

# Making Ends Meet: Challenges Facing Parents in Low-Wage Jobs—and Their Children

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spring  
into action

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# Many low-wage jobs are growing...

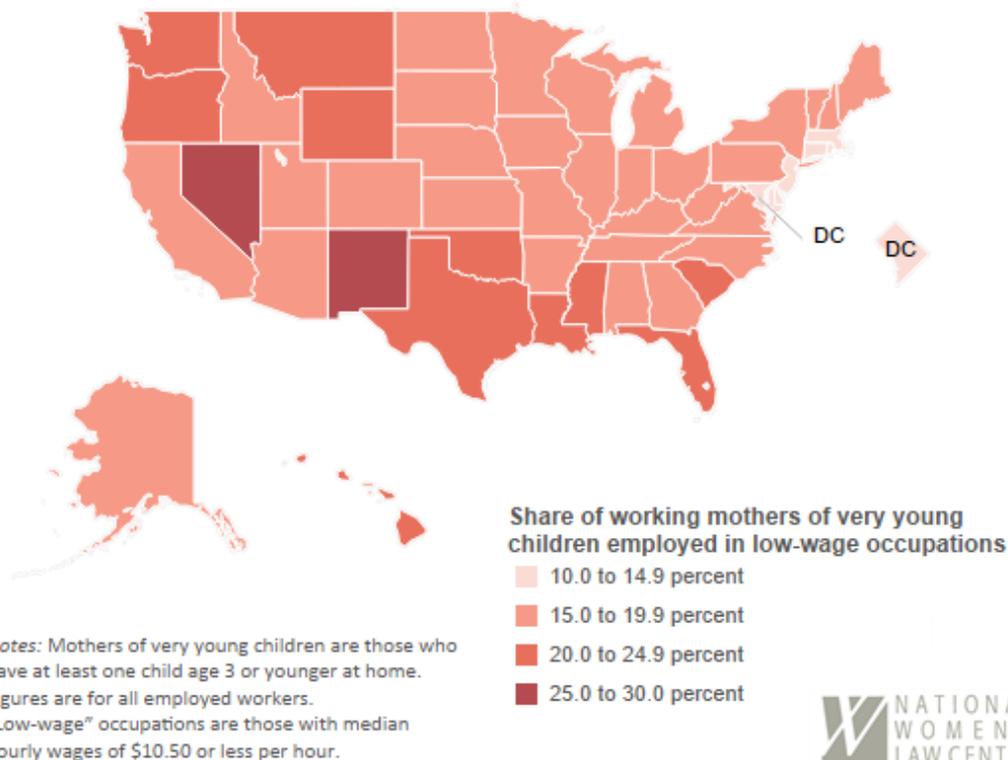
Occupations with the most job growth, 2016 – 2026 (BLS projections)

| Occupation (2017)                                | Share Women | Share Black | Share Asian | Share Latinx | Median Hourly Wage | Employment Change, 2016-2026 |         |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------------|---------|
|  |             |             |             |              |                    | Number (in 1000s)            | Percent |
| <i>Overall workforce</i>                         | 46.9 %      | 12.1%       | 6.2%        | 16.9 %       | \$18.12            | 11,518.6                     | 7.4%    |
| Personal care aides                              | 83.7%       | 24.8%       | 9.1%        | 20.7%        | \$11.11            | 777.6                        | 38.6%   |
| Comb. food prep/serving workers                  | 60.0%       | 17.3%       | 4.4%        | 22.8%        | \$9.70             | 579.9                        | 16.8%   |
| Registered nurses                                | 89.9%       | 12.3%       | 8.7%        | 6.9%         | \$33.65            | 438.1                        | 14.8%   |
| Home health aides*                               | 88.6 %      | 33.9%       | 5.6%        | 16.7%        | \$11.16            | 431.2                        | 47.3%   |
| Software developers (apps)                       | 18.7%       | 5.6%        | 32.4%       | 6.2%         | \$48.94            | 255.4                        | 30.7%   |
| Janitors & cleaners (except maids/housekeeping)  | 35.2%       | 18.6%       | 3.8 %       | 31.7%        | \$12.02            | 236.5                        | 9.9%    |
| General & operations managers                    | 34.1%       | 8.3%        | 4.5%        | 11.4%        | \$48.27            | 205.2                        | 9.1%    |
| Laborers & freight, stock, material movers, hand | 19.9%       | 20.2%       | 3.8%        | 22.2%        | \$13.00            | 199.7                        | 7.6%    |
| Medical assistants                               | 91.6%       | 15.0%       | 4.0%        | 27.9%        | \$15.61            | 183.9                        | 29.0%   |
| Waiters & waitresses                             | 69.9 %      | 9.2%        | 7.6 %       | 20.9%        | \$10.01            | 182.5                        | 7.0%    |

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics – 2017 Current Population Survey ([Table 11](#)), May 2017 [Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates](#), 2016 Employment Projections ([Table 1.4](#))

# ...and many parents work in low-wage jobs.

## Mothers of Very Young Children (0-3) in Low-Wage Occupations



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# What do low-wage jobs mean for families?

