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Submitted via:

https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRA/icrPublicCommentRequest?ref_nbr=202304-0607-003

Sheleen Dumas, Department PRA Clearance Officer, Office of the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, Commerce Department

Comments on OMB Control Number 0607-1013: Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for Review and Approval; Household Pulse Survey

Dear Sheleen Dumas:

The Women's Economic Justice Program at The Century Foundation submits these comments to strongly encourage the Department of Commerce, through the administration of the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, to continue asking questions regarding families' child care arrangements.

The Century Foundation is a progressive, independent think tank that conducts research, develops solutions, and drives policy change to make people's lives better. We pursue economic, racial, and gender equity in education, health care, and work, and we support democracy efforts domestically and internationally. The Women's Economic Justice Program at The Century Foundation promotes solutions that advance women's economic security, with a focus on work and care. Policy priorities include child care and early learning, paid family and medical leave, equal pay, and paid sick days. Our goals are to ensure that these issues are central to the national economic conversation, and to promote women's economic justice through state and federal legislation and executive action.

The Household Pulse Survey provides a crucial source of timely information on America's families. We have relied on this data source in past research about the state of the child care sector during the pandemic.¹ We also hope to use this data in future research on child care as it is a unique source of data that monitors parents' child care arrangements during a critical period of time.

¹ Clive Belfied & Julie Kashen, "Families with Young Children Are Losing \$13 Billion a Year While Child Care Sector Struggles during the Pandemic," February 2022, The Century Foundation, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/families-with-young-children-are-losing-13-billion-a-year-while-child-care-sector-struggles-during-the-pandemic/>.

Importantly, although many sectors of the economy have recovered, the child care sector remains in crisis, as it has been since the onset of the pandemic. The child care sector employment remains below pre-pandemic levels, child care prices continually outpace inflation, and programs are at risk of closing in the near future given economic uncertainty coupled with the scheduled expiration of key government funds. All of these challenges will make it harder for providers to remain open and for families to find quality and affordable child care.

While the coronavirus pandemic emergency declaration has ended, there are still several key programs from the American Rescue Plan Act that are impacting the child care sector. American Rescue Plan Act Child Care Stabilization Funds expire September 30, 2023. Child Care Supplemental Discretionary Funds expire in 2024. Additionally, State and Local Relief Funds, which some states are using for child care, expire in 2026. In brief, there are a number of federal investments going towards child care for the next several years. Moreover, there is significant uncertainty about how the child care sector will fare in the future amidst economic uncertainty around future appropriations to the Child Care Development Block Grant. It is imperative to have real-time information on how families' child care arrangements are being managed during this time.

Not only is it more important than ever to have questions to understand families' use of child care, but more questions should be added to the Household Pulse Survey to understand how turbulence in the child care sector and the economy are impacting families' decisions around managing work and care. Possible questions along these lines could be:

1. Have disruptions in one or more of your child care arrangements impacted your ability to work in the past month?
 - a. In the past month, were you or anyone in your household unable to work due to lack of access to affordable child care?
 - b. In the past month, did you or anyone in your household reduce the number of hours worked because you did not have child care?
2. Has the price you paid for one or more of your child care arrangements increased in the past month?
3. Have you had to change child care providers in the past month because your provider went out of business or had to reduce child care slots?
4. Would you be more likely to increase work hours if affordable child care were available?
5. Would you be more likely to look for a job if affordable child care were available?

For these reasons, the Women's Economic Justice Program at The Century Foundation strongly encourages the Department of Commerce to consider amending their request of the proposed rule to continue collecting information about child care arrangements.