



**“WE HAVE  
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*UB's response to member's long push for child care at medical school*

## Traversing the ‘child care desert’

Text by Darryl McGrath | Photo by Doug Levere, University at Buffalo

**O**n paper, Gov. Kathy Hochul’s support for child care in places around the state that have never had enough of this essential service seems to solve a huge problem for working parents.

The plan involves identifying places in New York that lack adequate child care, and then directing to child care programs in those areas grants from a nearly \$70 million pool of state money. The governor announced the grants in July as part of her lauded effort to help those far-flung child care programs increase staff and the number of children they can accommodate. The funds were part of a \$100 million initiative to address child care shortages in the state, which was approved in the fiscal year 2022 enacted state budget and originated with President Biden’s Build Back Better pandemic relief act.

But as Maureen Milligan has learned, a promise to address “child care deserts” is easier said than done. Milligan is a UUP member at the Buffalo HSC Chapter, a research administrator and staff assistant with the University at Buffalo’s Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences and a longtime advocate for child care. And she has been trying for years to convince the medical school to create a child care center on its campus in downtown Buffalo, where the medical school is part of a larger medical complex known as the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. The Jacobs medical school is the only one of the three University at Buffalo campuses that does not have child care, and Milligan does not see that changing any time soon.

“It’s a labor issue,” said Milligan, who chairs her chapter’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee, which has made access to child care and elder care

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a priority. “My God, it’s a labor issue, and it was all exposed during the pandemic ... it is a desert. It is five miles from the [university’s] South Campus and about 10 miles from the North Campus. And no child care for approximately 2,000 faculty and staff and students [at the medical school.] They built a brand-new building, and they didn’t put child care in it.”

## A loophole in the definition of “child care desert”

Because the University at Buffalo is considered a single entity, and two of the three campuses do have child care, the medical school would not have qualified for the state’s child care desert grant program, Milligan notes.

Nor does the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus operate its own child care center. A consortium of community groups and concerned individuals—including mem-

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Maureen Milligan, UUP member at the Buffalo HSC Chapter

bers of UUP—has been working for more than a year under the direction of the WNY Women’s Foundation on a grant-funded study of the feasibility of establishing child care at the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, said Sheri Scavone, the WNY Women’s Foundation’s chief executive officer. There is one private child care center that can accommodate about 32 children in a building across the street from the Jacobs medical school, Scavone said, but most parents make due by finding their own child care arrangements.

One obstacle to employer-sponsored child care in almost any setting in New York is the high cost of providing it, Scavone said. Employers who do provide it see it more as an employee retention issue than a profitable venture.

## Long effort to highlight need

Milligan said she raised the need for child care at the medical school more than five years ago, at forums for employees who moved into the new building when it opened in 2017.

When The Echo asked for a comment from the University at Buffalo administration about the Buffalo HSC chapter’s long effort to obtain child care at the

medical school, a spokeswoman for the university quoted the administration in a written response: “At present, there are no plans to have a UB day care facility at the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. Rather, we have deferred to the private sector to provide this service.”

The administration official who offered that response declined The Echo’s request that they provide their name.

Milligan is now part of a new committee at the medical school called “The Community Committee.” UUP members on the Jacobs’ medical school’s Faculty Council, including Jim Lukan and Peter Elkin, started the committee. The Community Committee is advocating for child care at the medical school, with the goal of seeing that service extend to the community around the medical school.

## An issue for negotiations

UUP has backed the concerns of the Buffalo HSC Chapter’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee. Delegates at the UUP Fall 2021 Delegate Assembly

passed a resolution introduced by the committee, with support from the New Paltz Chapter, which called on the UUP Negotiations Team to raise the need for child care and adult care on all SUNY campuses. (Gov. Hochul has also stated her intention to establish child care on all SUNY campuses.)

The resolution also directed UUP to work to develop a comprehensive

SUNY caregiver support program—a need that has been highlighted during the coronavirus pandemic as some members struggled to balance the care of young children, older parents, or both, when many services providing care temporarily or permanently closed.

Phil Glick, president of the Buffalo HSC Chapter, said Milligan’s efforts have helped define an important issue for the union.

“Maureen is our point person and advocate extraordinaire for child care issues,” Glick said in a written response.

Milligan, who is not a parent, said she grew up seeing her parents work opposite shifts—her mother was a nurse; her father an electrician—so that they could juggle child care responsibilities for Milligan and her two brothers. As an adult, she has watched friends and colleagues struggle with the same issues. It seems like little has changed, but she believes that change is possible.

Said Milligan, “We want to do this, we need to do this, we must do this ... the bottom line for me is that this is a bread-and-butter issue that will do something for our members.”