

At Home Infant Care

HB 449

Sponsor: Gail Gutsche

At Home Infant Care (AHIC) allows for low-income (at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Line) parents to care for their children in their own homes. This program enjoys a broad base of support and will have many positive effects for the state of Montana. AHIC will:

- *help many families deal with the critical shortage of infant child care,*
- *provide a proven cost savings to the child care scholarship program,*
- *support the importance of the earliest years in a child's development and*
- *show that Montana values parenting as work.*

There is a great demand across this state for infant childcare. Parents with very young children struggle to meet the demands of work and family. During the first 24 months of a child's life, bonding with their parents is profoundly important to their development.

- According to the Children's Defense Fund, 59 percent of mothers with infants (children under age one) are in the labor force.

At Home Infant Care addresses major problems with affordable and quality childcare in a simply and effective way.

At Home Infant Care saves Montana money!

- The results from Montana's AHIC Pilot Project show a definitive cost savings
- ***The total program savings amounted to \$114,388.36***

We owe it to the children of Montana to respond to the critical shortage of infant childcare. This session we are in the position to do this. AHIC was run as a pilot project in 2001 with exceedingly positive outcomes.

It is time to get this successful and cost effective program up and running again for Montana's families.



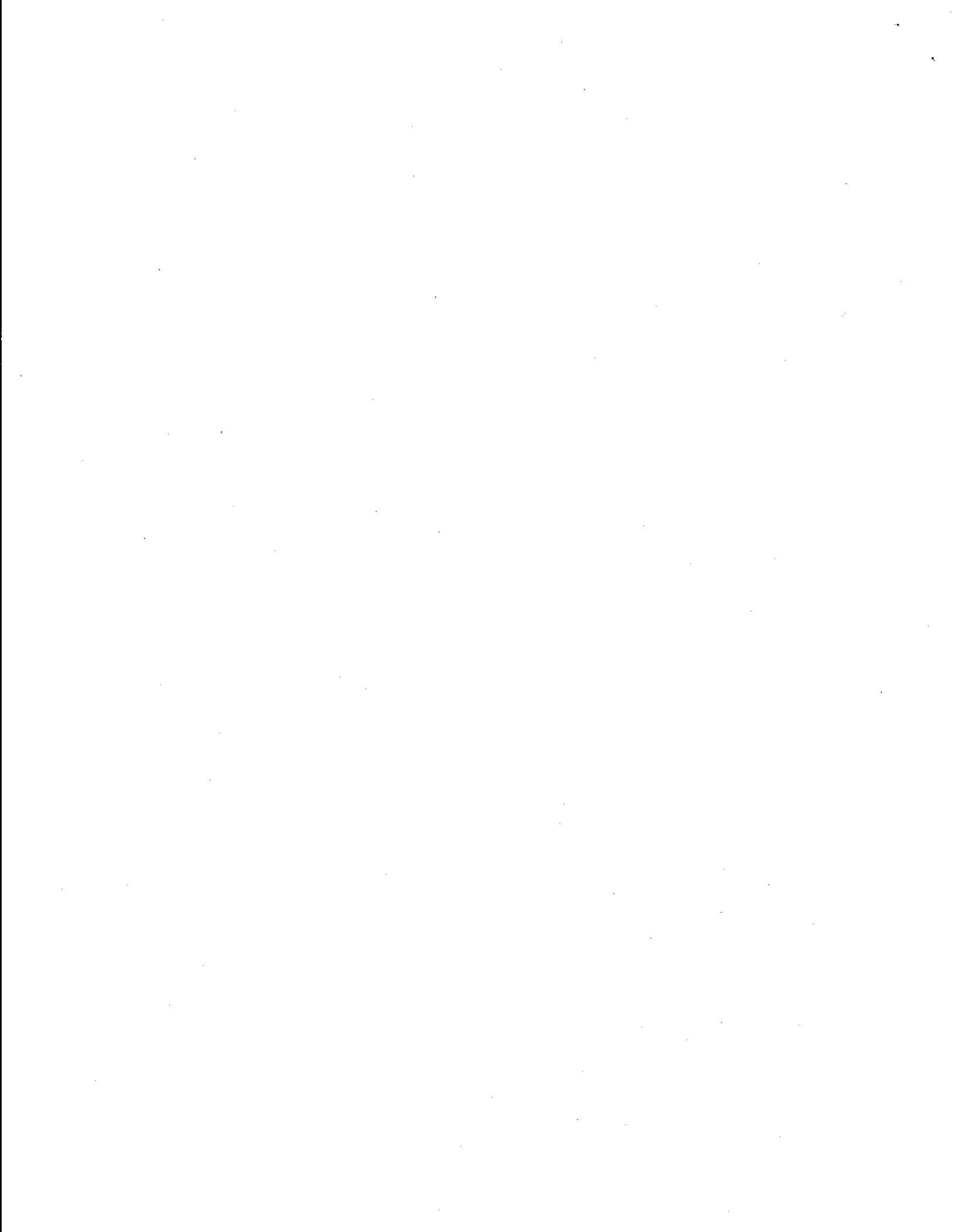
**At Home Infant Care
Summary of Savings**

