Aid to Dependent Children—predominately benefited White children whose mothers lacked the support of a breadwinner and thus were believed to be in need of assistance. Later, in the late 1960s, President Nixon introduced the Family Assistance Plan which would have provided a guaranteed basic income for all families. Nixon’s effort failed, and in the mid-1970s Congress instead passed the Earned Income Tax

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Credit (EITC) which provides cash support for those working but earning low wages. By the mid-1990s, Congress was increasingly focused on personal responsibility and passed the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program that required work participation and included punitive sanctions such as the ability of states to stop all benefits if families did not meet requirements. Congress also passed the Child Tax Credit, originally a \$500 per child non-refundable credit that applied only to those families earning enough to file a federal tax return. “Because of this [income requirement] more than half of Black and Latinx children were excluded from the Child Tax Credit,” said Burnside.

Today, progress is being made in 23 states and the District of Columbia where TANF benefit amounts have increased, and two states and the District of Columbia where full family sanctions have been repealed. Seven states have enacted a child tax credit in addition to the federal credit, and nine more have introduced legislation to do so. In addition, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic’s assault on the economy, in 2021 Congress passed legislation to provide stimulus payments to families. This temporary support included an increase in the Child Tax Credit and a change to make it fully refundable and available to families as advance monthly payments, and it included expansion of the EITC. Both of these measures will revert to previous payment levels and terms for tax year 2022 unless extended by Congress. The expanded Child Tax Credit alone had the potential to lift nearly 50% of children out of poverty, and to have even greater benefits for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous children.

At the time of the convening, current discussions centered on further expanding the EITC, making the Child Tax Credit expansions permanent, and supporting local demonstrations on guaranteed basic income.

Despite these additional opportunities brought forth through federal policy as a response to COVID-19, panelists raised concerns that many families are not applying for and receiving the benefits to which they are entitled. Barriers include language and reading level challenges, worry about immigration status, lack of needed documentation, lack of access to a computer and the internet for electronic filing, and complicated filing rules.

It was suggested that early childhood professionals and advocates can play a role in helping get the word out about these financial opportunities and connecting families with those who can assist them in filing the appropriate forms to claim their benefits. Support is especially needed for families who typically earn too little to file taxes and thus have little or no experience with the process. Some may be able to file on their own if directed to the online non-filer simplified tax return, where they can apply for the Child Tax Credit. Those with other barriers may need free and informed help to file a return. Without help, some families may miss out on other federal and state tax benefits or be unable to deal with complicated issues such as a noncustodial parent wrongfully claiming the children. Unfortunately, free tax-related help to harder-to-serve persons is not widely available.





## THE MAGNOLIA MOTHER'S TRUST

Started in 2018 with private funding, The Magnolia Mother's Trust, a guaranteed income initiative of the Jackson, Mississippi, nonprofit organization Springboard to Opportunities, was created by and for residents living in federally subsidized low-income housing. "Our program is radically resident driven. We heard from our families that they couldn't get to their goals without cash, and so together with the families, we designed the program," said Sarah Stripp, Program Manager, Springboard to Opportunities—The Magnolia Mother's Trust.

The Magnolia Mother's Trust provides a guaranteed income to low-income Black mothers who live in the target communities, opt-in to participate, and then are selected via lottery. Support is given in the form of \$1,000 cash payments for 12 months, and \$1,000 contributions to 529 education savings accounts for each child.

Enrolled mothers participate in workshops on financial education, goal setting, and building capital. A social worker also supports the mothers to set personal goals, address mental health concerns, and return to school.

Now in its third cohort, The Magnolia Mother's Trust finds that mothers are feeling empowered to make choices including investing more time and energy to prioritize their children and education rather than juggling multiple jobs to barely make ends meet. The moms are saving for college and purchasing health and life insurance.

