



NATIONAL CENTER FOR
THE EARLY CHILDHOOD
WORKFORCE

RIGHTS RAISES RESPECT

NEWS AND ISSUES FOR THE
CHILD CARE WORK FORCE

From Welfare to Working in Child Care: Possibilities and Pitfalls

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In the current political climate, it's far too easy for child care teacher and provider issues to be lost in the fight to save even a few of the "strings" in the social safety net. But there is one child care work force issue that is getting a great deal of political attention under welfare reform: the effort to turn AFDC parents into child care teachers or providers themselves.

To many policy makers, the idea seems like a perfect fit: it builds the child care supply for children in poverty, while creating a job opportunity for their parents. But child care is by no means an unskilled job, and it cannot be viewed as a simple solution to the welfare-to-work dilemma. With 70 percent of the child care work force earning poverty-level wages, a job in child care hardly guarantees an AFDC recipient a clear path to self-sufficiency. The prospects are difficult for family child care, too: after expenses, regulated family child care providers earn about \$8,500 annually, unregulated providers earn only about \$4,000. And, without a guarantee of adequate training and support for newly recruited caregivers, the supply of new child care services (regulated or unregulated) generated under welfare reform will undoubtedly be very poor in quality. In the April 1994 *Compensation Initiatives Bulletin*, NCECW published principles to guide any program to employ welfare recipients in child care. The issue remains on the welfare "reform" agenda, and the principles are restated below.

- Those who enter the field must choose to do so, and must be able to demonstrate an aptitude for the work. Recruits must be helped to develop realistic expectations for their future in the early childhood profession.

- Training programs must be targeted toward improving trainees' basic literacy and math skills as needed; must include specific content on child development, and early childhood curriculum and methods; must be culturally and linguistically appropriate; and must provide opportunities for

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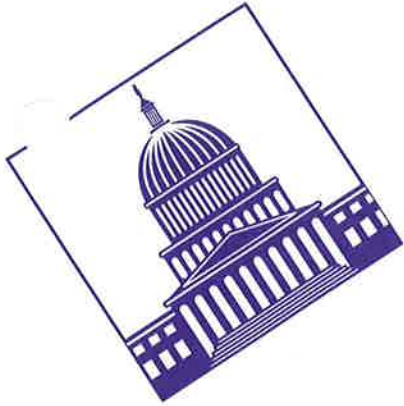
Worthy Wage Day: May 1, 1996—Vote Smart!

By Rosemarie Vardell

"I just read about the Worthy Wage Campaign. What's it all about? How can I get involved?".... "This will be our fifth Worthy Wage Day, and we're doing some empowerment training and a speak-out downtown. Some centers want to close for the day—can you tell us how other people have coordinated a closure?".... "We have a governor and a state assembly that are making harmful decisions about children and child care—how can we use Worthy Wage Day to educate the voters?"

We can always tell when Worthy Wage Day is approaching, because calls like these start com-

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Welfare Reform Update

As we go to press, a final federal “welfare reform” package is nowhere in sight. On February 6, one month after President Clinton vetoed the House/Senate Conference Committee’s welfare bill, the National Governors Association (NGA) presented its own welfare proposal to Congress—which is now drafting a revised bill with the NGA proposal in mind. There is strong pressure for the House and Senate to act on the revised bill after their spring recess, and it’s uncertain whether the new bill will ultimately invite or discourage a Presidential veto. The NGA proposal would:

- repeal the 60-year entitlement of financial aid to families and their children who have no means of support;
- repeal child care as an entitlement for poor families and replace it with \$8 billion of additional spending over seven years — barely ad-

equate for the increased child care need among working poor and AFDC parents;

- cut in half the current federal investment in boosting child care quality over the same period;
- repeal basic child care health and safety protections achieved with bipartisan support in 1990;
- prove more harmful, especially in its Medicaid provisions, than the Senate welfare reform bill proposed last fall.

Whether or not federal welfare legislation passes this year, most states are already working on “welfare reform” plans of their own—often with devastating effects, as state child care administrators and child care advocates struggle with slashed budgets and growing demands for services. We urge you to stay informed about, and active in, child care budget decisions being made in your state.

In Our Next Issue

Turnover: How much does it cost; strategies for managing and reducing it.

Accreditation: What are the implications for staff wages and turnover?

Higher Ratios: Why they won't solve the staffing crisis.

From Welfare to Working in Child Care

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apprenticeship with experienced caregivers.

- Child care training must position new providers for career mobility in the field, not only by being integrated into existing training systems, but by leading to a viable credential, certificate or credit, as well as providing economic reward.
- Child care providers trained under welfare reform must have continued support in order to succeed, including ongoing mentoring from other caregivers, health benefits, and assistance with child care costs for their own children.

In the coming months, we will all need to make sure that the voices of the child care workforce are heard in our states and communities as policy makers debate ways to recruit welfare recipients into child care employment. It will largely be up to us to ensure that all the stakeholders understand the importance of making sound investments to create decent and viable child care jobs. *(See the article on new NCECW research to promote such efforts, page 7)*