



TO: Save the Children Action Network

FROM: Lori Weigel & Karoline McGrail / New Bridge Strategy
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RE: Rural Voters' Views on Hunger, Child Care, and Early Education

On behalf of Save the Children and Save the Children Action Network, the bipartisan research team of New Bridge Strategy (R) and Hart Research (D) recently conducted research among rural and small town American voters across the country.¹ The study found that rural voters nationally are facing many challenges, with a significant focus on inflation and an increasing cost of living. While gas prices have recently dipped, they indicate that food/grocery prices and the cost of child care/early childhood education are having profound and personal impacts on them and people they know. While it is not surprising that parents are impacted by the child care and early education challenges, parents are also very worried about being able to feed their family in the year ahead (63 percent worried). The personal impact of challenges related to child care and food insecurity are striking and profound, and they likely underlie the overwhelming support we see for virtually every child care and food assistance policy we tested. Moreover, that support extends across party lines and virtually all demographic sub-groups among rural Americans.

The specific key findings include...

- **Rural voters deem inflation to be the greatest challenge facing rural families.** In an open-ended question about the biggest problems facing families in rural areas, respondents are most apt to volunteer gas prices and inflation. When asked about specific problems in their area, 68 percent say children not having enough to eat is a “very” (38 percent) or “somewhat” serious problem (30 percent).

¹ **Methodology:** From November 9-20, 2022, New Bridge Strategy and Hart Research completed 1,006 interviews utilizing an online panel of American voters residing in rural counties who describe themselves as living in a rural area (72% of the sample) or a small town (28%). Rural counties are defined as those considered “mostly rural” or “completely rural” by the U.S. Census. Interviews were distributed proportionally across the country and quotas were set for key demographic sub-groups, such as gender and age, based on census information.

The credibility interval is +3.5% for the overall national sample; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.

- **The vast majority of rural Americans say that food prices are having a profound personal impact on them and others in their community** – Nearly three-quarters of rural voters (72 percent) say they are changing how or what food they buy due to increasing grocery costs. Thirty-seven percent say they are struggling to afford to feed their family, and 64 percent say they or someone they know is struggling.

Half of parents (50 percent) say they are struggling to afford to feed their families, compared to 32 percent of non-parents. Not surprisingly, greater proportions of low-income voters report they are struggling to afford to feed their family:

51% struggling with a household income of less than \$20,000;
 47% of those in the \$20,000-\$39,999 range;
 28% of those in the \$40,000-\$74,999 range; and
 18% of those with a household income higher than \$75,000

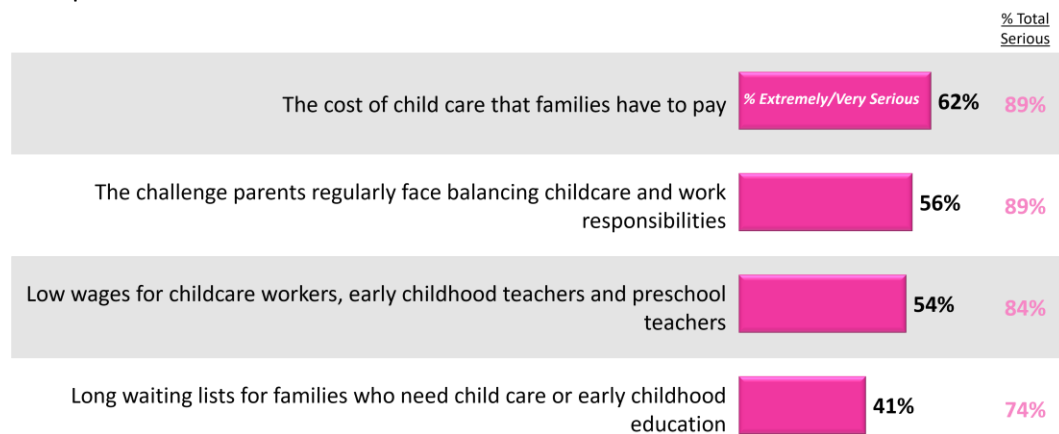
- **Similarly, six-in-ten rural voters are worried they might not be able to afford enough food to feed themselves and their families over the next year.** Sixty-three (63) percent of all rural voters say they are worried, with nearly a quarter saying they are “very worried.” Among parents, the proportion jumps to 77 percent who say they are worried they might not be able to afford enough food to feed their family.
- **Rural voters are overwhelmingly supportive of policy solutions for hunger.** Of the proposals we tested, all of them received support from more than three-quarters of rural voters. In fact, more than seven-in-ten Republican voters support every policy proposal to address hunger, with even greater levels of support from Independents and Democrats.