A community of support and best practices for those interested in starting a guaranteed income support program can be found here: [Guaranteed Income Community of Practice](#)

For more information: <https://springboardto.org/magnolia-mothers-trust>



## Paid Family and Medical Leave

*"One of the most important things for early childhood is being in stable, thriving families and paid family and medical leave supports that. It's both part of a child care system, because it provides parents of newborns time at home. And it is also something that allows for all our families and family members to be really well cared for, which has direct and important consequences for children. So it is really deeply connected to every part of an early childhood agenda."*

*Andrea Paluso, Executive Director,  
Family Forward Oregon*

Paid family and medical leave (PFML) is a critical benefit to support families' economic security when a child is born, adopted, or newly fostered; when a family member is seriously ill; or when someone needs time off to care for their own serious medical need. It provides families time to bond and establish consistent, nurturing rela-

tionships that are critical for the early social and emotional development of babies. Time at home with newborns helps with establishing breastfeeding, ensuring babies get to all well-child medical visits, and receiving necessary immunizations. There are benefits for new mothers too, including reducing the odds for postpartum depression and improving physical health. PFML is also critical if a child has medical needs that require significant treatment. Without access to PFML, too many working parents are forced to choose between caring for a child and their economic security.

Panelist Marianne Bellesorte, National Implementation Director, Family Values@Work, noted that more than 102 million workers (77%) nationwide lack PFML through their employer. The first PFML law was passed in 2002 in California, and since then, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York, the District of Columbia, Washington, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Oregon, and Colorado each passed PFML laws that look slightly different but

have the same basic structure—the laws provide workers time to care for themselves or loved ones without risking their economic security. These state laws, combined with years of federal advocacy, Congressional attention, and strong public support, provided an impetus for President Biden to include a universal, comprehensive PFML program in his 2021 American Families Plan, followed by House Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal including a similar program in the House Build Back Better Act.

While a national PFML program could set an important floor, states can continue to innovate to provide more robust PFML benefits to all families. For example, states can continue to expand the number of weeks available for leave and increase wage replacement, particularly so that low-income workers are better able to afford to take advantage of PFML. Paluso reminded convening participants that “It’s women, it’s communities of color, it’s aging populations, it’s people living



with disabilities, it’s immigrant workers, it’s our lowest income workers who are disproportionately impacted by not having access to paid family and medical leave.” Bellesorte added, “We need a triple A rating for paid leave to show that it is affordable, accessible, and adequate.”

Those in early childhood can lend their voice to federal and state efforts to pass or expand PFML laws, and where laws exist, they can help families understand how to access the benefit.

## TIME TO CARE OREGON

Time to Care Oregon—a coalition of racial and gender justice organizations, labor, public health organizations, and community advocacy groups representing seniors and children—came together to win the most inclusive PFML law in the country, the FAMLI Equity Act.

They started by defining the problem and who it impacts. They grappled with the recognition that caregiving is undervalued and that ignoring the realities for caregivers perpetuates gender, race, and class injustice. “We turned our attention to who is most likely to be left out,” said Andrea Paluso, Executive Director, Family Forward Oregon. They recognized that women are more likely to be harmed by lack of a system because they provide more of the unpaid care in families. Further, more White workers have access to paid leave compared to Black, Indigenous, and Latinx workers. They focused on developing policy principles rooted in equity and inclusion, and they used a race/gender/class narrative to show the impact PFML would have for Oregon.

When fully implemented, the FAMLI Equity Act will be available to all working Oregonians regardless of size of employer, hours worked, type of industry, or type of family. For workers who have earned at least \$1,000 in wages in a base year, the law provides up to 12 weeks of paid leave for self-care, family care, and parental leave; and an additional 2 weeks for pregnancy-related conditions. Progressive wage replacement is calculated as a percentage of the Oregon Weekly Average Wage, with lowest income workers earning 100% wage replacement and a diminishing percentage as wages increase. The maximum wage replacement per week is \$1,200 adjusted annually. The program is funded through a social insurance pool and administered by the Oregon Employment Department.

For more information: <http://www.timefororegon.org>

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## Housing

*"There is a bevy of research that shows that living in a home with inadequate heating and cooling, or dirty drinking water, or pests, or mold, or second-hand smoke, or other known environment hazards are detrimental for the health of babies.... Children in about 24 million homes nationwide have exposure to lead, and we know exposure during early childhood causes irreversible damage to their brains."*

Mike Koprowski, National Campaign Director,  
Opportunity Starts at Home

Access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing is critically important for families and especially their young children. Poor quality housing, housing instability, and homelessness can have detrimental impacts on children's health and development. Because of redlining and other discriminatory policies and practices, people of color are more likely to live in substandard housing, making this a racial justice issue.

