



# THE STATE OF CARE IN *Georgia*





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The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare a reality that American families have been grappling with for decades: Our economy is not set up to support working families. Too often, a lack of paid family and medical leave and the high cost of things like aging, disability, and child care force working Americans to make the impossible choice between caring for their families and paying the bills. This is not a choice that hardworking people should have to make.

Georgia Cares is building grassroots support for policies that would improve the lives of working families across the state, especially BIPOC and disabled communities. Making things like paid family and medical leave, affordable aging, disability, and child care and lower cost prescription drugs accessible to all Georgians would transform the lives of families in our state. These are solutions that would give families, family caregivers, and domestic workers the tools and opportunities they need to build a better life, which is exactly why the vast majority of Georgians support them.

The stories below illustrate the impact these policies would have on the lives of Georgians.



# Stephanie Ali



Brookhaven

Recently looking for child care while still pregnant, Stephanie Ali already knew that she was going to be on a waiting list. Pre-pandemic day care centers were booked up and all of the Georgia resources sites said that centers get booked up very quickly, so if you had a specific school in mind you needed to get on the waitlist. Finally, a spot opened up where her son was able to get in at four months old. The average cost of child care in their neighborhood is about \$1800 - \$2100 a month and that is for top tier child care. Cheaper child care is around \$1300-\$1400 a month but they wanted him to be in a smaller school with more hands-on attention.

Their school is very good and they really care about education; they teach a lot of life skills like getting dressed and making their own plate. However, the school has lots of problems with high turnover. The child care workers are making \$12-\$15 an hour so they have a lot of turnover. Her son had three teachers in one year when he was in his toddler class. The school charges \$15 a minute if you are late and will call the Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS) if you are more than 30 minutes late. Stephanie's friend (whose children attend another school) was an hour late once to pick up his child because he was caring for his wife who had just had a baby, and they called DFACS, so now he has to deal with caring for a new baby, along with a DFACS case.

Stephanie knows that she is blessed to have access to affordable, quality child care, and she also knows that not all families do, which is something that our government should be working on. She believes that there are too many gaps for after school and summer programs which a lot of working families depend on.



*I strongly believe that our government has a role to play in ensuring that all children and families have access to high quality, affordable child care and early childhood education. I want to see them take this responsibility seriously and ensure that all kids can thrive.*

*~ Stephanie*

# Helen Boothe



Helen Boothe wanted to stay home with her twin boys, so she decided to convert her basement to a child care center. Helen has a degree in early childhood education which helped her to launch her business which includes taking care of special needs children. As a daycare center owner, she is responsible for having meal and education plans for the children; she works with consultants from the state who perform home inspections; and at any given time, she's supporting multiple families with various dynamics. Helen is only permitted to have up to 12 children at a time in her daycare which she feels is unfair. This limitation hinders her ability to earn more income and makes it difficult to fully cover her expenses including paying her staff. Helen accepts CAPS which is a financial assistance program for low income parents, however, she is only allowed to have 6 children on CAPS. The other 6 children must provide private payment.

Helen believes this is unfair to small daycare center owners (most of whom are Women of Color) and favors bigger conglomerates who have the resources to purchase bigger buildings. Helen is also responsible for keeping up her certifications through classes that she sometimes has to pay for out of pocket. Additionally, she manages frequently changing policies that the state does not make clear but charges fines when care center owners are not compliant.

Helen wishes that our elected officials would prioritize treating care center owners with respect and as partners in the journey to provide affordable and quality child care to all those who need it.



*I wish more people would put themselves in my shoes as a care center owner and respect that I care about the children that I am taking care of and that also this is my business. We need to have elected officials who care about supporting care center owners just as well as caring about parents.*

*- Helen*

# Rev. Harriet Bradley



Norcross

Rev. Harriet Bradley was doing work to support her ministry and had a full-time job during the Bush presidency; however, the job market was horrible, so she was doing temp work with no benefits and using public transportation. A former co-worker had seen Rev. Harriet taking care of her mother and recommended her for a caregiving position. When she was hired by a private family, she received a week's paid vacation and frequent raises. Her client also had a caregiver paid by Medicaid. The agency hired Rev. Harriet to fill in for the morning caregiver. "When my client's daughter retired," says Rev. Harriet, "she took care of her in the afternoon, and I worked the mornings."

