

Racism and the Economy

focus on Education

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Title of Proposal: Centering Equitable Practices in Public Policy

Why Babies?

The first three years of a child’s life are the foundation for all later development, as young children discover the world through experiences with their parents and other caregivers. A young child’s early relationships, especially with parents and caregivers, shape the architecture of the developing brain.¹ These relationships require time, care, and consistency – conditions that unpredictable work schedules and a lack of paid leave can often thwart. If we care about education, the economy, and the future of this nation, we must start with policies that contribute to the healthy development of all babies, and especially babies of color.

Why Economic Security?

Young children develop in the context of their environments, where stability and supportive relationships nurture growth. Economic volatility leads both to material hardships, which can deprive young children of nutrition and shelter essential to their well-being, and to the increased stress that affect emotional health. All families benefit from parenting supports, and many – particularly those facing economic instability – require access to additional resources that help them meet their children’s needs. Centering equitable work practices in public policy will allow for families to better meet basic needs as well as cultivate and strengthen the relationships with their children – the foundation of healthy development

Families with young children are more likely to experience economic volatility. Two in five infants and toddlers live in a household with low income.² Moreover, children of color are more likely to grow up in a household with low income — nearly 60 percent of Black and Native American children, and more than 55 percent of Hispanic children live in families with low income as compared to less than 30 percent of White children.³ Families living with low income are also likely to have unpredictable work schedules and lack paid leave. Over a third of young children in households with low income have a parent who receives less than a week’s notice of their schedule⁴ — less than a week to make sure child care is in place, plan travel logistics, and rearrange everyday routines. And just 17 percent of all working people in the United States have

¹ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2019). Brain architecture.

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

² Keating, K., Cole, P., Schaffner, M. (2020). State of babies yearbook: 2020. <https://stateofbabies.org>

³ NCCP. (n.d.). United States Demographics of Low-Income Children. <https://www.nccp.org/demographic/>

⁴ The Shift Project. (2019). It’s about time: How work schedule instability matters for workers, families, and racial inequality. <https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/its-about-time-how-work-schedule-instability-matters-for-workersfamilies-and-racial-inequality>

access to paid family leave through their employers; lower income workers are even less likely to have access.⁵

Instability due to unpredictable work schedules or an inability to take time off work often give rise to household economic insecurity and can lead to depression and stress in parents and caregivers.⁶ Very young children are closely attuned to the well-being of their parents or other caregivers and are very much impacted by the stress and emotions their caregivers' feel. Studies have found that children's cognitive and emotional outcomes are significantly impacted by a caregiver's depressive symptoms.⁷

Predictable Work Schedules

Unstable and unpredictable work schedules often lead to household economic insecurity, dramatic increases in hunger, and other hardships.⁸ The constant juggling of work schedules and family needs can lead to depression and stress in parents and caregivers and a home environment of increased instability and chaos. When parents and caregivers are subject to just-in-time work schedules, their children likely will be affected as well. The instability and unpredictability that parents or other caregivers experience may spill over at home and negatively affect children by upsetting family routines, disrupting developmental child care time, and introducing strain and stress into everyday interactions that would, in an ideal setting, be warm and supportive.

Further, there are stark racial and gender disparities when looking at who is most likely to be impacted by unpredictable work schedules.⁹ Research confirms that many of the low-wage, hourly jobs in which unpredictable schedules are found, are jobs that women are more likely to hold and that women of color are at especially high risk of being subjected to unpredictable work schedules.

Across the United States, life upended by unpredictable work schedules is the reality for many families. A recent study found that nearly three in four workers with low wages experience last minute shift changes¹⁰ inevitably impacting their families as well. Beyond that, two in three workers with low wages have less than two weeks' notice of their schedules¹¹ and one in three

⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018, September). National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2018 (Tables 16 and 32). Retrieved 8 November 2018, from <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2018/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2018.pdf>

⁶ Teti, D. M., Gelfand, D. M., Messinger, D. S., & Isabella, R. (1995). Maternal depression and the quality of early attachment: An examination of infants, preschoolers, and their mothers. *Developmental Psychology*, 31(3), 364-376. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.31.3.364>

