

Improving child care will help parents on job



Jim Spurlino

If you spend your work-day worrying about how well your kids are doing in child care, you're not alone. A recent study shows families living in 39 percent of Ohio's ZIP codes are stuck in "child care deserts," where three to five children are typically in line for every licensed and age-appropriate day care slot. Equally troubling, another study found child care is unaffordable for more than 7 of 10 families nationwide.

Fortunately, Congress and lawmakers around the U.S. now have a fresh reason to do something to help you. According to a new report from the ReadyNation business leader group, the child care crisis is costing working parents, taxpayers and employers about \$57 billion every year.

Titled "Want to Grow the Economy? Fix the Child Care Crisis," the report shows employers lose about \$13 billion every year based on extra costs to hire new employees to replace parents who quit because they can't afford child care, from lower productivity when work is disrupted by child care problems and from lower revenues based on lower worker output.

Not surprisingly, there's also a \$7 billion cost to taxpayers based on lower GDP and other factors, on top of the \$37 billion parents lose

due to reduced pay, fewer opportunities for promotions and other factors.

The report also shows how the crisis creates career instability. About 1 in 5 parents surveyed for the report were reprimanded for their performance because of problems related to child care struggles. About 13 percent had to quit their jobs due to child care problems.

Tackling the problem head-on would be a smart political move for lawmakers at both the state and federal level. That's the lead message in a First Five Years Fund poll released on Jan. 7 that shows voters are eight times more likely to have a favorable opinion of members of Congress who support funding for quality early learning.

As a member of ReadyNation, I don't want the careers of working parents to be compromised by their inability to find and afford quality child care. That's why I support recommendations to expand the eligibility for publicly funded child care to families earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level, as opposed to the 130 percent limit right now. That would help parents of two who earn up to \$49,700 a year, most of whom could never afford to spend more than \$9,000 a year for child care, which is the average annual cost for center-based infant care in Ohio.

Ohio should also like to tackle the "child care deserts" problem by establishing a comprehensive

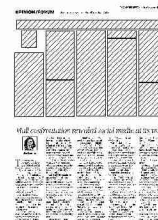
early childhood system that directs financial resources strategically to reach underserved communities and that continually improves the services offered to our kids and families.

While I hope lawmakers create better child care options in Ohio, I also see plenty of opportunity for meaningful action by Congress as well. It took one significant step in 2018 by essentially doubling funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which allows states to subsidize child care to help more parents work or attend job training or educational programs.

However, it's not enough. We need a bold, bipartisan plan to address three key facts: Nearly one-third of parents across the nation struggle to find care. The average annual cost of infant and toddler care in private child care centers in at least 28 states is higher than public college tuition and fees. And only 11 percent of child care nationwide is accredited as "high quality."

This final point is particularly troubling given the stakes for young children themselves.

Research demonstrates that a child's brain undergoes its most crucial period of development from birth to the age of 3, when more than 1 million neural connections are produced each second. That's good news for the youngsters who head off to high quality child care as their folks head off to work — and a



significant challenge for millions nationwide who will languish in low-quality environments because that's all their parents can find or afford.

Jim Spurlino, a Dayton businessman, is a member of ReadyNation, a non-partisan organization of business leaders who promote policies to strengthen educational achievement.