<i>Ranked by % Total Support</i>	Strongly Support	Total Support
Simplifying the retailer application process so that more operations such as farmers markets can accept food assistance benefits and people in rural areas and smaller communities have more options to access fresh food.**	58%	93%
Ensuring more children in school have access to food through "backpack" programs where they can bring food home, or food pantries at school sites.*	59%	92%
Offering more programs that increase access to food for hard-to-reach communities such as those that allow food boxes to be shipped or operate mobile pantries that go to outlying areas to better reach families.*	56%	91%
Expanding the Double Up Food Bucks program that enables recipients to match what they spend on fruits and vegetables, up to \$20 a day. That means families can get twice the fresh fruits and veggies in their budget.*	53%	89%
Allowing families who receive federal food assistance greater benefits to combat inflation and give them the opportunity to purchase fresh and healthy foods.*	55%	88%
Allowing those who qualify for other programs, like Medicaid or Head Start, to automatically qualify for food assistance programs.**	55%	86%
Continuing to allow people who qualify for WIC, the federal program that provides food to low-income pregnant women and children at risk of hunger up to age five, to meet with a representative online or via the phone to sign up for or renew their benefits, rather than in person.**	54%	86%
Allowing food assistance program benefits to be used for delivery fees so people in rural areas can receive home delivery of groceries.**	44%	79%

Thinking some more about this...Congress and a number of state legislatures will be considering some changes to programs that help families afford and access food. For each one please tell me whether you would support or oppose that particular change.

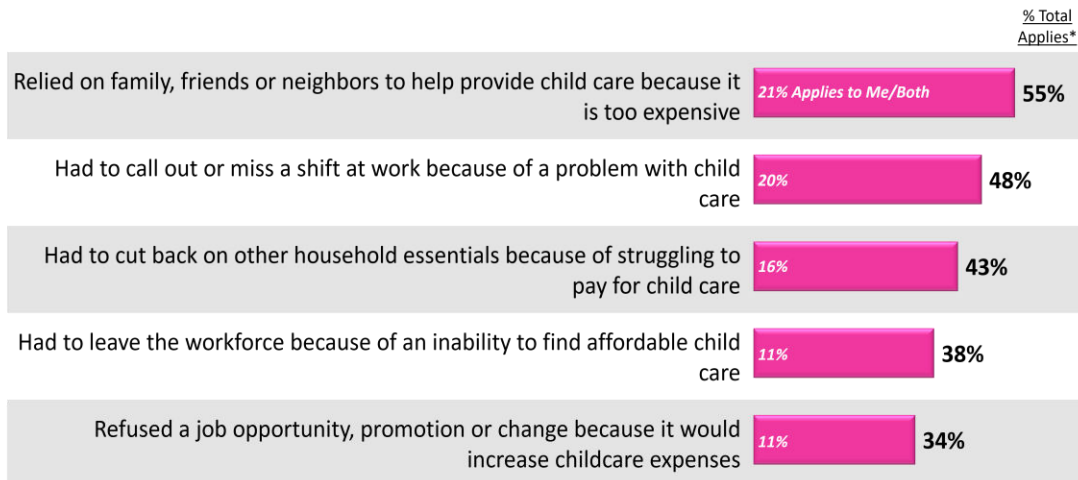
**National Sample A, N=506 **National Sample B, N=500*