According to panelist Koprowski, people should not spend more than 30% of their income on housing, but for most low-income families, that is not a reality. Many spend 50% or more, which means they have less money for other necessities, leaving them with food insecurity and an inability to afford medicine and other needed services. "Nationally, only one in four households who qualify for federal housing assistance actually receives it, leaving the majority of households to fend for themselves... And due to decades of underfunding by Congress, the nation's public housing stock is in a state of disrepair with 10,000 to 15,000 units of public housing lost every year due to obsolescence or decay," said Kim Johnson, Housing Policy Analyst, National Low Income Housing Coalition.

President Biden's 2021 Build Back Better plan would make a significant down payment to address housing challenges for families with young children. At the time of this convening, the House-passed Build Back Better Act contained provisions that would extend housing vouchers to an estimated 300,000 of the nation's low-income families and invest \$15 billion in the

creation of an estimated 150,000 units of deeply affordable, accessible housing through the national Housing Trust Fund. It would also provide \$65 billion to make desperately needed repairs to the nation's public housing stock.

In addition, the bipartisan Family Stability and Opportunity Voucher Act would extend rental assistance to 500,000 families with children under age 6 who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness or housing instability. The bipartisan Eviction Crisis Act would provide funding for families with emergencies so that they can stay in their home.

There is a role for early childhood stakeholders to play in housing policy. From weighing in on the size of low-income housing to meet families' needs, advocating where housing should be built so that children will have access to quality public schools, or opposing developments near landfills or where there is no transportation, the voice of early childhood advocates can be invaluable in the push for housing reform. According to Koprowski, "If you are not in the housing world, it can be overwhelming. The point is that it's not about you becoming a housing policy expert, but building a relationship of trust with the housing experts and standing with them.... Your issues are deeply intertwined. We are naturally siloed by sector and it takes an intentional effort to reach out to groups from other sectors and build relationships with folks who swim in other streams."

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Mike Koprowski,  
National Campaign Director,  
Opportunity Starts at Home



## OPPORTUNITY STARTS AT HOME CAMPAIGN

The Opportunity Starts at Home Campaign was launched in 2018 for the purpose of bringing new voices from education, climate, health care, nutrition, and other fields into the housing space so together there can be a strong and unified voice advocating for federal housing policy. It was founded by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and Children's Health Watch. ZTT and CLASP are partners as well. An intersectional steering committee reflects the reality that the crisis of affordable housing in America impacts many.

The Campaign's policy agenda centers on three strategies: (1) bridging the growing gap between renter incomes and housing costs through rental assistance; (2) expanding the stock of affordable housing for low-income households; and (3) stabilizing households by providing emergency assistance to avert housing instability and homelessness. In response to COVID-19, the Campaign was able to rally support for emergency rental assistance and push the Administration for an eviction moratorium.

While the primary focus is on federal policy, the Campaign also recognizes the importance of state policy. A competitive Request For Proposal process was used to identify housing and non-housing groups that pledge to take on state- and federal-level housing policy as a pillar of their work. Seven states were funded to be part of the first 2-year cohort, and eight states were part of the second. Multisector state coalitions are in operation in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, and Utah. Support to the state coalitions includes policy analysis, communications, advocacy strategies, peer learning opportunities, and a \$50,000 grant to support their work.

The Campaign is funded primarily by Funders for Housing and Opportunity with additional support from the American Association for Retired People and the Butler Family Fund. Most recently, the Ballmer Group joined the community of funders.