When Rev. Harriet switched to working for an agency, she didn't receive any paid time off or benefits. Rev. Harriet's pastor sent an email about the mayor of Atlanta and how she was having breakfasts every quarter which is where Rev. Harriet learned how to be an advocate for caregivers. Rev. Harriet wants her legislators to know that they need to make sure that funds that are given to agencies are tracked and given to the workers. There is a huge shortage because caregivers pay is inadequate along with having no benefits. It is important to make sure that federal money gets to the healthcare providers. Rev. Harriet's agency doesn't offer any PPE or any money for gas. There is also a need for good public transportation to make sure that caregivers can get to work.



*I want our legislators to prioritize caregivers because we are the backbone of this economy. We really care about our patients and also we need to be paid fairly and receive health benefits.*

*~ Rev. Harriet*



# State Rep. Lisa Campbell



Kennesaw

Six years ago, Georgia House Representative Lisa Campbell's mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, so she and her family had to come together to manage her mom's care. After months of traveling back and forth, Lisa moved closer to her parents to help provide consistent support. While her parent's direct medical care was primarily covered by Medicare, many other supports were needed. The cost of caregiving is not always viewed in totality, but often includes a wide range of expenses such as: time off from work, transportation, counseling, meal prep, physical therapy, and cleaning.

As an elected leader, caregiving is top of mind and an important priority for her and for her constituents. Too often, the role of unpaid caregiver falls to women who have to reduce working hours, choose lower-paying jobs, or leave the labor force entirely, resulting in lower lifetime earnings and reducing their retirement security. We know this lack of investment in early caregiving and learning for children, especially children from economically disadvantaged families, can have lasting impact on their success later in life.

Lisa supports a multi-pronged policy solution which includes: expanding paid family and medical leave; guaranteeing paid sick time; offering benefits to care for children and aging parents; increasing fair and flexible scheduling; anti-discrimination protections for caregivers; expanding remote mental health services and telehealth care programs for family caregivers; and achieving quality healthcare access and affordability for all Georgians to improve our individual and collective well-being. Not only would these policies benefit caregivers and their families, they would help motivate a national cultural shift, sending the message that caregiving at all stages of our lives are important and caregivers are valuable to our society.



*Caregiving is difficult and caregivers need our encouragement, education, resources, compensation, and acknowledgement for their valuable work that benefits our shared community.*

*~ Lisa*

# Chelsea Dove



**Riverdale**

Chelsea Dove is a first time mom who has been trying to navigate the child care system while also trying to find a job. She is trying to find work from home; however, that has been difficult because a lot of employers do not want to hear kids in the background. Child care prices are way too expensive for her to afford on her own and the waiting list for assistance can be up to a year long. Chelsea's own sister in law waited for a year before getting financial assistance.

Chelsea wants our elected officials to focus on making child care more affordable as well as having more child care facilities, especially in rural areas. She also recognizes that not a lot of people want to do this work because they do not pay enough; she was offered a job as a child care worker previously and she declined because it didn't pay enough.

Chelsea is hopeful that we can work towards having a more robust child care system that works for all Georgians!



*I don't believe that parents should have to navigate finding child care alone; we need to support families with new babies.*

*~Chelsea*

# State Sen. Jason Esteves



Atlanta

Georgia State Senator Jason Esteves and his wife were parents to their first child and young son when they discovered that his mom would need to receive care due to her diagnosis of early onset Alzheimer's. After speaking with his sister, they decided that he was best equipped to take on this responsibility. Jason's mother moved in with them and they went about trying to navigate the healthcare system which is no easy task, even for someone like Sen. Esteves, an elected official with resources. They relied on his mother's primary care physicians to help them understand the system; however, it was clear that they barely knew how to navigate the system themselves. His mother was in the dreaded gap of care during the first year of her diagnosis, meaning that she made too much income to qualify for Medicaid or any federal subsidies, but not enough money to pay for the high cost of private insurance. They relied on free health insurance from Whitefoord Inc until his mother was able to qualify for federal subsidies through the Affordable Care Act and then subsequently Medicare after she turned 65.

Jason's household was a prime example of the sandwich generation - taking care of two young kids and an aging parent. He was lucky to have a great support system with a two-income household, and yet it still put a strain on his family's finances and mental well being; he can't imagine how a single or low income household would manage this situation. The stress of having to navigate finding and paying for care can really take a toll on caregivers. He believes elected officials need to provide more effective communication and better support to take some of the stress off of caretakers, so that they can focus on what really matters--giving the best care possible to their loved ones. We should have systems in place to give caretakers comprehensive support, including mental health services, because caring for a loved one can be an emotionally taxing experience. Sen. Esteves is grateful that his family was able to manage and he believes that all Georgia families deserve to be able to take care of their loved ones with dignity.



