

ACCESS & USAGE: JANUARY 2024

A data-driven report on a structural solution for caregiving candidates.

photo: Representative Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (WA-03) with her son.

campaign funds for childcare

by  *Vote mama* FOUNDATION

introduction

In Hawaii, candidates are allowed to use their campaign funds to pay for a vehicle, but not campaign related childcare expenses.¹

In Iowa, candidates are allowed to use their campaign funds to pay for gala tickets, but not campaign related childcare expenses.²

In 20 states, candidates are allowed to use their campaign funds to cover the cost of mailers, staff salaries, yard signs, and campaign office furniture, but not campaign related childcare expenses.

The cost of childcare impacts how and when caregivers are able to run for office, and for some, it may shut them out of our political system entirely. Research shows that women are less likely to run for office if they have young children.³ It is no wonder that just 6.8% of federal legislators and 5.3% of state legislators are moms with minor children.*⁴ The cost and accessibility of caregiving creates structural, financial, and logistical barriers to running for office.

When Liuba Grechen Shirley, Vote Mama Foundation Founder and CEO, ran for Congress in 2018, her children were just one and three years old. For the first six months she campaigned with a baby strapped to her chest and a toddler by her side. She knew her schedule was unsustainable, but so was paying for the cost of childcare out of pocket after giving up her salaried job to campaign full time. Liuba petitioned the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and became the first woman in

history to receive federal approval to spend Campaign Funds for Childcare (CFCC). This unanimous, bipartisan approval paved the way for other federal candidates to do so as well. **Since 2018, 68 federal candidates have used CFCC—both moms and dads, Democrats and Republicans.**

The FEC ruling made it easier for parents to run at the federal level, but it does not apply to candidates running for state and local office. Vote Mama Foundation is the only organization working to authorize the use of Campaign Funds for Childcare in all 50 states. We work with elected officials and candidates on both sides of the aisle to authorize the use of CFCC by passing legislation, requesting Ethics Rulings, and issuing Secretary of State or Attorney General opinions. At the time of publication of this report, 30 states have brought their statutes in line with federal regulations to allow candidates running for state and local office to use CFCC.

This report provides an update on who has access to and who is using CFCC. Our results show that CFCC usage has increased exponentially, especially among moms with minor children and candidates of color. **Overwhelmingly, this report indicates that CFCC is vital for accessibility and equity, and that CFCC is a structural solution that increases the diversity of candidates and elected officials.**

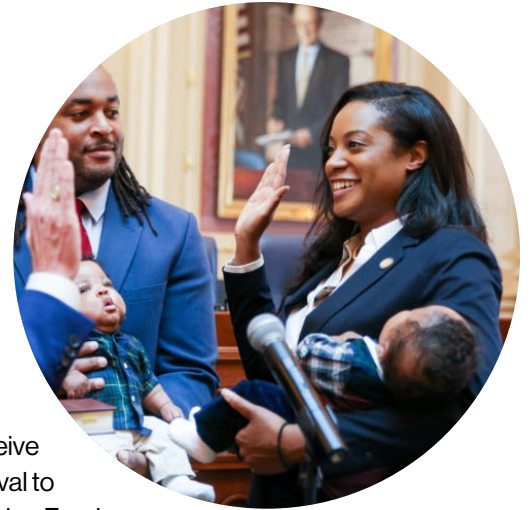


photo: Virginia State Senator Jennifer Carroll Foy with her twin sons.