CALCULATIONS

Days of Full Time Care/Month	22
Average Child Care State Cost Per Day	<u>\$16.56</u>
Average Cost Per Month	\$364.32
Sibling Months of Care	248
Siblings Cost of Care	\$90,351.36
AHIC Payments	\$211,302.00
Infant Months	559
AHIC Payment per Month	\$378.00
Average Infant Market Rate/Month	<u>\$421.00</u>
<i>Difference</i>	<u>\$43.00</u>

SAVINGS

Infant Care Savings	\$24,037.00
Siblings Cost of Care Savings	<u>\$90,351.36</u>
<i>Program Savings</i>	<u>\$114,388.36</u>
Total Infant Out of Home Cost of Care	\$235,339.00
Siblings Out of Home Cost of Care	<u>\$90,351.36</u>
	\$325,690.36
Percent of Savings	35%



**Montana At Home Infant Care
Cost Savings Model**

Shown below are three different childcare options. This model is based on an example family of three, a parent earning minimum wage with a four year old child and an infant.

At Home Infant Care

One payment

Total State Commitment: \$334.00

Note: While on AHIC a family cannot access Child Care assistance or TANF

Parent In The Workforce

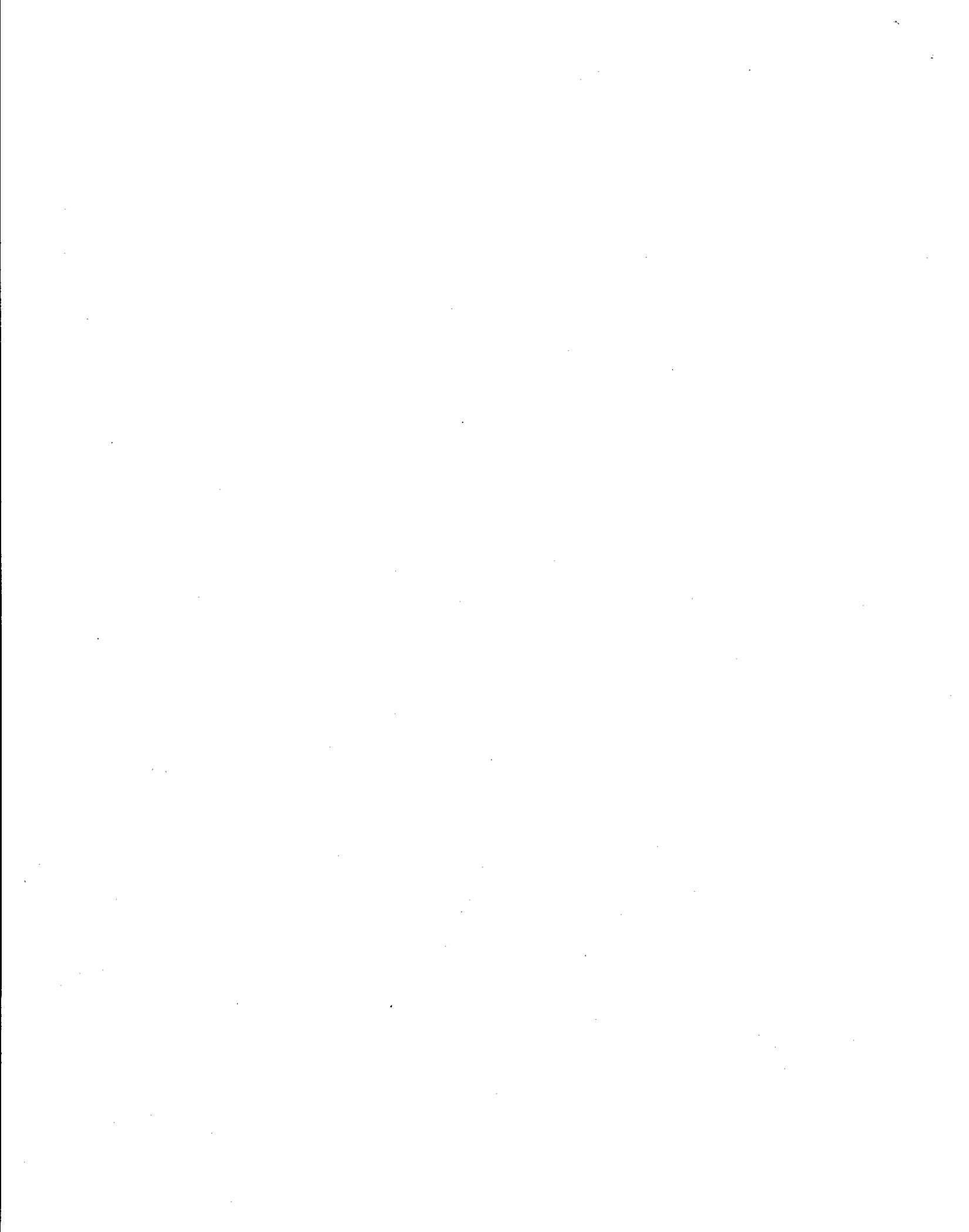
Two payments

Out of home childcare for an infant:	\$334.00
Child Care Assistance for a 4 year old:	<u>\$296.00</u>
Total State Commitment:	\$630.00

Receiving TANF

Three payments

Out of home childcare for an infant:	\$334.00
Child Care Assistance for a 4 year old:	\$296.00
Cash Assistance Check:	<u>\$405.00</u>
Total State Commitment:	\$1035.00



Maybe 2

Activities noted as valuable:

WIC

Parent/play groups

Immunization and nutrition

Sign language

Basic child development

Car seat - safety

Question #3: Are you still in the program? Why did you discontinue the program if you did? What are you doing now?