For more information: <https://www.opportunityhome.org>

### Education and Training

*"High-quality jobs that offer basic dignities like livable wages, benefits, and advancement potential are not always accessible. Education, training, and workforce development programs that center working parents and people with dependent care responsibilities are not the norm, but should be."*

Molly Bashay, Senior Policy Analyst,  
Center for Law and Social Policy

Sustainable, high-quality jobs and access to quality child care during working hours are key to economic justice for families with infants and toddlers. But systemic inequities limit many parents' access to the education and training that is necessary to prepare for employment. In addition, lack of access to child care that covers work and training hours further limits opportunities. This is

especially detrimental to women who continue to be the primary caregivers in families and are often excluded from some of the high paying jobs in their communities. Unaccounted costs of training and employment—such as transportation, uniforms, tools, books, and materials—can be an additional barrier for families experiencing economic insecurity.

Convening participants discussed the fact that as America builds back post COVID-19, it is important to be mindful of these challenges and to create valuable and realistic work and training

*"Because women make less than men and are concentrated in minimum wage jobs, gender inequity prevents women from working their way to economic security."*

Carol Burnett, Director,  
Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative,  
and Director, Moore Community House

opportunities that can reverse systemic inequities and provide opportunities for workforce re-entry, including for nontraditional students. Importantly, as part of President Biden's 2021 Build Back Better plan, families would pay no more than 7% of their income for child care, and they would have access to free universal pre-kindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds.

States can leverage federal funding to support low-income families with young children.

From the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), to TANF, states can play an important role in supporting families so that they can return to work and have child care assistance. Still, attention will need to focus on countering gender and racial bias in workforce and child care policies that prevent women from earning their way to economic security. The voices of early childhood stakeholders will be essential in these discussions.

## MOORE COMMUNITY HOUSE—WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

In 1924, Moore Community House began serving children of seafood workers in East Biloxi, Mississippi. Today, the nonprofit operates an Early Head Start program and a workforce training program for women in the construction and advanced manufacturing fields.

The Women in Construction program started in 2008 in recognition that Mississippi women make up half of the workforce yet they represent 75% of those making minimum wage, leaving women-led families in persistent poverty despite full-time work. Moving mothers into living wage jobs requires countering race and gender bias and training women for occupations where they are underrepresented and could be better paid.

Women in Construction program leadership meets regularly with industry leaders to understand the skills workers need and then the program trains women accordingly. Free training programs range from a few weeks to a few months, with women graduating the program with marketable skills that are attractive to local industry—from shipbuilding to residential and commercial contractors. Graduates are able to enter jobs with starting wages of \$15 per hour or more, double the state minimum wage. The program recognizes the importance of child care and therefore offers participants free child care for 6 months and during that time they connect the women to the state child care system to access ongoing benefits. In addition to the technical training and child care supports, women have access to workshops about legal rights, protections, sexual harassment, and financial management, all topics aimed at support women's long-term independence and success.

More than 700 women have graduated from the Women in Construction program, and with a placement rate of 74%, the program is making a real difference for the economic well-being of families. **“Job training and child care—it’s the magic road for economic security,” said Carol Burnett, Director, Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative, and Director, Moore Community House.** And the unions and business community appreciate the program too because they know they will be hiring women with strong skills. According to Burnett, “We hear our graduates are great workers, and so they become the best ambassadors of the program. They are opening a lot of doors for other women to come behind them.”

The Women in Construction program is funded primarily by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, with additional support from private donations and local banks. The program has received some support from the U.S. Department of Labor including a Strengthening Working Families grant in 2016 and the Women in Apprenticeship and Non-Traditional Occupations in 2021. Funding to support the child care component of the program comes from a subgrant from the state TANF program.

Importantly, the concept of training for available living wage jobs plus child care has carried over to a new statewide program that is broader than construction. Proof of concept from the Women in Construction program is bringing about more recognition of both the training and child care needs of parents.

For more information: <https://www.moorecommunityhouse.org>

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## MOVING FORWARD

Convening presenters and participants shared many ideas for ways early childhood policy-makers, advocates, and professionals can work to support the economic well-being of families with infants and toddlers. It is important to note that the early childhood community does not need to lead on these issues. Instead, the community can partner with leaders in these spaces and bring its unique perspective and the child and family lens to economic justice discussions, planning, and implementation. In doing so, the early childhood community will add value to those sectors that are working to end economic insecurity and achieve an essential goal of advancing child well-being for all babies and toddlers.

