

Day care and unions don't mix

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Parents who work know the value of finding high quality, reliable care for their children. That's even more so for low-income families who struggle to afford day care services from paychecks that can only be stretched so far.

So, in theory, it's a good idea that the state provides subsidies that help low-income families cover the cost of child care.

That theory gets shattered, though, when the subsidy becomes a vehicle in which \$1 million in state taxpayer dollars can be funneled to a couple of large unions.

That's what has happened in Michigan where 40,000 home day care providers find themselves members of the United Auto Workers and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, or AFSCME. Most — nearly nine out of 10 — didn't vote for the union representation.

In fact, most didn't vote at all because they were either unaware of the election, didn't pay attention to the ballot mailed to them or couldn't imagine that, as an independent contractor, they could be represented by a union.

Many probably share the opinion of Peggy Mashke, an Ogemaw County resident (near West Branch) who, according to The Associated Press, was surprised when she got a letter welcoming her to the UAW.

"I thought it was a joke," she said. "I work out of my home. I'm not an auto worker. How can I become a member of the UAW?"

The "how" is the story of clever state and union officials who figured out a way to grab taxpayer money under the guise of providing representation for day care workers whose customers include at least one low-income family.

Because of the low-income subsidies, the unions were able to form a partnership with something called Child Care Providers Together Michigan. The name is as unwieldy as the process.

Bottom line, though, is that \$1 million of taxpayer money is skimmed from the low-income subsidies and given to the UAW and AFSCME, two unions with strong ties to the Democratic Party.

The unions and the state officials behind this plan are counting on the fact that most home day care workers don't have the time or ability to fight the deduction — especially when the amount is relatively small, only \$100 a year for Mashke, for instance.

But, as mentioned, it adds up for the unions.

A couple of conservative organizations, however, are picking up the fight. A federal lawsuit against the plan has been filed on behalf of a small group of reluctant union members by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation. The Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a free-market think tank in Midland, is suing at the state level on different grounds.

For their part, supporters of the union say they are merely trying to provide important support for a vital but low-paid sector of the economy. Indeed, there are those who say the new union has provided valuable information and services, such as helping out when a state check is slow in coming.

Still, it's hard not to be more than a little skeptical when the reward is \$1 million and new members to organized labor, which continues to see

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membership in the private sector decline and is focusing on getting additional rewards from taxpayer-funded employees.

Using the well-intentioned state subsidy as an under-the-radar method of padding the union pockets, however, is just another reason why the anti-government fervor is growing among some voters.

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