⁷ Teti, D. M., Gelfand, D. M., Messinger, D. S., & Isabella, R. (1995). Maternal depression and the quality of early attachment: An examination of infants, preschoolers, and their mothers. *Developmental Psychology*, 31(3), 364-376. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.31.3.364>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ National Women's Law Center. (2020). The schedules that work act: Giving workers the tools they need to succeed. <https://nwlc.org/resources/schedules-work-act-giving-workers-tools-they-need-succeed/>

¹⁰ Equitable Growth. How U.S. workers' just-in-time schedules perpetuate racial and ethnic inequality. (2019). <https://equitablegrowth.org/how-u-s-workers-just-in-time-schedules-perpetuate-racial-and-ethnic-inequality>

¹¹ Ibid.

workers receive their schedules with less than one-week notice,¹² impeding their ability to plan for things like child care, paying rent, and other necessary household expenses.

Paid Family and Medical Leave

A baby's brain is influenced most significantly by the everyday moments they experience with parents and caregivers. When parents have a new baby, unhurried time helps them become attuned to their infant's development. These positive, consistent relationships during babies' earliest days, weeks, and months result in children who are better equipped for success in school and in life. Paid family and medical leave is also associated with better rates and length of breastfeeding, higher rates of immunizations and participation in well child checks, and improved opportunity for mothers' recovery and parental adjustment.¹³

Because the United States lacks a national paid family and medical leave policy, economic necessity forces many new parents to go back to work and forgo precious bonding time with children. And these choices are not faced equally by all families: The lack of a permanent national paid family and medical leave policy disproportionately impacts Black and Hispanic families who overall have less access to paid leave and fewer financial resources to allow them to take leave they may need, even when paid a percentage of their wages.¹⁴

Proposed Policy Solutions

The majority of young children growing up today are raised in households in which all of the adults able to work, do work.¹⁵ Although working parents are the norm, family-friendly workforce policies have struggled to keep up with the needs of today's families. Millions of people in America are working in sectors vital to the economy but are paid low wages and are subject to just-in-time scheduling practices and lack paid family and medical leave.

Predictable Work Schedules

Current scheduling practices make it next to impossible for working people to meet their own responsibilities and equally critical roles outside of their jobs, including that of caregiving to our future workers, innovators, and leaders. While businesses reap the benefits of dynamic scheduling practices as families struggle, predictable work schedules could benefit families and businesses alike. A growing body of research has found that increasing predictability, stability, and flexibility of worker schedules can lead to higher productivity and increased sales for retail

¹² National Women's Law Center. (2020). The schedules that work act: Giving workers the tools they need to succeed. <https://nwl.org/resources/schedules-work-act-giving-workers-tools-they-need-succeed/>

¹⁴ National Partnership for Women and Families. (2018). Paid family and medical leave: A racial justice issue – and opportunity. NPWF. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>

¹⁵ The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2009). Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2004/04/Young-Children-Develop-in-an-Environment-of-Relationships.pdf>

stores—a solution benefiting the worker and the economy.¹⁶ To ensure a strong economy, national policies should recognize the needs of workers who also are raising families. Legislation such as The Schedules that Work Act, first introduced in 2014, would address many of the problems caused by just-in-time scheduling practices while fostering the equity and stability that families need. Policies aimed at building strong family-first work supports for workers with unpredictable schedules must:

- Protect workers requesting a schedule change for various reasons including child care;
- Incentivize predictable and stable schedules; and
- Guarantee workers the right to rest between shifts.

Paid Family and Medical Leave

While some states and localities have already adopted paid family and medical leave policies, the time parents have to bond with and care for their babies or a family member should not be dependent on income, workplace, zip code, or gender. The Administration and Congress should create a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave insurance program, such as the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act, that embodies the following core principles:

- Accessibility for all working people;
- A meaningful length of leave—at least 12 weeks;
- Coverage for the full range of medical and family caregiving needs established in the Family and Medical Leave Act;
- Affordability and cost-effectiveness for workers, employers, and the government;
- Inclusivity in its definition of “family”; and
- Protection from employer retaliation for workers who take leave.

To ensure a strong economy, national policies should recognize the needs of workers who also are raising families. These proposed policies would address problems families face with just-in-time scheduling practices and lack of paid leave while also fostering the security that helps babies thrive.

¹⁶ Economic Policy Institute. (2018). ‘Fair workweek’ laws help more than 1.8 million workers: Laws promote workplace flexibility and protect against unfair scheduling practices. <https://www.epi.org/publication/fair-workweek-laws-help-more-than-1-8-million-workers/>