- Rural Americans believe that access to affordable, quality child care and early childhood education is increasingly out-of-reach for many families.** In multiple questions, rural voters tell us that “care for your children” is lacking in their community, costs too much, and that access to quality, affordable care has gotten worse in the last few years since the pandemic.
 - 55 percent say the availability of high-quality and affordable child care has gotten worse since the pandemic, while 31 percent say it has gotten better or stayed the same and 13 percent are unsure.
 - A majority (54 percent) of rural voters say there are only some or very few high-quality early education programs in their area that are also affordable for lower- or middle-income families: 22 percent say very few, 32 percent some, 26 percent half, 32 percent some and 20 percent say all or most are high-quality and affordable.
 - Nearly three-quarters or more say that every aspect of child care we tested is a serious problem. The chart below details this:



Thinking just about issues related to child care and early childhood education from birth to age five, how much of a problem do you think each one of the following is in your area?

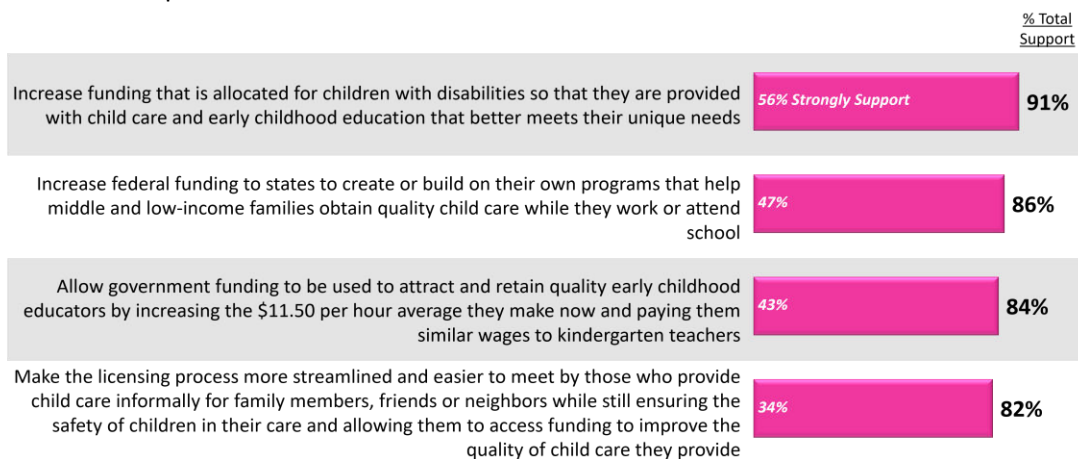
- Rural voters see child care as important for strengthening the economy.** Rural voters know the importance of high-quality, affordable child care to the economy, and this cuts across party lines. Overall, 70 percent of rural voters say it is “essential” or “very important” to strengthening the economy and helping workers with an additional 25 percent saying it is somewhat important. The percentage of voters who say it is essential or very important is 68 percent among Republicans, 64 percent among Independents, and 78 percent among Democrats.
- Rural Americans – particularly parents – are being personally impacted by the shortage of affordable, quality child care with significant implications for their jobs and careers and the broader economy.** We asked survey respondents to tell us if they or someone they know has experienced each of six potential child care challenges. The following chart details the responses:



*Now, do any of the following things apply either to you or to someone you know? You may select both if it applies to you AND someone you know.
Total includes "Applies to someone I know"

Thirty-one percent of all rural voters, including 75 percent of parents, have personally faced at least one of these challenges, with significant proportions indicating that child care issues had affected their ability to work – whether for a day or at all – and had limited their ability to advance in their career.

- **Regardless of party, rural voters are supportive of every public policy proposal we tested to help address the shortage of affordable quality child care and early childhood education.** Each of the proposals we tested (below) receives support from more than seven-in-ten Republican voters with even higher levels of support from Independents and Democrats. This is particularly impressive given that three of the four proposal mention using government funding specifically to address the problem.



Coming up, Congress and some state legislatures may be considering a number of proposals that provide more families the opportunity for their children to attend high-quality child care and preschool. For each one please indicate whether you would support or oppose that particular change.

As many voters in rural areas are facing a lack of affordable and high-quality child care options as well as difficulties in affording food for their families, support for policy proposals that address these issues is strong and cuts across party lines.