*Vote Mama Foundation is the only organization tracking the number of mothers with minor children serving in state and federal legislatures across the United States—[Politics of Parenthood \(POP\)](#) dataset is the first publicly available dataset to include parental status for state and federal legislators.

organization & team

Vote Mama Foundation is the leading source of research and analysis about the political participation of mothers in the United States. We work towards gender equity by naming and dismantling the barriers mothers face running for and serving in office, normalizing mothers of young children in office, and enabling legislators to pass *truly* family-friendly policies. Vote Mama Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Authors: Sarah Hague, Chief Program Officer; Louisa Duggan, Policy & Advocacy Manager; Maria Wilson, Research Manager. **Editors:** Liuba Grechen Shirley, Founder & CEO; Corie Pope Lieberman, Chief Development Officer; Elise Anderson, Communications Director. **Editor & Designer:** Amanda MacDonald, Digital & Creative Director.

data & methodology

The data in this report covers campaign finance records from January 2018 to December 2022. For federal elections, we used the Federal Election Commission's (FEC) campaign disbursement database—searching the following keywords: “childcare,” “child care,” “daycare,” “day care,” “nursery school,” “babysit,” “baby sit,” “babysitting,” “baby sitting,” “babysitter,” “baby sitter.”⁵ Any transactions with descriptions outside of these search terms are not captured in this dataset. Demographic data was retrieved from the Biographical Directory of Congress and the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate websites, supplemented by candidate websites, the Center for American Women in Politics (CAWP), Ballotpedia, and candidate Facebook and X (i.e. Twitter) accounts.

For state and local elections, data was retrieved from individual state reporting agencies responsible for monitoring and regulating campaign finance. Throughout the report when discussing state data, this includes local elections that report to state agencies and does not capture all local elections. The accessibility of this data varies widely, and we were unable to access data for some states. Where possible, campaign expenditures were retrieved from each state's reporting agency.* At the time of data collection, 29 states allowed campaign funds to be used for childcare—of those, 18 had accessible campaign finance data. We found expenditures for childcare in 13 of those states: CA, CO, IL, KY, LA, MD, MN, NE, NH, TX, VT, WA, WI. Findings in this report are based on the data from these 13 states. For state databases that report campaign finance information similarly to the FEC database, we replicated the search process above. For state reporting agencies that did not have a searchable database, we downloaded expenditure data in bulk and manually searched for transactions with the description featuring our keywords. Demographic data came from candidate websites, Ballotpedia, CAWP, candidate Facebook and X (i.e. Twitter) accounts, or official state biographies.

We were unable to analyze data from the remaining 11 states due to the lack of robust filing requirements or the inability to search transaction descriptions in the state's database.

Given the data limitations, we do not claim this report to be an exhaustive record of the use of CFCC at the state and local levels, and we suspect that usage is higher than reported.

* Searchable database: IL, LA, NC, NH, VT, WA Bulk download: CO, DE, KY, MD, TX, WV

Data sent from state agencies: CA, MN, NE, OR, RI, WI Data not accessible: AK, AL, CT, GA, KS, MT, NM, NJ, NY, UT, VA, WV

key findings

Vote Mama Foundation found a monumental increase in CFCC usage at both the federal and state levels since 2018. The increase is particularly salient among those who have historically been underrepresented and who face additional barriers when running for and serving in office. A majority of the funds spent by women candidates at both the federal and state levels on caregiving services were spent by women of color.