*I am grateful that my family was able to manage and I believe that all Georgia families deserve to be able to take care of their loved ones with dignity.*

*~ Jason*



# Shun & Julie Kidd



Before Julie Kidd was married, she was forced to drop out of high school for lack of affordable, reliable child care for her oldest son. Thankfully, friends and family helped out and she received her GED. Unfortunately, 12 years later not much has changed.

When Julie and her husband, Shun, welcomed their third son a year ago, she found herself back in difficult but familiar territory – navigating the costly, sparse, and often uncertain child care terrain of North Georgia. They called every day care in surrounding cities and heard the same story – staff shortages made worse by the pandemic, too long waiting lists, and impending closures. Fortunately, they have understanding employers who offer flexible hours, a strong family support system, and are able to afford the ever increasing costs.

Even with all of their advantages, it took them weeks to find quality child care for their youngest son and both Julie and Shun describe this as an incredibly stressful time for their family. Julie and Shun want leaders who empathize with their fellow citizens and will work to ensure we have fair policies that support better child care for families and workers.



*It's not easy raising kids and good child care or bad child care impacts your entire life. If you can't find a good day care provider, it impacts your work, your life, and your professional advancement.*

*~ Shun & Julie*

# Dr. Connie Kitchens



Dr. Connie Kitchens' life changed on July 24th, 2018. After retiring at the age of 57 on May 27, 2018, Connie and her husband had made so many wonderful plans to enjoy life. They have minor medical health problems that are controllable and a very stable financial foundation. On July 24th, 2018, their 27-year-old daughter was diagnosed with triple-negative metastatic inflammatory breast cancer. To receive proper medical care, she and her eight-year-old daughter and her three-year-old son who was diagnosed with sickle cell disease at birth moved into their home. Not only did Connie have to juggle her schedule to ensure her daughter met all of her appointments, received her treatments, but she was also tasked with ensuring her grandson continued receiving his medical treatment and went to his medical appointments.

As her daughter's cancer became more aggressive, she finally had to be hospitalized on October 5, 2019. Until her death on November 22, 2019, Connie refused to leave her and stayed at the hospital by her bedside daily. She would only go home between 5:00 pm and 10:00 pm to assist a Pre-Kindergarten and a 4th grader with homework, feed them, give them a bath, get clothes and materials together for the next day, and put them in bed. After the death of her daughter, she suddenly became a parent to two young children at the age of 58.

By investing in Georgia's care infrastructure, people with disabilities like Connie's grandson would have access to the services they need in order to live in their communities, without having to wait years and years for these crucial supports. For example, Connie has a church member whose son is in his 30's with Sickle Cell Disease who needs lots of crucial support. However, the family has been fighting the system to receive assistance but with no success. They have gone through their savings, not able to work full-time jobs and people have held fundraisers to fill in the gaps.



*By investing in Georgia's care infrastructure, people with disabilities like my grandson would have access to the services they need in order to live in their communities, without having to wait years and years for these crucial supports.*

*~ Dr. Kitchens*

# Christina Le



Christina is a single mom who struggles to find affordable and quality child care while leaning on the small village of support that she has here in Georgia. Christina prefers to pay family members to be caregivers because it's usually less expensive and she prefers the familiarity of family.

Christina has been making ends meet by doing “oddball” jobs including working in the adult entertainment industry as a dancer. Originally, Christina's mother-in-law was taking care of her daughter but she had to stop due to an injury.

Currently, Christina is working in the adult industry from home because that is the easiest and most convenient way for her to continue being able to provide for her family while also being a caregiver to her daughter. Christina has been offered amazing opportunities in the past such as a job in HR with Wal-Mart, but always had to pass because of the lack of affordable and quality child care.

Christina wishes that our elected officials would focus on making child care more affordable for single mothers as well as lowering the cost of living in general so that families are not struggling to make ends meet.



*It's very hard for single mothers to be able to work full time & provide what is necessary without compromising the time they could be spending with their children. Help families out more by offering help with caregiving - for example - offer governmental assistance for child care.*

*~Christina*

# Hamida Madhani



Hamida had to leave her corporate career and switch to freelance work after becoming a mother. Everything changed when her husband fell and injured his head. He required full time care, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Like many families, Hamida could not afford to stop working to provide care. She needed to balance earning money with taking care of her husband. It was a difficult adjustment and Hamida struggled with her physical and emotional wellbeing. In an instant, her entire life had changed and she was suddenly a full time caregiver to her entire family as well as the sole source of income. At the time, she felt helpless but she knew that she had to be strong and prioritize her mental health so that she could care fully for her husband and daughter.

