



Is Family-Friendly Help Headed Our Way?

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Feeling squeezed between caring for your children and your parents? President Obama Monday unveiled a package of initiatives designed to help families pay for care for their children and elderly relatives, save for retirement and pay off student loans, The New York Times reports.

If you're among the "the sandwich generation" — struggling families squeezed between sending their children to college and caring for elderly parents — you know help can't come soon enough.

The president is asking Congress to nearly double the child care tax credit for families earning less than \$85,000 and proposes to expand financing to help families care for elderly relatives at a cost of \$102.5 million, The New York Times reports. With these proposals, Mr. Obama is looking to help the middle class—a group he says has been under assault for a long time — and his State of the Union address on Wednesday is expected to continue to seek ways to ease their pain, according to the Times.

I'll be waiting to see what steps—if any—this president is taking to move our nation down a family-friendly path. Easing our economic burden for family care would be a start.

But even if you have the money for care, finding someone to care for your child or parent in a crunch is a daily difficulty for parents. A 2007 national survey of working adults commissioned by Workplace Options (WPO), the largest provider of work-life employee benefits in America, found that 59 percent of employees or their spouses missed three to ten days of work in the last year due to the lack of adequate back-up child or elder care options. You need back-up care when your main child care or elder care arrangements falls through due to illness, vacation or other unexpected circumstances.

Some local companies have come up with a creative solution to this dilemma. Raleigh-based Workplace Options partnered with Bright Horizons, a national child-care provider, to start the Back-Up Care Advantage Program, which arranges care for employees with children and aging parents. Employees at companies who have signed up with the program can access a nationwide network of quality, licensed child care centers and in-home care provided by trained, licensed home health care professionals.

For parents, the program offers a safety net and peace of mind, while employers reap the benefits of reduced absenteeism and can use it as a recruitment tool. If you're working at any of [North Carolina's family-friendly companies](#) or have a supportive supervisor, you may be able to work at home or use flexible work hours to help you through such family emergencies.

But parents who don't have these options and are feeling the squeeze will be looking to see if help's on the way Wednesday during the president's address.

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