

2024 ParentsTogether Storytelling Cohort



Fighting for Economic Security For Families

As any parent knows, raising a child in the US can feel impossible. Families go it alone with no paid family leave, skyrocketing child care costs, the end of family-focused pandemic aid, and a general sense from society that their child is their problem. Polling backs this up: 78% of parents say raising a family in the US is getting harder. When asked why, 85% point to rising costs of food and essentials.

The fact is, it doesn't need to be this hard. There are viable solutions to parents' challenges that have strong parent support. 90% of parents support making child care affordable for every parent; 89% support requiring employers to give parents paid time off to take care of new children; and 81% support continuing the expanded Child Tax Credit. Yet parents seldom hear from leaders about these solutions – and relief in the form of policies like paid leave or the expanded, monthly Child Tax Credit can feel completely out of reach.

For the past four years, ParentsTogether has grown and supported a powerful groundswell of parents determined to create change by shifting the conversation about what is possible for families and building support for the policy solutions that would change the game for American families. Parents across the country have come together to achieve wins for families such as the Summer EBT program which helps families keep food on the table when school is out, the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, and the PUMP Act.

At the heart of this work are everyday parents who give it their all every single day to give their children the best life possible. The parents in the following pages have stories that are all too common across the United States – and illustrate how vital it is that our leaders actually offer support and relief to millions of families struggling to get by. Their voices are powerful – as is their resolve to fight for economic policies to help all children thrive.



Amy Funes

Queens, New York

Issue Areas: Child care, CTC, affordable housing

Amy is a single mother to her 5 year old son. When she was first pregnant, she didn't realize what the cost of child care would be for her son. She found herself in a domestic violence shelter for some time after her son's birth, and during that time she was still working, trying her best to navigate work and life as a single parent. Her salary was too much to qualify for any child care subsidies, but too little to afford child care. She went through a lot to try and find any support she could, and ultimately decided to leave her job to receive government assistance. When the pandemic shut everything down, she was receiving unemployment and the monthly Child Tax Credit, which allowed her to move out of the shelter and find an apartment she could afford. Around this time her son was diagnosed with autism, but she was unable to find the proper support he needed because of COVID. She found a lower paying job in retail that allowed her to qualify for child care support while still remaining on SNAP, but eventually she was told she was making too much money to qualify for any government assistance and found herself in the same situation all over again. After finding herself in shelter again for a year, she finally was able to qualify for a housing subsidy that has allowed her to rent an apartment. However, she must remain on public assistance to continue to qualify.

Her goal is to overcome this "welfare cliff" by obtaining her MSW so she can find a high enough paying job to cover her basic needs. And she's doing this all while navigating the cycle of needing childcare and specialized services for her son, Leo.

"It was easier to afford things during the pandemic when we were all receiving extra assistance. It's possible to do it, so why do we continue these cycles that keep families in poverty?"



Ashley Trent

California City, California

Issue Areas: CTC, WIC, affordable child care, Head Start

Ashley is a mother of 5 kids, with another one on the way! Ashley's family has struggled with the cost of groceries due to inflation, affording child care (especially during the summer months), and keeping up with bills along with their family's basic expenses. The expanded Child Tax Credit allowed her family to catch up on bills and other expenses, and WIC allowed her to afford fresh fruits and vegetables for her kids. Her youngest son is in their local Head Start program, and she actively gives input as a parent on the Head Start Policy Council in her district. With the summer in place, she feels lucky to work from home, but it's hard for her to keep her kids entertained. Child care and summer programs are not affordable, and with the intense summer heat, play time outdoors is limited for her kids.

"It's a lot to talk about in a few sentences, but it's harder now to live than it has been since my children were born."



Jasmin Cruz

Orem, Utah

Issue Areas: WIC, child care, children with learning disabilities.

Jasmin is a mother of 2 young girls. When her first daughter was born she was eligible for WIC benefits, and she was able to receive educational resources that were helpful for her as a first-time mother. WIC allowed her to afford fruits and vegetables for her family, and even allow her daughters access to enrichment activities like memberships to the zoo and local museums. Now her youngest daughter is turning 5 years old and her WIC benefits will be coming to an end. She and her husband both have part-time jobs, but without the extra support from WIC, she is concerned with how her family will afford fresh produce with the increased cost of groceries. Together, they make too much to qualify for any other assistance, but not enough to make up for what they will lose from their WIC benefits ending.

“I have two children that are kinder age. I recently started a new job and was expecting things to be easier (financially). However it is getting harder. We lost our Medicaid coverage and CHIP only covers certain things. We have a child with special needs and we need as many resources available for her. WIC and SNAP have been so helpful for our family, but we have since lost SNAP, and now WIC is a major concern since we will be losing that too.”



Brittani Barnett

Charlotte, North Carolina

Issue Areas: Student loans, affordable child care

Brittani is a single mom of 3 who has had to work two jobs to make ends meet. She received her Masters in Mental Health and Wellness with a focus on Family Dynamics. Her student loan repayments started in January 2024 and they're estimated to be around \$1000 a month. During the pandemic, the expanded Child Tax Credit helped her catch up and stay ahead on utility bills. She recently had to resign from her job as an in-home social worker due to the challenge of affording summer care for her 8 year old daughter and her employer not being accommodating to her scheduling needs. With all the rising costs due to inflation, she is very concerned on how she's going to afford to pay back her loans, afford childcare, and stay up to date with her bills. As a single parent, much of her paycheck is already spent before she receives it and her two older kids help her with expenses as is.

