

Statement to the Vermont House Committee on Government Operations
Jean Sinzduk, Associate Director
Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
March 9, 2021

I'm Jean Sinzduk, associate director of the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. For nearly 50 years, CAWP has been monitoring and analyzing women's status and prospects in American politics, tracking the numbers of women candidates and officeholders as well as conducting research about the impact of women serving in elected positions. I'm testifying today in support of House Bill 10, an act permitting candidate expenditures for dependent care costs.

Democratic ideals call for full citizen participation in political life, and those ideals demand an examination of the barriers to entry for all citizens, and a keen focus on leveling the playing field. In the interest of ensuring participation by as many citizens as possible and ensuring that a full range of perspectives and life experiences are present at policymaking tables, working to eliminate barriers to entry is a laudable and important goal.

Women remain underrepresented in public office. Our Center's data shows that, despite recent milestones including the election of the first woman vice president, women hold only one in four seats in Congress, only eight governorships out of 50, less than a third of seats in statehouses nationwide, and are less than a quarter of mayors in cities above 30,000 in population. In Vermont, women are doing better than the national average in the statehouse, holding 42% of state legislative seats (7th in the nation), but unfortunately it remains the only state that has never sent a woman to either the US Senate or House. Only two of six statewide elected positions is currently held by a woman. While Vermont has done better than many states at the state legislative level, it still fails to represent women near their proportion in the population.

As the members of this committee and every elected official knows, campaigning is time-consuming and labor-intensive. For anyone considering a run for office, the decision to run involves weighing out various factors to determine whether public service is feasible. In many cases, potential candidates may choose to forgo a run because of personal or professional responsibilities. While this is often a reasonable choice, some barriers can be reduced or eliminated.

One of the biggest barriers to entry for candidates with young children is the cost of childcare. Childcare is enormously expensive in the United States, and at a time when wages have stagnated, childcare costs have grown exponentially (per-child spending on childcare grew by a factor of 21 between the 1970s and 2000s, according to one study by Sabino Kornrich of the University of Sydney and Frank Furstenburg of the University of Pennsylvania). Women disproportionately shoulder the burden for childcare responsibilities; research shows that women still spend twice as much time on childcare as men do. In addition, a recent survey of women voters found that the top reason for women not getting involved in politics was that they were too busy working or taking care of their families.

The costs of caring for adult relatives are also significant. According to one study, the proportion of adults providing personal care and/or financial assistance to a parent has more than tripled in 15 years. Currently,

a quarter of adult children provide these types of care to a parent (*Caregiving Costs to Working Caregivers* by Metlife Mature Market Institute®, National Alliance for Caregiving, and Center for Long Term Care Research and Policy, New York Medical College.) Furthermore, dependent care costs have been rising for the past 15 years, increasing the financial burden on caregivers (Genworth Cost of Care Survey 2004-2020.) As with childcare responsibilities, women are more likely to assume the burden of caring for dependent adult family members. It is worth noting, however, that both men and women pay economic and opportunity costs when responsible for care of a relative.

This is also a class issue. Research by Duke University professor Nicholas Carnes shows that “working class” individuals – those in manual labor, service industry and clerical jobs – are less likely to run for public office because they do not have the financial resources to spend months in the unpaid job of running for office, and that working class individuals make up less than 3 percent of the typical state legislature and 2 percent of members of Congress. Policies allowing candidates to use their campaign funds for campaign-related dependent care removes a barrier to participation for caregivers – both women and men – who want to run for office but might be deterred because of the burden of additional dependent care costs. It also removes a barrier for lower-income candidates who do not have the disposable income or other financial resources to easily mount a campaign, and for those who do not have a partner or spouse to share the caregiving burden.

A national discussion around allowing the use of campaign funds for campaign-related childcare was started by a Federal Elections Commission ruling in 2018, in response to a request from then-Congressional candidate Liuba Grechen Shirley. The FEC approved Shirley’s request to use her campaign funds for campaign-related childcare needs on the basis that such expenses would not exist irrespective of her candidacy. The FEC issued a similar ruling the following year approving the use of childcare funds in a different candidate’s request. In both cases, the FEC noted that the rulings applied only to the specific case at hand and that because regulations do not specifically address the use of childcare in campaign funds, each case must be decided on a case-by-case basis. In March 2019, US Representative Katie Porter introduced the "Help America Run Act" to codify this practice into law for federal candidates. It passed the US House and was sent to US Senate but was not acted upon before the 116th Congress adjourned. In March 2021, Rep. Porter introduced H.R.1515 to amend the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 to provide for the treatment of payments for childcare and other personal use services as an authorized campaign expenditure.

The 2018 FEC ruling spurred several state-level candidates to seek clarity on the rules regarding campaign funds and childcare expenses in their states. Both legislative and administrative channels have been employed to expand access to the use of campaign funding for relevant childcare and/or dependent care expenses. To date, 17 states allow or have allowed the practice of using campaign funds for campaign-related dependent or childcare. Seven states have enshrined the practice into law (California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Utah), while the other states allow it administratively through the relevant elections boards or commissions. Four states besides Vermont have bills pending in their legislatures (Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, and Massachusetts), while several others are expected to introduce bills this year. Most advisory opinions issued by commissions note that state law does not specifically address the issue, and some opinions encourage the legislature to take the matter on and formally enshrine the practice into law. Similar to the federal situation, it is important that the practice be addressed legislatively to remove ambiguity.

I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you to this committee for allowing me to testify in support of House Bill 10. I encourage you to approve this bill and pass it out of committee.