Suggestions for moving forward are outlined below:

- Center the voices of families and providers to understand their experiences and how intersections between early childhood and economic security efforts can be strengthened and structural barriers to inequality can be ameliorated.
- Be explicit about naming, understanding, and addressing the root causes of disparities that created the racial inequities that result in some children and families being further from opportunity than others.
- Use state and community needs assessment processes to identify potential partners including those involved in job training, small business, housing, health access, and other sectors that are important for supporting the whole family.
- Sharpen the message about why partners from other sectors should care about families with infants and toddlers by highlighting the impact that persistent economic insecurity has on child development. [\*The State of Babies Yearbook\*](#) is a reliable source for data on family well-being and can assist in telling the story.
- Build reciprocal relationships with identified partners to share information about early childhood and learn from partners about their work. Together, seek to acknowledge the intersections and develop strategies for working collaboratively.
- Identify ways partners can coordinate services for families, breaking down silos and streamlining access. For example, a home visitor could connect families to programs that will help the family apply for the child tax credit or for housing assistance.
- Encourage policymakers to adopt a two-generation approach for policies and programs that provide holistic support for the well-being of the whole child and whole family.
- Establish mechanisms for cross-agency and cross-department collaboration as another important step toward coordinated, holistic support for families.
- Frame needs and opportunities in an equitable way focusing on fairness, beyond just the “right thing to do.” Inviting others to share their caregiving story can help people (especially legislators) see how the issues touch their lives too.

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*“Tennessee has seen encouraging success in cross-agency collaboration, notably through innovative opportunities like the Children’s Cabinet, which connected leadership of child-serving departments to address child-specific needs. This encouragement to work together to find solutions for Tennessee’s children is ongoing.”*

Melissa Binkley,  
Director, Regional Intervention Program,  
Tennessee Department of Mental Health  
and Substance Abuse Services.



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## CONCLUSION

Building Strong Foundations for Families, a project of CLASP and ZTT in partnership with state teams, is about promoting federal and state policies that comprehensively address the well-being of infants, toddlers, and their families. Early childhood stakeholders know well how to advance policies and programs that focus on strong parent-child relationships, high-quality child care and early education, and healthy outcomes. Some have less direct experience with and knowledge of policies and opportunities to support economically stable families.

This virtual convening provided an opportunity for state policy teams to learn together about economic security policies and intersections with early childhood. National experts shared the history and current opportunities related to cash assistance and tax credits, paid family and medical leave, housing, and education and training. Innovative strategies were shared—from standing up a guaranteed income program for low-income mothers, to building a workforce training program paired with child care, to crafting equitable paid family and medical leave state policy. Panelists emphasized that early childhood stakeholders can play an important supporting role by sharing information with the families they serve, partnering with other sectors that are working to advance economic justice, and making the child development case for increased investment in and support of pathways to economic prosperity for families with infants and toddlers.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**AUTHOR:** Deborah Roderick Stark, Consultant

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## CONVENING PANELISTS

### Cash Assistance and Tax Credits

**Moderator:** *Tiffany Ferrette*, Policy Analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy

**Speakers:**

- *Ashley Burnside*, Policy Analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy
- *Ife Finch Floyd*, Senior Economic Justice Policy Analyst, Georgia Budget and Policy Institute
- *Melanie Malherbe*, Managing Attorney, Welfare Law Unite, Greater Boston Legal Services
- *Sarah Stripp*, Program Manager, Springboard to Opportunities—Magnolia Mother's Trust

### Paid Family and Medical Leave

**Moderator:** *Jamie Colvard*, Director of State Policy, ZERO TO THREE

**Speakers:**

- *Marianne Bellesorte*, National Implementation Director, Family Values@Work
- *Michelle McGrain*, Director, Congressional Relations, Economic Justice, National Partnership for Women and Families
- *Andrea Paluso*, Executive Director, Family Forward Oregon

### Housing

**Moderator:** *Amanda Szekely*, Senior Advocacy Partnerships Manager, ZERO TO THREE

**Speakers:**

- *Kim Johnson*, Housing Policy Analyst, National Low Income Housing Coalition
- *Mike Koprowski*, National Campaign Director, Opportunity Starts at Home
- *Bob Palmer*, Policy Director, Housing Action Illinois