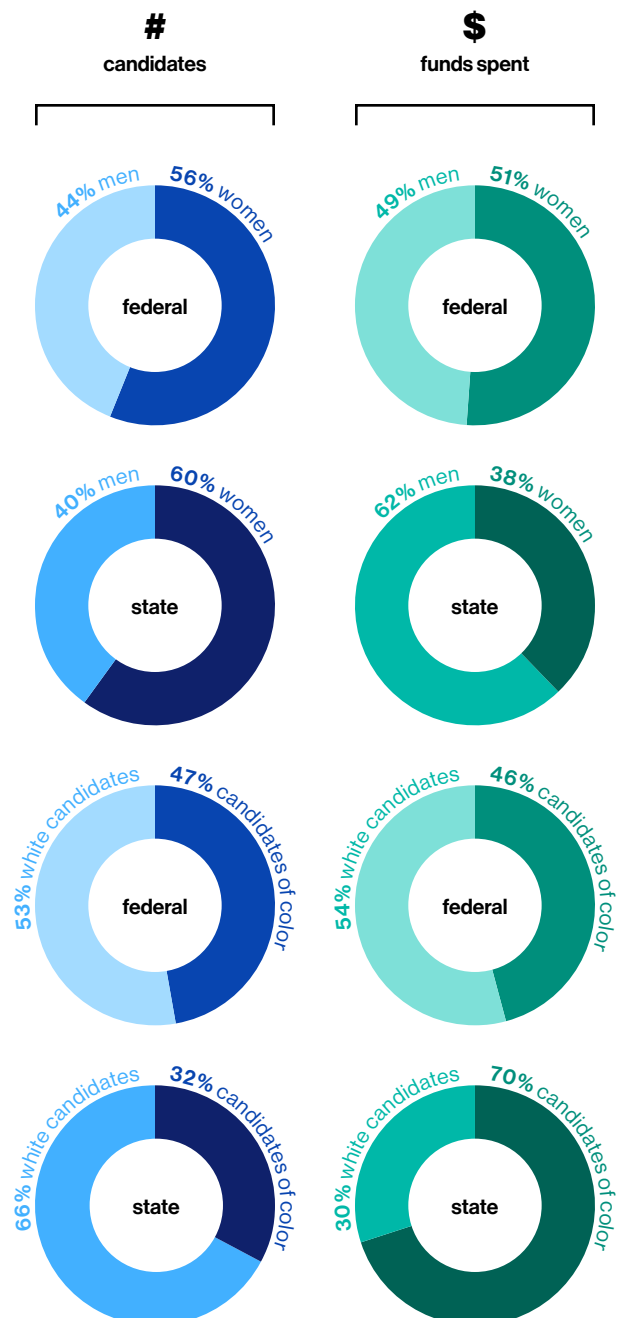
The information in this report reflects campaign finance data from January 2018 to December 2022.

662%
increase in funds spent
by federal candidates

68
federal candidates have
used CFCC in 90 races

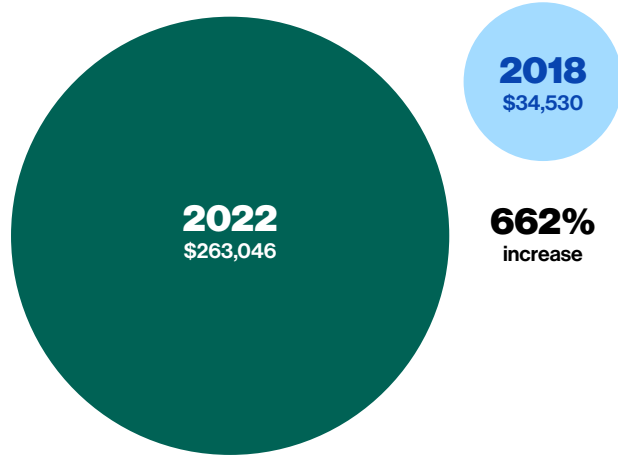
2,156%
increase in funds spent
by state and local candidates

87+
state and local candidates have
used CFCC in 13+ states



federal overview: funds spent

Federal CFCC spending multiplied by nearly 7 times from 2018 to 2022, and was used by 68 candidates—moms and dads, Democrats and Republicans—running for U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and the Presidency.



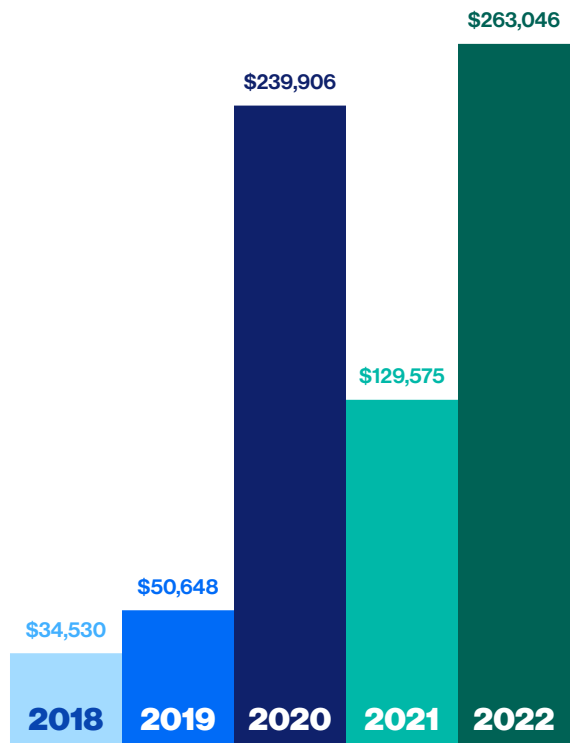
\$717,706
total spent by federal candidates