“It’s really hard to have to leave a job you love because they cannot accommodate your needs as a parent. It’s equally frustrating that child care is not affordable and that parents are left to choose between the well-being of their child or their job.”



Jon Gromek

Lakewood, Ohio

Issue Areas: Paid Leave

Jon is a father to two young boys. He lost his job 5 months before his second child was born. He started a new job close to his son's due date, but this job offered no paid leave and he was not eligible for PTO for the first 90 days. The timing of his new job rolled right into the timing of the birth of his son. His son was born on a Friday, and Jon had to go back to work the following Monday, leaving his wife at home with their toddler and newborn. This also impacted them financially. They were a two parent household, with one working adult, no paid leave, and their salary was a quarter of what they both make collectively now. His second son experienced health issues shortly after being born, and Jon's inability to take time off also made it difficult to take his son to appointments and ensure he received the care he needed. Since his experience, Jon has worked with paid leave campaigns on a national level and is an advocate for parental paid leave especially for fathers.

“No parent should have to fear missing the birth of their child or not being able to be there for their family to support and enjoy what should be a celebratory event. There should be better paid leave policies for fathers to bond with their children.”



Liz Bayer

Royal Oaks, Michigan

Issue Areas: Affordable child care, Mental Health, Postpartum Care

Liz is a mom of two who was working as a crisis counselor for a non-profit organization during her first pregnancy. After she gave birth, she struggled to find affordable, reliable child care and had to cut back on her hours as a result of her employer not accommodating her scheduling needs. When she had her second child, she was working remotely and had initially requested 1-2 months to prepare financially and emotionally to go back to work. Her employer gave her 2 weeks to find child care so she could return to work. It was impossible for her to achieve. Now she works as a mental health counselor for expecting and postpartum mothers and is passionate about providing support/resources to other mothers who are struggling with similar issues.

“We are constantly under pressure to do more with less. Is it a wonder we are feeling stressed and overwhelmed? We must work harder to provide for our families financially, but also be flexible to be available for our children because the support needed for new parents often does not exist.”



Crystal Douglas

Grand Blanc, Michigan

Issue Areas: Student debt, child care, CTC, affordable housing, children with learning disabilities

Crystal is a single parent to a 9 year old son. During the pandemic she moved in with her father to be his caregiver, and now she finds herself in the unique position of being both a parent and caretaker. In recent years, she has had to navigate a multitude of economic challenges such as affording child care, student loan repayments, and finding affordable housing. Her son was diagnosed with Global Developmental Delay and when the pause on student loans ended, she found herself having to choose between her son's enrichment and therapy services for his learning disability or making her student loan payments. She has \$80k in student loan debt and the repayments make it difficult to save or afford things like therapy services and childcare. She makes too much to qualify for child care subsidies, but too little to afford child care.

“In one way or another my family has been impacted by the following: difficulty getting pregnant, managing being a parent with the rising cost of housing, student debt, and other concerns. All while managing my son's educational needs.”



Megan Duhs

Boca Raton, Florida

Issue Areas: Summer EBT, child care

Megan is a mom of 3. She has two step sons ages 16 and 13, and an 8 year old daughter. Currently she struggles with finding affordable child care or summer camp programs for her daughter.

Everything is too expensive so her daughter stays home with her brothers while Megan works during the day, even though it is far from an ideal situation. She feels that her daughter is missing out on enrichment opportunities for her age, but does not have other options. Megan's family has recently been impacted by Florida's governor rejecting Summer EBT funds. Her kids receive free lunch during the school year, and her family relies on having that extra help during the summer. Without it, they have to ration their groceries just to make it last through the week.

"My kids receive free school lunch and it's been a huge blessing for them to be able to have something to eat everyday at school. Summer time is hard because we have to basically ration food and be very conscious of how much food and what we buy because it's so expensive."



Tasha Marshall

Augusta, Georgia

Issue Areas: Summer EBT, child care, healthcare, food insecurity

Tasha is a mother of 3 children ages 3, 13, and 22 years old. Her husband and 3 kids share a home with a roommate and her toddler in order to afford their rent. Recently, Tasha had to quit her job because they went from a 3 car household to a 1 car household. Her husband works 2 jobs, her older son also works 2 jobs and will sometimes donate plasma in order to make ends meet. With one car, she is now the one who drives everyone to work and appointments, and finds herself driving over 150 miles each week. She, her husband, and her son do not have health insurance, so if they require medical attention when they get sick, they find themselves going to the emergency room to receive care. Tasha is now able to stay home with her 3 year old since quitting her job, but her family often sacrifices quality time together as a result of the rest of the household having to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Her 13 year old daughter receives free lunch during the school year, but since Georgia has opted out of Summer EBT funding, they are without that extra financial help for groceries during the summer. This often means not buying meat unless it's on sale, or rationing food to make sure everyone is able to eat. With the rising cost of food, it's becoming challenging to make groceries last throughout the week.

“Without the added support from SUN Bucks this summer, my family has really struggled to buy food and pay rent and bills. We've had to make use of several food pantries in our area to supplement our groceries. Parents from across the state are calling on Governor Kemp to stop putting politics over Georgia's children. We want him to do the right thing and change course so that families have access to this important nutrition program next summer.”