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N.J. Child Care Workers Win Right to Join AFSCME, CWA

by [Mike Hall](#), Aug 7, 2006

More than 7,000 New Jersey home child care workers officially won union representation last week, when Gov. Jon Corzine (D) signed an executive order granting the workers union bargaining rights. They will become members of the Child Care Workers Union (CCWU), a joint effort by AFSCME and the Communications Workers of America (CWA).

The workers provide day-care services in their homes for children of low-income families and are paid by the state. Prior to the executive order, they were classified as independent contractors without the right to unionize. While the state pays the workers and certifies their qualifications, the order does not make them state employees.

Their need for a union is clear, says CWA Local 1037 President Hetty Rosenstein. The workers currently earn "unbelievably low wages....Some are making the equivalent of less than \$5 an hour, with zero benefits."

Not exactly the best treatment for those who take care of some our most precious family members.

The child care workers, assisted by AFSCME and CWA activists, began the campaign to win a union voice about a year ago through a community-wide campaign in which they went door to door to talk with care providers, held rallies and met with state officials.

In a statement accompanying the executive order, Corzine said the family child care workers provide an "invaluable and essential service to working parents and guardians"

by providing a safe and productive environment for their children while they are engaged in work and training opportunities....[The state] needs to continue and improve both the quality of care and the living and working conditions of the providers.

Corzine spokesman Anthony Coley says:

The lack of better pay has led to high turnover, and when people go from job to job, you lose the expertise and knowledge that has developed over time. The children are short-changed, and they have to be our first priority....The executive order allows them to be represented over issues that help improve recruitment and retention of qualified child care providers.

Along with wage issues, the executive order allows child care workers and their union to negotiate with the state over benefits, health and safety conditions and other issues.

The New Jersey home child care workers join a number providers who are winning the right to come together in unions, including **50,000 in New York**, **6,000 in Iowa** and 5,000 in Oregon.

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