46%
spent by candidates of color

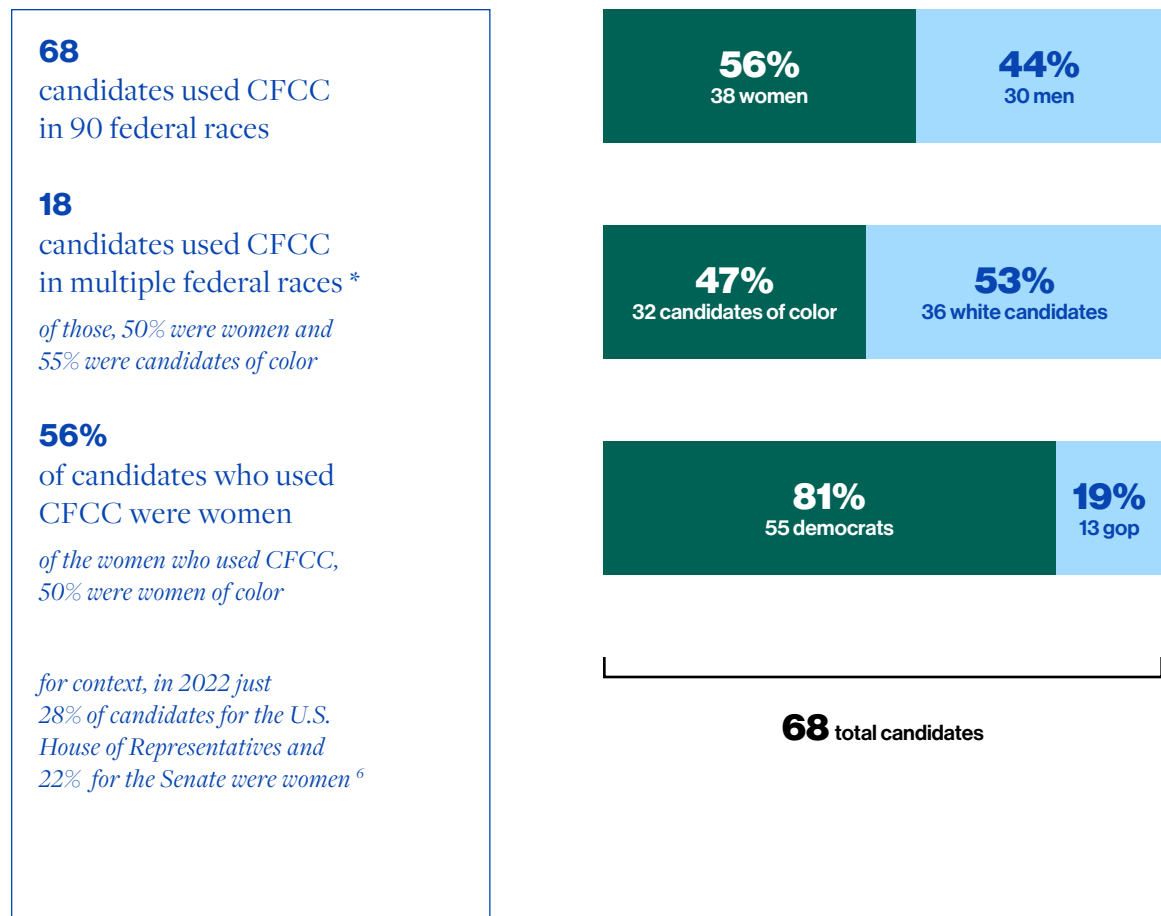
51%
spent by women
of the funds spent by women, 60% was spent by women of color (accounting for 31% of total funds); 60% was used by Democratic women and 40% by Republican women