Still on the AHIC program 19

Reasons for leaving:

- Baby turned 2 2
- Stayed home anyway 1
- Went back to work 4
- Went back to school 2
- No explanation/other 2

Question #4: What type of activity were you participating in before you came into AHIC?

Work 17

Staying home 2

Attending school 8

Work and school 3

الموقع العربي

Bridging the
gender gap
every dayFREE
SUBSCRIPTION

LINKS

PERMISSIONS

Women's
We NEWSMake a
DONATION

February 10, 2005

RSS Feed

In the States

Montana Women Score Victory on Valuing Caregiving

Run Date: 09/01/02

By Betty Holcomb
WEnews correspondent

Mothers in Montana who want to raise their kids but worry about whether they have enough money to stay at home have found a happy medium: a state-run program that compensates them for their child care.

(WOMENSENEWS)--A band of low-income women in Montana are pioneering a bold solution to the nation's infant care shortage, winning over both state and local legislators, and making sure that traditional women's work--the work of caregiving--is valued along the way.

Montana's "At-Home Infant Care Program" provides parents that have incomes 150 percent of the poverty line or less with up to \$384 a month to stay home with their infants for up to two years, the same amount the state pays child-care providers to do the same work.



Mary Caferro and her daughter, Kenji Swain

Montana is the fourth state to create such a program and the only one to do it at the insistence of women themselves. This summer, Sen. Paul Wellstone of Minnesota made sure that welfare-reform proposals now wending their way through Congress expand the experiment by making \$30 million available for new programs in 10 more states.