As she looks back on those especially difficult early days, Hamida imagines the difference it would have made for her and her family if she'd had more care support. She's grateful for her community, family, and friends. The help she received from them and her daughter helped her make it through. Hamida knows others in similar situations and wants to see more affordable and quality care available for all families who need it.



*As a caregiver, you need support not just for the person you are caring for but for the caregiver themselves - there should be mental health services - wellness programs - more support for the caregivers. I want legislators to allocate more resources to the caregiver shortage which is a growing issue as our society is getting older.*

*~ Hamida*



# Jerri McElroy



In 2017 Jerri McElroy's father disappeared from the residence where he stayed, and he was found injured in the street. After taking him to the ER, Jerri expressed concerns to the VA medical staff that her dad didn't seem cognizant. Soon after, he was assessed and diagnosed with early onset dementia at age 65.

Life changed with that diagnosis, as Jerri's father could not go back to his residence, and she had to immediately find a personal care home where his meals and meds could be properly managed. Jerri is a mother of six, and at the time of her dad's diagnosis her house was full with four teens and two adults. Jerri's father stayed in two different care homes, and in April of 2018 he experienced a grand mal seizure while residing in the second home. His speech was severely affected and he lost use of the right side of his body. With a rehab and recovery care plan in place, he was then placed in three different rehab facilities in which his health and mental capacity continued to decline, instead of improve. By September of 2018, Jerri had a spare bedroom, and decided to bring her dad home in an effort to provide a better quality of life for him to recover.

Jerri experienced a lot of culture shock due to being very unfamiliar with the Veterans Affairs system. She found the VA unwilling to explain the different processes to civilians, making it very hard to advocate for her father. According to Jerri, the VA's caregiver program will only cover a disability that is related to his active service in the military and her father has been non-verbal since the mal seizure in 2018 so she can't make the connection. Since Jerri can't prove his eligibility for a service related injury or condition, he is considered ineligible for service-connection; also resulting in Jerri being ineligible to be paid through the caregiver program.

Jerri's voice as a family caregiver needs to be uplifted and elected officials need to understand that the average PCA or CNA doesn't do what she does. Jerri wishes that more family caregivers are given access to income in lieu of a job, when managing care becomes priority; and that the red tape of bureaucracy is removed so she can focus on simply giving the best care possible to her father.



*I think it would be nice for any family caregiver to have access to income in lieu of a job; the red tape needs to be removed. If the government needs to verify the care relationship, then they should do that; maybe even a home visit to observe the care relationship. There should be a way to offset expenses when you have to leave your job.*

*~ Jerri*



# Dorian Robinson



Dorian Robinson is a mom of two who has struggled to find affordable child care for her two young children since moving to Georgia. She's originally from South Carolina and has a limited network of trusted family and friends in the state. It has been difficult for Dorian to expand her community because although she's young and eager to enter the workforce, she has to stay at home while her partner works. The money she would make isn't enough to cover the costs of child care for both children.

Dorian's only hope for re-entering the workforce soon is Georgia's lottery funded universal Pre-K program. Unfortunately, there are limited spots and Dorian can only hope that there is an available spot in her area when her daughter turns four next year and becomes eligible. Until Dorian knows the outcome of the process, she has to limit her job searches to remote work which is becoming harder post pandemic.

After months of searching, Dorian remains unemployed but she is hopeful for future opportunities.



*It's not easy having kids and then trying to get a job; we need more affordable child care options for job interviews and for work.*

*~ Dorian*

## About Georgia Cares

Georgia Cares is a network of progressive nonprofits who are dedicated to improving the lives of working families across the state, especially BIPOC and disabled communities. Costs are rising and Georgia families are feeling the squeeze. Together, we're educating, advocating, and building grassroots support for solutions like paid family and medical leave, affordable aging, disability, and child care, and lowering prescription drugs. These policies would transform the lives of families, family caregivers, and domestic workers.

We believe that all Georgians deserve dignity, fairness, and an opportunity to thrive. Collectively, we're seeking A South where liberation and justice for all people is achievable.



**Care IN  
action**



**CARING  
ACROSS  
GENERATIONS**



**FAMILY  
FRIENDLY**  
GEORGIA



**NEW DISABLED SOUTH  
RISING**



**GEORGIA**

**ROSALYNN FOR  
CARTER  
INSTITUTE**

**CAREGIVERS**