74%
spent by Democrats

77%
of total Republican funds spent on childcare were spent by women of color
women of color makeup only 2.6% of the Congressional Republican caucus



federal overview: candidates



* For example, Congressman Eric Swalwell utilized CFCC in 2 Congressional races and 1 Presidential race from 2018 to 2022.

state overview: funds spent

CFCC spending at the state and local level increased by 2,156% from 2018–2022.

\$297,582+

total spent by state candidates

2,156%*

increase in funds spent

70%

spent by candidates of color

38%

spent by women

*of the funds spent by women,
70% was spent by women of color*

84%

spent by Democrats

*11% Republicans
4% nonpartisan
1% unknown*

2018
\$10,001

2022
\$225,567

2,156%
increase

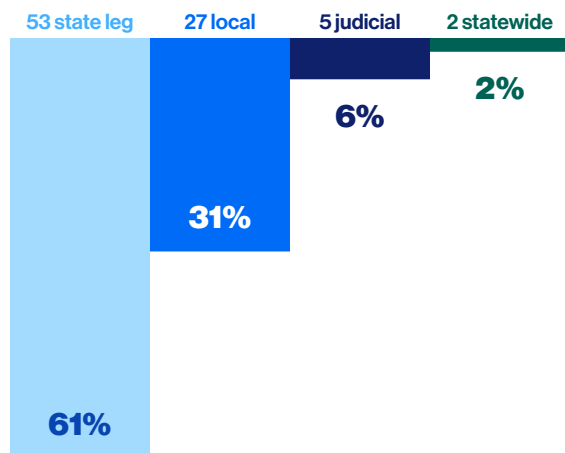
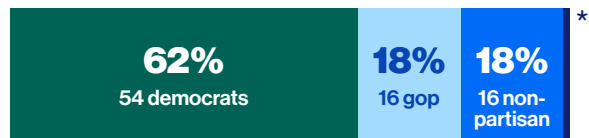
* Vote Mama Foundation found records of spending on childcare in 6 states in 2018 and 12 in 2022.

state overview: candidates

87+
state candidates used CFCC

60%
of state candidates who used CFCC were women

32%
of state candidates who used CFCC were people of color



* We were unable to verify the racial identity of two candidates and unable to verify the political identity of one candidate.

state overview:

scope of allowance

All of the 30 states listed below explicitly allow candidates to use campaign funds on childcare expenses directly related to campaign activity. Some states, as indicated below, allow funds to be used on broader dependent care* and official duties in addition to childcare and campaign activity.