"The phenomenal part of this policy is that it was created by low-income women to meet their own needs. The monthly allowance is not enough money to represent the true value of the work it takes to care for an infant. But it's a start. And for these women, that's a big victory," says Mary Caferro, an organizer for Working for Equality and Economic Liberation, a national poverty-rights group that pushed for the initiative.

"They wanted the caregiving they do at home to be recognized as the work that it is," Caferro added. "That's what this new policy does."

Quality Child Care Scare, Especially in Rural Areas

The new program, still an experiment with limited funding that is about to run

out, allowed state officials to pay parents nearly the same as the state's market rate for child care services--\$17 a day, or up to \$384 a month--to care for their own infants at home. It was an option with special appeal in the rural state.

"There's no more urgent problem in child care today than the critical shortage of infant and toddler care," says Joan Lombardi, head of the Better Baby Care Campaign, an organization aimed at alleviating the critical shortage of infant care in the United States. "Rural areas have it the worst," she adds.

Current statistics show that nationwide there are at least 10 infants waiting for every licensed care spot that exists and surveys indicate that parents have to compromise on quality when they can't afford or find a spot with a trained caregiver or high-quality center. Indeed, these days, the best infant care can run to as much as \$1,400 a month in many cities, a pricetag well out of reach of all but the most affluent. In rural states, such as Montana, there just aren't any options at all, with or without the money.

Paying a parent to stay home, then, has the potential to solve many social problems at once--and satisfies a number of political agendas.

"This is a very appealing solution for parents, taxpayers and politicians," says Kate Kahan, executive director of Working for Equality and Economic Liberation based in Missoula, Montana.

"Liberals now see it as a step toward paid leave. Conservatives see it as a way to allow women to be home with their babies. Montana officials like it because it makes great economic sense and helps solve the terrible shortage of infant care in our state," Kahan said.

Welfare Reform: Lose-Lose Proposition

But that was not how the approach was seen at first.

"At first, state officials were worried it would be too controversial. They didn't think conservatives or taxpayers in this state would support paying mothers to stay home," says Wendy Young, a policy analyst and an early lobbyist for the program. "The whole focus under welfare reform has been to get mothers to work, not to let them stay home."

However, board members of Working for Equality and Economic Liberation listened to the findings from informal meetings with low-income families around the state and they became convinced that this solution was the right one for low-income mothers.

"What we heard was that welfare reform was turning out to be a lose-lose proposition for women and their children, at least the way Montana was doing it," says Young. "Parents were being asked to find a job even if it meant neglecting their children. The new push toward the paid workforce meant ignoring what they saw as their top priority and their first job: raising their children."

"We tried to get the board to consider other approaches, like campaigning for

a living wage," Young says, because they were skeptical that the government would accept the idea of paying women to stay home to take care of their children. "But the board was very adamant on this point. They wanted the public policy to value of the work of caregiving."

Young began to research the issue. To her surprise, she learned Minnesota launched a program in 1997 that created an allowance for parents who stayed home with their newborn infants.

The allowance wasn't much: Parents only got 75 percent of the going rate the state paid to professional caregivers. But it was a model to learn from.

"Once I saw this was possible, I got excited and we worked from there," Young says.

Pilot Program Gives Funds to 60 Families

Working for Equality and Economic Liberation decided to adopt a more ambitious version of the Minnesota program, giving parents up to 90 percent of the value of a child-care subsidy and extending the offer for up to two years. The group then worked with state welfare officials to launch a modest pilot program--\$250,000 to fund 60 families for the first two years. Even then, program organizers met resistance and had to take the lead on making sure families learned about the program.

"Some of the state officials thought the state would be criticized for paying mothers to stay home," says Caferro, "so they didn't do much to let people know about it."

So Working for Equality and Economic Liberation put out the word through the state's child-care referral agencies, which reach many low-income families. The group also took out radio ads. Within a few months, there was a waiting list for the program and no shortage of supporters, from the state capital to the ranches and farms across the state.

"Everyone," Kahan insists, "is excited about the program now, especially new mothers."

Heidi Wallace can testify to that. She and her husband, a waiter, lived paycheck to paycheck even before she had her son, Jude. She wanted to be with Jude as much as possible his first year and managed to do that by bringing him along to her job as a family outreach specialist at a local elementary school.

