

# Child care problems must be resolved

Region's economy won't recover until parents feel they can come back to work



**Randi F. Marshall**

randi.marshall@newsday.com

It's never been easy to be a working mom — or dad. The work-life balance. The child care issues. The emotional and physical toll. And for some women in those early years, the exhausting, seemingly never-ending cycle of breastfeeding at home and pumping at work.

Last year, Gov. Kathy Hochul made that last part just a bit easier, by signing legislation that requires all employers to provide private spaces — “other than a restroom” — for pumping, complete with a chair, table, running water, and electricity.

One problem solved. Many more — much tougher ones — to go.

Across Long Island, the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting explosion of remote work brought into stark relief the difficulty of balancing work

and family, of finding adequate affordable child care, and of determining whether it was even worth it to continue working at all. The region faced critical questions without easy answers.

Why bother going into the office, and pay a caregiver most of your paycheck, when you could just stay home? Even if parents enjoy their jobs and want to work, the math often doesn't add up and parents find themselves making tough choices. That leads to more questions.

Can we encourage moms and dads to return to the workforce — and even the office — by rethinking how we offer, handle, and invest in child care? Can employers offer flexibility for parents who need a few hours to attend a parent-teacher conference, or an early departure to make it to a school play?

And how do we recruit more workers to the child care industry, make it more flexible, and help it meet the changing demands of Long Island fami-



MORGAN CAMPBELL

**Owner Janna Rodriguez with kids at a child care center in Freeport. Child care is a critical building block to boosting the workforce.**

lies?

That last part, of course, requires more money — for staff, who often earn barely above minimum wage and rarely get benefits, and for facilities and insurance, among other things. But it's more than that, because reimagining the industry must include making it more affordable and flexible for families.

So, the full response is complicated. But it starts with recognizing the extent of the

problem.

“I've been in and around child care for 25 years,” said Jennifer Rojas, executive director of the Child Care Council of Suffolk. “I've never seen the industry this fragile. It's at a tipping point.”

That's bad news for the region's entire economy. Child care is a critical building block to boosting the workforce and encouraging young women — and men — to take that next job or get back on the train or

return to the office. Without it, there's no way Long Island will develop the nascent industries like life sciences and high technology so critical to the region's future.

Long Island Association chief executive Matt Cohen, who also chairs the Child Care Council of Suffolk's board, and Association for a Better Long Island executive director Kyle Strober — both young fathers — say they're ready to do more to lead on the issue. That's a good start. So, too, is the spotlight shone by Linda Army of Bethpage Federal Credit Union, through her work on the Long Island Regional Economic Development Corp. Hochul likely will beat this drum, too, starting with Tuesday's State of the State address.

But until the alarm is sounded more loudly, until this becomes an issue at the top of everyone's to-do list — like housing or transit or job creation — and until more innovative ideas are embraced, the larger problems working parents face will remain unsolved.

■ **COLUMNIST RANDI F. MARSHALL'S** opinions are her own.



**Then Rep.-elect George Santos talks with Georgia's Marjorie Taylor Greene on Thursday during the ninth vote to elect a House speaker.**

this goes away. Let's keep up the pressure so this madness stops. I am so tired of staying in my lane trying to do everything right. It must be nice to go off the rails and not suffer consequences while others feel obliged to live up to a higher standard.

— PHILIP BOSCIA, BAYVILLE

This fiasco may indeed boil down to just one word. The final nail in Rep. George Santos' political coffin may have emerged — the theft and use of someone else's checks [“CNN: Santos used stolen checks in '08,” News, Jan. 5].

But I believe that Santos may just have conflated one word in

all his ludicrous resume explanations. When he used the word “embellishment,” he most likely mixed it up with the word “embezzlement.”

Probably an innocent oversight.

— MICHAEL WAGNER, GREAT RIVER

It appears that the high school that Rep. George Santos may have attended did not offer any courses on ethics or resume writing.

— MARY ROULETTE, WEST ISLIP

One politician can broadcast dangerous and hurtful lies, and many people want him back in office. Another politician tells lies that mostly hurt only himself, and people are screaming for his resignation [“Pol: ‘Consider resigning,’” News, Jan. 2]. Why is that?

In the case of the former political officeholder, he believes himself to be the victim of the lies he's told.

While in the instance of the new officeholder, the public feels as if they've been victimized by the lies.

No politician who lies can claim to represent the people.

— JIM INCORVAIA, WESTBURY

Thank you, Rep. George Santos, for showing that the American Dream is alive and well. Where else can a person of limited education and no apparent record of accomplishment, with just a fanciful, “embellished” resume and a whole lot of gall, rise to represent his district in Congress?

— MICHAEL GOLDEN, GREAT NECK

While Rep. George Santos' lying to gain public office is

inexcusable and reprehensible, it pales in comparison to the Republicans who violated their oath of office by being involved in and supporting an insurrection on the U.S. Capitol to stop the lawful transition of power to a legitimately elected president.

They violated their oath to protect and defend the Constitution.

— VINCENT FIORDALISI, EAST NORWICH

We, the taxpayers, are now paying Rep. George Santos more than \$3,300 a week for a position he won by lying about almost everything. Let that sink in.

— DION HELLEN, NEW HYDE PARK

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