state	approval method**	year approved	broader dependent care?	covers official duties?	total spent 2018-2022
30 total	^B indicates bipartisan support	2018-2022	9 total	11 total	\$297,582.42
Alabama	Ethics Ruling	2018	no	no	no accessible data
Arkansas	Legislation ^B	2021	no	no	no accessible data
California	Legislation ^B	2019	no	yes	\$74,878.47
Colorado	Legislation ^B	2019	yes	no	\$12,602.01
Connecticut	Legislation ^B	2021	no	no	no accessible data
Delaware	Legislation ^B	2021	no	no	no records of use found
Georgia	Ethics Ruling	2023	yes	yes	no accessible data
Illinois	Legislation	2021	yes	yes	\$144,641.05
Kansas	Ethics Ruling	2018	no	yes	no accessible data
Kentucky	Ethics Ruling	2018	yes	no	\$594.23
Louisiana	Ethics Ruling	2019	no	no	\$1,623.00
Maryland	Ethics Ruling	2019	no	no	\$522.50
Minnesota	Legislation ^B	1993	no	no	\$8,771.29
Montana	Legislation ^B	2021	no	no	no accessible data
Nebraska	Ethics Ruling	2015	no	no	\$1,782
New Hampshire	Legislation ^B	2019	no	no	\$220
New Jersey	Legislation ^B	2020	no	yes	no accessible data
New Mexico	Secretary of State Opinion	2022	no	no	no accessible data
New York	Legislation ^B	2019	no	yes	no accessible data
North Carolina	Ethics Ruling	2020	yes	yes	no records of use found
Oregon	Ethics Ruling	2022	no	yes	no records of use found
Rhode Island	Legislation ^B	2021	no	yes	no records of use found
Tennessee***	Ethics Ruling	2023	yes	yes	no records of use found
Texas	Ethics Ruling	2018	no	no	\$19,085.16
Utah	Legislation ^B	2019	no	yes	no accessible data
Vermont	Legislation ^B	2021	yes	no	\$316
Virginia	Attorney General Opinion	2021	no	no	no accessible data
Washington	Legislation ^B	2022	yes	no	\$22,423.93
West Virginia	Legislation ^B	2021	yes	no	no records of use found
Wisconsin	Ethics Ruling	2018	no	no	\$10,122.78

* This definition of caregiving includes the care needed for both young children and aging parents or adult children with disabilities who might be dependent upon the candidate and their family.

** Vote Mama Foundation works to get CFCC approved in all 50 states. While codification is our gold standard, we have sought allowance through other avenues. We work with candidates to request Ethics Rulings from state agencies that monitor and regulate state & local campaign finance law, as well as petition Secretaries of State and Attorneys General to issue formal opinions that allow state & local candidates to use their campaign funds on childcare expenses.

*** Tennessee became the 30th state to pass CFCC after the data collection for this report and is not included in our analysis.

recommendations

Expand Federal Allowance to Include Dependent Care

While 9 states allow candidates to use campaign funds on dependent care expenses in addition to childcare expenses, this is not yet allowed at the federal level. Vote Mama Foundation Founder & CEO Liuba Grechen Shirley testified before the FEC in 2023 in support of a proposed rule changes to expand the 2018 ruling to include coverage for broader dependent care expenses directly related to campaign activity. With 54% of Americans in their forties being part of the “Sandwich Generation,” the FEC stands to remove a significant barrier to entry for caregivers at all stages of life.⁷

Expand State Approvals for Office Holders and their Staff

Vote Mama Foundation advocates for campaign funds to be authorized for all caregiving expenses directly related to campaign activity AND carrying out official duties with no cap on usage. Most state legislators are paid below their state's standard cost of living, and many do not have funding to hire staff. According to the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL), there are only four states with full-time legislatures that pay their legislators enough of a livable wage that they can survive without an additional income.⁸ States should allow candidates and officeholders to cover dependent care expenses incurred by their staff members, as was approved in Georgia.⁹ These measures are essential to building a sustainable pipeline of working parents at all levels of government.

Make State Campaign Finance Data More Accessible

Vote Mama Foundation believes that campaign finance data should be more accessible to the public and streamlined across states for more accurate data collection and analysis. Given the data inconsistencies across states, we recommend states follow the campaign finance reporting methods used by the Federal Election Commission. Like the FEC, state reporting agencies should provide the option to search databases via transaction keywords. Ideally, a standardized keyword of ‘care’ would be used by candidates to clearly categorize funds and easily identify transactions that have been spent on dependent care or childcare. Being able to track all campaign expenditures will allow for the impact of resources like CFCC to be measured and for campaign expenses to be monitored for abuse.

conclusion

his data shows that when candidates are authorized to use their campaign funds on caregiving expenses—they do.

CFCC usage rose exponentially from 2018 to 2022 at the federal, state, and local levels, especially among candidates from underrepresented groups. CFCC has proven to be a vital resource for women and people of color, and it presents an opportunity for both Democrats and Republicans to increase the diversity of their candidates.