But once Jude started to walk, that arrangement fell apart. She managed for a while, rearranging her schedule, and calling on friends and relatives to help with the boy. But by the time Jude was 18 months old, and expenses got ahead of Wallace and her family, she began to resign herself to getting a second job again and being away from Jude even more.

That is, until she heard about the new at-home infant care credit. The program "provides just enough for my family to break even every month and it is truly the best thing for Jon and I and our son."

Such stories from the front have convinced an ever growing number of activists, lawmakers and policy-makers that this new approach is not only valid, but a winning way to go.

"We hoped, but we never really dreamed that people in Washington would be promoting this policy so quickly," says Caferro. "It's caught on like wildfire and we are excited. Right now, we are hearing from people in West Virginia, Missouri, Florida, Oregon and other places, just waiting for Congress to sign off on this. We see it as a victory for women, and one that women will continue to carry forward, especially with the support that Congress could give to the cause right now."

Betty Holcomb, author of "The Best Friend's Guide to Maternity Leave," writes on work/family issues for many national publications.

For more information:

Working for Equality and Economic Liberation:
<http://www.montana.com/weel/>

National Partnership for Women and Families:
<http://www.nationalpartnership.org>

The Better Baby Care Campaign:
<http://www.betterbabycare.org>

Copyright 2004 Women's eNews. The information contained in this Women's eNews report may--written authorization of Women's eNews--be published, broadcast, rewritten or otherwise distributed without permission, send an e-mail to permissions@womensenews.org and provide the publication or broadcast and the name of the newspaper, magazine, radio or television station, cable network, Web site, or list serve where it will be replicated. Please include the approximate size of the audience you intend to reach.

Women's eNews is a nonprofit independent news service covering issues of concern to women and their families. An incubator program of the International Institute for Community Solutions, Fund for the City of New York; the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; the Lee Family Foundation; the Open Society Institute; the Rockefeller Family Fund; The Helena Rubenstein Foundation; the Sister Fund and the Starry Night Fund. The donations from readers are critical to our survival. Donate now by going to <http://www.womensenews.org/support.cfm>.

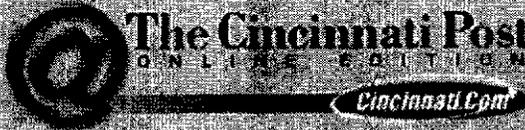
Women's eNews subscribers may select whether to receive a daily full text, daily summary or weekly digest. To change your email address, send mail to membersvcs@womensenews.org. To change the frequency of mail or to cancel your subscription, send a message to Member Services (membersvcs@womensenews.org) or use our online form: http://www.womensenews.org/update_subscription.cfm

Send this story to a friend.

Your Name:

Friend's Email:

CINCINNATI.COM POST REDS BENGALS JOBS CARS HOMES WEATHER TRAFFIC SUBSCRIBE



FIND THE BEST DEALS ON VIDEO GAMES in our video game section

NEWS OPINION BUSINESS LIVING SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT CLASSIFIED

THE POST
Kentucky Post
Back Issues
Cincinnati.Com
AP News
News Summary
News
Business
Living
Opinion
Sports
Search
Contact Us

DAILY FIX
Weather
Traffic
Talk, Cincinnati
Giveaways
Horoscopes
Lottery Numbers
Comics
Crosswords
Stahler

SPORTS
Bengals
Reds
Golf Guide
Hockey

ENTERTAINMENT
Movies
Dining
Menus
Local Events
Video Games

CLASSIFIEDS
Jobs
Cars
Homes
General

LOCAL INFO
Maps / Directions
Send an E-Postcard
Visitor's Guide
Local Links
School Links

Paying moms to be moms

BOZEMAN, Mont.—Amber Byrnes tucks her daughter into the highchair at the coffee shop where the smiling and elfin 8-month-old promptly begins her favorite activity—decorating the rug with cracker crumbs.

The 20-year-old mother, eating breakfast with one vigilant eye on the little girl, describes how life has changed since she was a teenager who wanted only to be a dancer. "It's not about me anymore. It's all about her. I have a reason. I'm this little baby's mother."