*In many low-wage jobs...*

LOW PAY  
+  
ERRATIC SCHEDULES  
+  
NO PAID LEAVE  
=  
**STRESS**

Surviving on low wages strains parents and children.  
[nwlc.org/lowwageparents](http://nwlc.org/lowwageparents)

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# Inadequate pay

*This is pretty much how my day goes: I get up, and get my daughter to school by 8 am. I am at my first job by 9 am. I get off at 1 pm and try to take a nap before I pick up my daughter at 5:30 pm. We do dinner and homework, and I try to take another nap. Then I go to work at my second job at 10 pm in a warehouse because I'm not getting the hours with home care, and if I do get the hours it's still not enough money. . . . I make it home by 7 am and start over. Some days I'm going off of three or four hours of sleep. On Saturday, sometimes I get to sleep late, sometimes I'll get up and try and do a movie with her . . . but if I do that, a bill doesn't get paid.*

*I have rent, life insurance, car insurance, the light bill . . . I work at least 60 hours a week, so I now make too much for food stamps and my daughter doesn't get free lunch—that is another \$400 a year for food . . . so the struggle is real with me right now.*

**Jonelle**, a home care worker and warehouse employee in Illinois

# Unstable & unpredictable work schedules

Parents in low-wage jobs can face multiple scheduling challenges.

- 🍃 Nonstandard timing
- 🍃 Unpredictability
- 🍃 Instability/variability in hours
- 🍃 Involuntary part-time work
- 🍃 Limited schedule control

*I work 5 am until 11 pm or midnight regularly. A lot depends on the parents' schedules, which change all the time. When the schedule changes, from morning to night, it will be past midnight when they arrive. Because they don't have anywhere else to leave the kids. We don't charge more for that because the parents can't pay, so what's the point?*

*. . . It makes me sad to have to wake up their kids to go home in the middle of the night. To get them out of bed and wake them up, and take them outside, especially in the winter, is hard on them. And then we get notes from their teachers saying they are falling asleep in class.*

**Marisol**, a child care provider in Chicago

# Lack of paid time off for caregiving

*Access to paid leave by selected characteristics, 2017*

|  | Paid Family Leave | Paid Sick Days | Paid Vacation |
|--|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| All workers                                | 13%               | 68%            | 76%           |
| Management, professional & related workers | 24%               | 88%            | 88%           |
| Service workers                            | 7%                | 46%            | 52%           |
| Full time                                  | 16%               | 81%            | 91%           |
| Part time                                  | 5%                | 35%            | 36%           |
| Wages in:                                  |                   |                |               |
| Lowest 25 percent                          | 6%                | 43%            | 50%           |
| Highest 25 percent                         | 24%               | 89%            | 91%           |

*Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Compensation Survey (March 2017), Table 32, Leave benefits: Access, private industry workers.*

# What do low-wage jobs mean for child care?

For many low-wage workers, affordable, safe, flexible child care is nearly **IMPOSSIBLE** to find.

Surviving on low wages strains parents and children.  
[nwlc.org/lowwageparents](http://nwlc.org/lowwageparents)



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# Challenging work schedules especially constrain child care options.

- Formal child care centers and preschools mostly provide care on a weekday, full-time, regular schedule.
- Licensed family child care homes are more likely to offer part-time and evening care, but still few weekend or night hours.
- Informal family, friend, & neighbor (FFN) care is often the only setting available for parents who work evenings, weekends, and/or variable hours.



# How can we set families up for success?

- 🌱 Invest in child care
  - 📄 New federal \$ presents opportunity; long-term – Child Care for Working Families Act
  - 📄 Include FFN care; support nontraditional hours care
- 🌱 Raise the minimum wage
- 🌱 Regulate work schedules
- 🌱 Establish paid family & medical leave
- 🌱 Require paid sick days

(...and more!)

# For more information

- 🌿 National Women's Law Center resources
  - 📖 Report – [Set Up to Fail: When Low-Wage Work Jeopardizes Parents' and Children's Success](#)
  - 📖 Agenda for Action – [Set Up for Success: Supporting Parents in Low-Wage Jobs and Their Children](#)
  - 📖 Resource collection – [Parents, Children, and Low-Wage Jobs](#) (includes messaging guidance, data, strategies to support FFN care, and more)
- 🌿 Contact me: [julie.vogtman@nwlc.org](mailto:julie.vogtman@nwlc.org)