Vote Mama Foundation is working with candidates and legislators to authorize Campaign Funds for Childcare in all 50 states. In 2023 alone, we secured the introduction of 23 pieces of CFCC legislation in 16 states. Our gold standard allowance permits candidates to use funds on childcare and dependent care for both campaign and official duties. As we continue our work to expand and normalize this vital resource, we anticipate that the number of candidates using campaign funds to cover childcare and dependent care expenses will continue to rise, creating more

opportunities for candidates with caregiving responsibilities to enter politics.

Research shows that mothers in office legislate on their lived experience and prioritize issues related to family and caregiving.¹⁰ More representation among caregivers means more

voices in office advocating for truly family-friendly legislation.

To get more parents and caregivers into every level of office, we must remove the structural barriers that prevent them from running in the first place.

Running for office should not be a privilege solely awarded to those who are independently wealthy and well-connected. Campaign

finance reform can break down financial and structural barriers that prevent candidates from running, and presents an exciting avenue for continued research on how to increase representation among marginalized groups.

Vote Mama Foundation will continue our work to authorize Campaign Funds for Childcare in each state, track its usage, and analyze its impact on accessibility and diversity at all levels of government. [Visit our website to learn more.](#)



Citations

- 1 State of Hawaii Campaign Spending Commission. "Campaign Spending Law Hawaii Revised Statutes". Chapter 11, Part XIII, pg. 28-29. June 2023. <https://ags.hawaii.gov/campaign/files/2023/08/HRS-2023.pdf>
- 2 Iowa Administrative Code. "Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board." Chapter 4, pg. 1. Iowa Legislature. December 18, 2023. <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/iac/chapter/10-18-2023.3514.pdf>
- 3 Mariani, Mack D. "A gendered pipeline? The advancement of state legislators to congress in five states." *Politics & Gender* 4.2 (2008): 285-308; Carroll, Susan J., and Kira Sanbonmatsu. *More women can run: Gender and pathways to the state legislatures*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.
- 4 "Politics of Parenthood: Key Findings." Vote Mama Foundation. New York, NY. Accessed October 31, 2023. <https://www.votemamafoundation.org/aboutpop>
- 5 Federal Election Commission (FEC). FEC Campaign Finance Disbursements Database, accessed October 13, 2023. <https://www.fec.gov/data/browse-data/?tab=spending>
- 6 Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP). 2023. "Women as Percentage of 2022 Major-Party Candidates and Nominees." New Brunswick, NJ: Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University-New Brunswick. <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/election-watch/women-percentage-2022-major-party-candidates-and-nominees> (Accessed October 30, 2023)
- 7 "More than half of Americans in their 40s are 'sandwiched' between an aging parent and their own children." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. April 8, 2022 <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/04/08/more-than-half-of-americans-in-their-40s-are-sandwiched-between-an-aging-parent-and-their-own-children/>
- 8 "Full- and Part-Time Legislatures." National Conference of State Legislatures, Washington, D.C. July 28, 2021 <https://www.ncsl.org/about-state-legislatures/full-and-part-time-legislatures>
- 9 "Georgia Advisory Opinion 2023-01" Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission June 26, 2023 https://8c99c177-8ae3-4e84-b7ff-133cca25df05.usfiles.com/ugd/8c99c1_83dae44615d9485683c52339081fce55.pdf
- 10 Lisa A. Bryant and Julia Marin Hellwege, "Working Mothers Represent: How Children Affect the Legislative Agenda of Women in Congress." *American Politics Research* 47.3 (2019): 447-470. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X18808037>

photo: US House Representative Andy Barr (KY-06) with his daughters.



WWW.VOTEMAMAFOUNDATION.ORG

Jan 2024

campaign funds for childcare



Photo: U.S. House of Representatives candidate Tamika Hamilton (CA-06) with her son.

 **Vote mama** FOUNDATION