

When Child Care Workers Join Unions, Communities Benefit

by [James Parks](#), Mar 16, 2007

It's a maxim of the union movement that when workers join unions, their communities benefit. This mutually beneficial relationship between workers and their communities is made especially clear in a new report by the [National Women's Law Center](#), which highlights three states where home-based child care providers have joined unions and signed a contract. The workers, in turn, used their political power to help their communities receive increased funding for child care and improved working conditions for providers.

"[Getting Organized: Unionizing Home-Based Child Care Providers](#)" shows that in just the past two years, there has been a flurry of union organizing among child care providers who care for children in the providers' homes. Most of the workers are self-employed women who care for a small number of children in their own homes and receive low pay and have few, if any, benefits.

In the three states where home care providers have signed a union contract (Illinois, Oregon and Washington), governors also requested more funding for the home-based providers and child care centers. Home child-care workers in those states are represented by AFSCME and SEIU. Workers represented by either AFSCME, Communications Workers of America (CWA) or UAW are negotiating contracts in four other states (Iowa, Michigan, New Jersey and Wisconsin).

Nancy Duff Campbell, co-president of the National Women's Law Center, says the report shows the strength in numbers:

Unionization of home-based child-care providers appears to be a strategy that can increase resources not only for these providers but also for child-care centers and for families needing child-care assistance.

Child care advocates have long urged legislators to increase funding to improve the quality of child care and make child care more accessible and affordable, Campbell said.

If current trends hold, unionizing home-based child-care providers could be a significant advance for the entire child care system and the parents and children who depend on it.

In the past two years, the legislatures or governors in 11 states allowed home-based child care providers to join unions. Seven of the states (Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin) have authorized union representation for providers. In the other four states (California, Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island), although the legislatures authorized union representation, the governors, all Republicans, vetoed the bills.

Most home-based providers receive a state subsidy to care for low-income children and/or are regulated by the state. Once workers join a union, they negotiate a contract with the state for subsidies and other protections. The three current contracts all provide for increased pay as well as training and treatment for home-based providers