This is a feeling that resonates with all new mothers. Suddenly a small person is born and priorities shift. Suddenly, a young woman knows what politicians can only attest to glibly when they laud motherhood as the hardest job in the world.

The difference is that motherhood really is Amber's job.

Call the idea conservative. Call it radical. Or maybe just call it, as one supporter did, "subversive." Amber is among 40-odd women in Montana who get paid by the state for taking care of their own babies.

The idea began with the grass-roots poverty group called WEEL, Working for Equality and Economic Liberation. Mary Caferro, an organizer in Helena, remembers when the members said, "We want caregiving to count as work."

Eventually, Montana became the second state—after Minnesota—to have At-Home Infant Care. The pilot program pays the same child-care worker's wages—\$17 a day in this state—to a low-income mother caring for children under 2.

To show you how this turns history on its head—or makes history—remember that Aid to Families with Dependent Children began in 1935 as a program that would allow widowed mothers to stay at home with kids. By the 1990s, with so many mothers in the work force, the cry was to end AFDC.

Welfare reform was based on an idea so radical that we didn't even publicly acknowledge it. The idea was that a (poor) mother's place was in the work force.

The problem is that we never answered one huge question: Who will take care of the children? For many families, especially for those with infants, wages were so low and child care so expensive that the math didn't work.

Across the country, there are only enough licensed infant child-care slots for 18 percent of the need. In rural states like this one, the average cost of infant care is still about \$4,500 a year. Nevertheless, under welfare reform, a Montana mother is expected to fulfill her work requirement at any job—except caring for her child. State money is used to

Post Featu



Contact Us

- Letter
- Rob
- Jeff

LATEST N INTERNATIONAL NEWS

- [Supreme Strikes I Ban](#)
- [Arafat S Cease-F](#)
- [2 U.S. S by Iraqi](#)
- [Windshi Case Go](#)
- [Labor D Sues En Pension](#)
- [Supreme Lawyers](#)
- [Sept. 11 Question](#)
- [Ebsen in Undisck](#)
- [Stocks F on Joble](#)
- [NBA Dra With Fo](#)

subsidize child care—as long as it doesn't go to the mother of the child.

Madness? You want to make an at-home mother bristle? Tell her that taking care of a baby isn't a job. Now at least for a few women, "caregiving counts as work."

What has it meant to Amber? For eight months, it allowed her to be "this baby's mother." The program enrolls two-parent families, not just single mothers, and the extra dollars got Amber, her fiance Lance and their baby out of low-income housing. "We moved into a trailer and have a dog and all that good stuff," says this lively young mother, who is also finishing the last four credits toward a high school diploma.

These days, Lance works at Shopco 5 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Amber is just starting a part-time \$6-an-hour job at Target. They pass the baby between them in the parking lot. All told, they still live on less than \$1,400 a month.

Does At-Home Infant Care sound like welfare under another name? The bean counters like this program because it saves the state money. Religious conservatives like it because it supports mothers at home with infants. But the truly "subversive" part is that it may break the common-sense logjam, offering a government program that helps young families.

As Amber picked up her daughter to leave, out in California Gov. Gray Davis signed a landmark bill giving workers paid family and medical leave for up to six weeks capped at \$728 a week. That means six weeks of paid leave for a newborn, too.

Meanwhile, At-Home Infant Care is part of the Senate version of the postponed welfare reform bill. If that passes, there will be funds for similar programs in 10 more states.

Caferro says that this is "a place where the right and left can meet." But it's also the place where there isn't a right or a left. Just parents and kids.

Ellen Goodman writes for the Boston Globe. Her e-mail address is ellengoodman@globe.com.

Publication Date: 10-01-2002



[Email this story to a friend](#)

NEWS

OPINION

BUSINESS

LIVING

SPORTS

ENTERTAINMENT

CLASSIFIED

Cincinnati.com

The Cincinnati Post

YOU CAN'T TRUST CINCINNATI.COM ADVERTISERS! Check here.

SUBSCRIBE

TRAFFIC

WEATHER

HOMES

CARS

JOBS

BENGALS

REDS

POST

C