



THE COST OF BEING A WOMAN

EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE

CAPSULE ONE

SECTION 4

FEBRUARY 16TH - MARCH 1ST 2026

OVERVIEW

Our fourth policy focus for our first capsule, The Cost of Being a Woman, centers on Education and Childcare. Since its establishment, NOW has been focused on ensuring equal access to education for women and girls and advancing public policies that support caregiving, recognize its economic value, and make it possible for women and families to thrive.

FOUNDATIONS

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, NOW identified education and childcare as essential to women's economic security. In 1970–71, NOW campaigned for the Comprehensive Child Care Act, landmark legislation that would have established a national childcare system to support working families. Although the bill passed Congress, it was vetoed by President Richard Nixon, who derided it as the “Sovietization of American children.”

We have continued to confront the structural inequities in education and childcare that disproportionately affect women, advocating for robust public investment, strong civil rights protections, and policies that recognize caregiving as essential to economic security.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- NOW's education advocacy continued with its leadership in the successful national campaign for the Education Amendments of 1972, including Title IX, which guarantees women and girls equal educational opportunities in admissions, athletics, and academic programs.
- In the 1980s and 1990s, NOW expanded its focus on caregiving and family policy. In 1987, NOW launched “The Great American Mother's Day Write-In” to support passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act, highlighting the need for job-protected leave so caregivers are not forced out of the workforce.
- Recognizing the long-term economic penalties faced by caregivers, NOW formed a Family Law Committee in 1999 and established an Advisory Committee on Mothers and Caregivers Economic Rights in 2005. In 2013, NOW Foundation further advanced this work by issuing a report proposing Social Security caregiver credits to recognize time spent out of the paid workforce caring for children or aging relatives.



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LEGISLATION

Today, NOW continues this legacy by advancing policies that treat education and childcare as essential infrastructure. We are currently supporting federal legislation that strengthens the childcare and education ecosystem, including:

- H.R. 5658/S. 2939 – Child Care for Every Community Act
- H.R. 2994 - Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit Enhancement Act of 2025
- H.R. 6406 - Parental Workforce Training Act
- S. 2828 - Child Care Modernization Act of 2025
- S. 2295 - Child Care for Working Families Act
- H.R.5390/S.2823 - Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act (FAMILY Act)

TODAY

In addition to supporting proactive federal legislation, NOW is actively opposing regulatory and administrative actions that threaten women's access to education and affordable childcare. In January 2026, NOW signed onto a coalition letter led by the National Women's Law Center opposing the Department of Education's proposed redefinition of "professional degree," which would cap federal student loans for certain post-baccalaureate programs. The proposal would disproportionately harm women, Black students, and other students of color, particularly those pursuing careers in essential fields such as healthcare, education, and social work.

That same month, NOW also joined a letter led by the Center for Law and Social Policy opposing a proposed rollback of the 2024 Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) rule. The rollback would eliminate key affordability protections and payment structures that stabilize providers and expand access for low-income families, ultimately increasing childcare costs and reducing family choice. By signing onto these letters, NOW continues to defend critical safeguards that make education and childcare accessible and equitable.

Ensuring equitable access to education and affordable childcare has been a core priority for NOW for nearly six decades, and the organization remains committed not only to advancing federal and state policies, but also to empowering local chapters to take action in their own communities. Chapters can bring this work to life by organizing skill-sharing or community education events that double as mutual aid; creating or coordinating emergency childcare networks to support working parents and caregivers; hosting Title IX know-your-rights workshops for students and families; advocating at school board or state legislative meetings for increased public investment in childcare and gender equity in education; and building partnerships with local providers, unions, and parent groups to push for structural reforms. Through both policy advocacy and grassroots action, NOW continues to fight for a future in which women, families, and caregivers can pursue education and opportunity on equal footing.