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Understanding Child Care in America

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Child care costs have skyrocketed, forcing many families to make difficult tradeoffs between work, finances, and the care they want for their children. As policymakers seek solutions, understanding parents' experiences and priorities is essential. To better understand these challenges, we partnered with GBAO to survey parents about their child care experiences and priorities. Below are three key takeaways on parents' child care preferences, cost challenges, and efforts to balance work and caregiving responsibilities.

1. Parents are satisfied, but many would choose differently.

- Parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the safety and quality of their child care arrangements.
- Although 89% of parents using day care centers are satisfied with the care they receive, nearly half say they would prefer a different type of care arrangement.
- Half of parents would prefer to stay home with their children rather than use center-based child care.

2. Child care costs and work schedules force difficult tradeoffs.

- 60% of parents say child care is one of their top monthly expenses, and nearly one in five households report that someone has quit a job because of child care costs.
- Lower-income parents are especially likely to quit a job, change their work schedules, and rely on informal care arrangements to manage costs.
- Parents working non-traditional hours face greater challenges finding reliable care and are more likely to change their schedules or cut back their hours.

3. Parents want greater workplace flexibility to manage child care.

- Employers play an important role in child care support, with 64% of parents getting at least one child care benefit through their job.
- Parents prefer flexibility over on-site child care or subsidies—even when child care is one of their largest monthly expenses.