### Education and Training

**Moderator:** *Christine Johnson-Staub*, Senior Policy Analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy

**Speakers:**

- *Molly Bashay*, Senior Policy Analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy
- *Carol Burnett*, Director, Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative, and Director, Moore Community House
- *Brianna Crusoe*, graduate, Moore Community House Women in Construction Program

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources were shared as part of the convening and may provide additional guidance to early childhood stakeholders on supporting the economic security of families:

### General Resources

- [Building Strong Foundations for Families](#): A project of CLASP and ZTT to promote federal and state policies that comprehensively address the well-being of infants, toddlers, and families.
- [Economic Security Convening, October 2021](#): Slides from the convening with national and state experts as well as Building Strong Foundations state teams and other interested stakeholders. (Need to make a hyperlink to the PPT.)
- [Five Ways Poverty Harms Children, 2014](#): Article from Child Trends explaining the effects of poverty.
- [State of Babies Yearbook: 2021](#): National and state-by-state data compiled by ZTT on the well-being of infants and toddlers.
- [Advancing Equitable State Child Care Policies Using ARPA and Other Relief Funds, 2021](#): CLASP brief of state implementation efforts of ARPA funds to support families with young children and child care providers.

### Resources on Recent Federal Policy Efforts

- [What's in the American Rescue Plan for Babies?: 2001](#): Fact Sheet from ZTT describing provisions of the American Rescue Plan.
- [What's in Build Back Better for Babies?: 2021](#): Fact Sheet from ZTT describing what is in the Build Back Better Plan for babies.
- [Understanding Child Care and Pre-Kindergarten Provisions in the Build Back Better Act, 2021](#): Brief from CLASP detailing the child care and pre-k provisions in Build Back Better.

### Resources on Cash Assistance and Child Tax Credit Policy

- [IRS Child Tax Credit Resources and Guidance, 2021](#): Links to materials and guidance from the IRS regarding the 2021 Child Tax Credit and Advance Child Tax Credit.
- [GetCTC.org](#): Website for filing to receive the Child Tax Credit. The portal officially closed on November 14, 2021.
- [Get My Payment](#): Website to determine the status of stimulus payments for families.
- [Child Tax Credit Overview, 2021](#): This document from the National Conference of State Legislatures provides an overview of the federal Child Tax Credit and information on state-level tax credits where they exist.
- [State Earned Income Tax Credits](#): This document from the Urban Institute provides information on state earned income tax credits.
- [Guaranteed Income Community of Practice](#): This community of practice convenes leaders to collaborate on guaranteed income pilots, programs, and policy.



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- [Magnolia Mother's Trust](#): This guaranteed income program was featured in the convening.
  - [10 Things to Know about the Expanded Child Tax Credit, 2021](#): This fact sheet from CLASP highlights key things to know about the program.
  - [TANF and the First Year of Life: Making a Difference at a Pivotal Moment](#): Report from CLASP on the impact of TANF on infants, toddlers, and their families.

### **Resources on Paid Family and Medical Leave Policy**

- [Paid Leave Advocacy Toolkit](#): This toolkit from ZTT includes a fact sheet, talking points, and graphics that can be used when advocating for paid family and medical leave policy. It also includes guidance for writing an op-ed.
- [Time to Care Oregon](#): This collaborative effort to advance paid family and medical leave policy was featured in the convening.
- [10 Things To Know About Paid Family and Medical Leave in BBB, 2021](#): This piece from CLASP highlights key things to know about paid family and medical leave in Build Back Better.

### **Resources on Housing Policy**

- [Opportunity Starts at Home Campaign](#): This campaign to advance housing policy was featured in the convening.

### **Resources on Employment and Training Policy**

- [Moore Community House Women in Construction](#): This program was featured in the convening.
- [PBS News Hour on Women in Construction](#): This is a recording from a PBS News Hour episode that featured the Women in Construction program.
- [Helping Parents Access Child Care for Education and Training](#): This report from the Urban Institute provides insights for state leaders to consider in supporting parents in accessing child care.