



**NEWS from the Shelby County Mayor's Office**

***Lee Harris, Mayor***

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

JULY 8, 2022

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**SHELBY COUNTY GOVERNMENT EARNS LOCAL AND NATIONAL SUPPORT  
FOR A NEW CHILDCARE BENEFIT PROGRAM FOR WORKING FAMILIES**

***The pilot program takes aim at inequities in career advancement opportunities for working mothers, a problem that has “snowballed” since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.***

**Shelby County, TN** – Beginning during this year’s open enrollment process, 100 Shelby County Government employees with small children will be able to enroll in a new Childcare Benefit for Working Families. The limited 6-month pilot program will be used to further guide new benefits to help recruit and retain talented public servants. Qualifying employees will receive a monthly \$300 deposit into a dependent care spending account as a way to offset the increasing cost of childcare. The Shelby County Mayor’s Office designed the program in response to President Joe Biden’s passionate plea to support working families who are crippled by the rising cost of childcare post-pandemic.

The pilot program will serve employees who have children who are not yet eligible for Pre-K, as well as children with special needs. Priority will be given to households with multiple children and to families who do not receive other childcare subsidies. High-wage earners are not eligible to participate.

Since announcing the program during a presentation to the Shelby County Board of Commissioners, organizations have chimed in with support of the employer-sponsored initiative to address childcare strain on working families.

**Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris:** “We greatly appreciate the hard work and resourcefulness of the army of working parents in Shelby County Government and around our community. We



recognize that affordable and accessible childcare is essential for working families in Shelby County. We haven't found a similar model to the Shelby County Childcare Benefit anywhere in the region. But, it's important that Shelby County leads the way when it comes to supporting working families.

**Danielle Inez, Chief of Staff to Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris:** “As a working mother in Shelby County Government, I am passionate about this new benefit for county employees. Since the pandemic, American women have left the workforce in record numbers, too often because of a lack of childcare. Research shows this has been especially true for Black mothers. When affordable and available childcare providers shut down during COVID, these were the moms who found themselves in the impossible position of having to leave their jobs to care for their children. Employers, like Shelby County Government, have the power to give these mothers better options. That's why we want to lead the way with policies that make it easier for mothers to remain in the workforce.”

**Hon. Heidi Kuhn, Shelby County Criminal Court Clerk:** “We are not just a team here in our office. We're a family. We all know about a baby's first tooth and first steps. And we know when a co-worker has a delicately balanced childcare situation. They rely on a mother, a grandmother, or another relative to look after their baby because it's so much more affordable than a daycare center. But when that relative can't keep the baby, the employee can't come to work. No one minds stepping in to handle their work when childcare falls through, but working mothers shouldn't have to worry about burdening their work family because of childcare problems. I'm hoping we'll soon be able to change that.”

**Gerald Thornton, Human Resources Director at Shelby County Government:** “Shelby County is fortunate to have so many exemplary employees who are also mothers. Unfortunately, I've found that it can be hard to reward many of these employees with promotions because of the strict requirements from their childcare providers. These women want and deserve a job that gives them more responsibilities, opportunities to learn new skills, and earn more money for their families. But finding affordable childcare that will accommodate any change in work hours is next to impossible. I have had women turn down promotions only because of childcare issues. Changing that dynamic will help our existing workers and make us a more attractive employer for future workers.”

**Lesley Brown Rawlings, Vice President of Strategy of Beloved Community:** “Beloved Community is currently leading the NOLA C.A.R.E.S. initiative in New Orleans, which centers access to childcare as an engine of economic mobility for Black and brown women. We know that when reliable, high-quality childcare is not available, women are often pushed out of the



workforce. One of the cornerstones of our work through NOLA C.A.R.E.S. is supporting employers in centering access to childcare as a workplace benefit. For some employers, this may look like onsite childcare while for others it may look like monthly childcare stipends. We're excited to see this practice emerging in other communities like Memphis and Shelby County, as well. Employer-provided support for childcare is the first step toward economic freedom for women, especially Black and brown women. We hope that the policies and practices that we see coming forth in places like New Orleans, Memphis, and other cities become the national norm as we hold women as valuable members of our economy.”

**Shante Avant, Vice President of Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis:** “Over ten years ago, the Women’s Foundation partnered with several national agencies to publish a paper about the impact of expensive childcare on mothers in the workplace. Today, the inequitable burden of childcare continues to fall in the laps of mothers and less than 7% of employers across the country have invested in a solution. I’m appreciative of partners like the Shelby County Mayor’s Office for seeking solutions and implementing benefits like this one to address the needs of parents, especially mothers, in the workplace. We are all better served when women are better supported.”

**Melanie Schild, CEO of Girl Scouts Heart of the South:** “Girl Scouts Heart of the South is pleased to support Shelby County Government’s efforts to provide a childcare program for their employees. The vast majority of our volunteers are working moms - several of whom work for county government - and we are thrilled that they will have access to this much-needed benefit. This amazing effort on behalf of working mothers is exactly why girls in our council created National Working Mothers Day in 2018. This national day of recognition aims to honor the 70% of women with children under 18 years of age who participate in today’s labor force. At great personal sacrifice, the working mothers of the world make substantial contributions not only to corporate success but also to the nation’s economic growth and to the increasing strength of the American family.”

**Tabitha Glenn, Immediate Past President of Junior League of Memphis:** “Working mothers are essential to both their families and our communities. A lot of working moms are not just superwomen in their jobs and businesses but are also pillars in the community. They volunteer their time, talents, and treasures throughout Shelby County. The Junior League of Memphis fully supports working families, especially working mothers who need access to quality childcare. We are very appreciative of the Shelby County Mayor’s Office for their work on this new benefit for working families.



**Tonja Sesley-Baymon, President of the Memphis Urban League:** “Most adults become parents during the most critical season of their professional career. Men return to the workforce within a couple of weeks after a new child is born. Nearly half of new moms don’t re-enter the workforce because they cannot afford to work and also secure high-quality care for their children. I commend Shelby County Government and Mayor Harris for recognizing what it takes to support new parents in the workplace, and I’m happy to direct our clients at the Memphis Urban League to a conscientious employer that prioritizes families.”

**Hendrell Remus, Chairman of the Tennessee Democratic Party:** “Since President Biden introduced legislation to Build Back Better, Democrats have been working to ensure that families have access to affordable, high-quality childcare. The leadership of Mayor Harris on this issue will help to alleviate some of the economic burden that working families face to fund child care. It will also signal to businesses and members of Congress the urgent need to help expand the crucial investments that community leaders are making to assist working families.”

(End of Release)