

# State *Of the* State Survey

## ***Perceptions of Welfare Reform and Child Care in Michigan***

*by*  
*Robert Griffore*  
*Rosemary Walker*  
*Alice Whiren*  
*John Herrick*

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*prepared by*

**Robert J. Griffore, Ph.D.**

Department of Family and Child Ecology  
Institute for Children, Youth, and Families

**Rosemary Walker, Ph.D.**

Department of Family and Child Ecology

**Alice Whiren, Ph.D.**

Department of Family and Child Ecology

**John Herrick, Ph.D.**

School of Social Work  
Michigan State University

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**About this report:** Robert J. Griffore, Department of Family and Child Ecology (phone 517-432-3818. Email: [griffor1@msu.edu](mailto:griffor1@msu.edu) **About SOSS:** Brian D. Silver, Director of SOSS (Phone: (517) 355-2237) or visit the SOSS web site at <http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/soss/>. **About the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research:** Carol S. Weissert, Director (Phone: (517) 355-6672 Email: [Weissert@msu.edu](mailto:Weissert@msu.edu)). General contact for media and press: AnnMarie Schneider, or Amy J. Baumer at IPPSR (Phone: (517) 355-6672 Email: [annmarie@msu.edu](mailto:annmarie@msu.edu) and [baumeram@msu.edu](mailto:baumeram@msu.edu)).

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## **BACKGROUND**

Welfare reform as we know it is a relatively recent development. For generations public assistance remained largely unchanged. The recent large scale changes have been implemented

relatively quickly and without precedent. The consequences of welfare reform are not entirely clear. It is widely hoped that welfare reform will reduce dependency on public assistance; that people will seek employment and remain employed. The State of Michigan is a leader in welfare reform, and it is very important that Michigan's policies and procedures are workable.

Most people agree that if welfare reform is to be successful, it will be necessary to create and maintain policies that are effective for Michigan's poor families. In many cases these are single parent households. If the heads of these households are to seek and maintain employment, they will in many cases require child care. Thus child care arrangements are very important to the success of welfare reform. In order to achieve effective reform of the welfare system, it will be necessary to make changes in Michigan's system of child care.

The Institute for Children, Youth, and Families, in partnership with the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research, collaborated in this study of "Perceptions of Welfare Reform and Child Care In Michigan." The Institute for Children, Youth, and Families (ICYF) is committed to promoting positive development of all children, youth and families in communities. It applies the scholarly resources of Michigan State University to enhance the experiences of diverse individuals and families. ICYF is devoted to empowering individuals and families. It seeks to assist families by integrating outreach and scholarship toward the development of "best practice" programs and interventions for children, youth, families and communities.

This study was undertaken as part of the quarterly MSU State of the State Survey. The specific objectives of the study are to measure public opinion in Michigan about:

- the role of government in child care
- the ease or difficulty of getting off welfare
- the need to have infants cared for at home

and to obtain information about:

- child care used for children under 5, the reasons for having these types of child care, and satisfaction with child care arrangements
- child care used for children 5 to 17, the reasons for having these types of child care, and satisfaction with child care arrangements
- transportation usually used to get children to child care and frequency of problems with this transportation.

## **THE SURVEY**

A telephone survey of 952 adult residents of the state of Michigan was conducted by Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) between June 10 and July 30, 1997. The eleventh quarterly MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS) focused on health information, confidence in the medical profession, and child care preferences. The overall

sampling error is  $\pm 3.2\%$ . Questions about child care for children under age 5 and for children aged 5-17 were asked only of people who indicated that their household included such children; thus, the sampling error is larger for these questions. (In the sample, 205 people had children under age 5 and 220 had children aged 5-17.)

The sample was designed to be representative of the state and its regions: Detroit City, Southeast Michigan (excluding Detroit), Southwest Michigan, West Central Michigan, East Central Michigan, Northern Lower Michigan, and the Upper Peninsula. (See attached information sheet for a list of the counties included in each region.) The data reported here are weighted to make the results representative of the adult population of Michigan.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **Public Opinion**

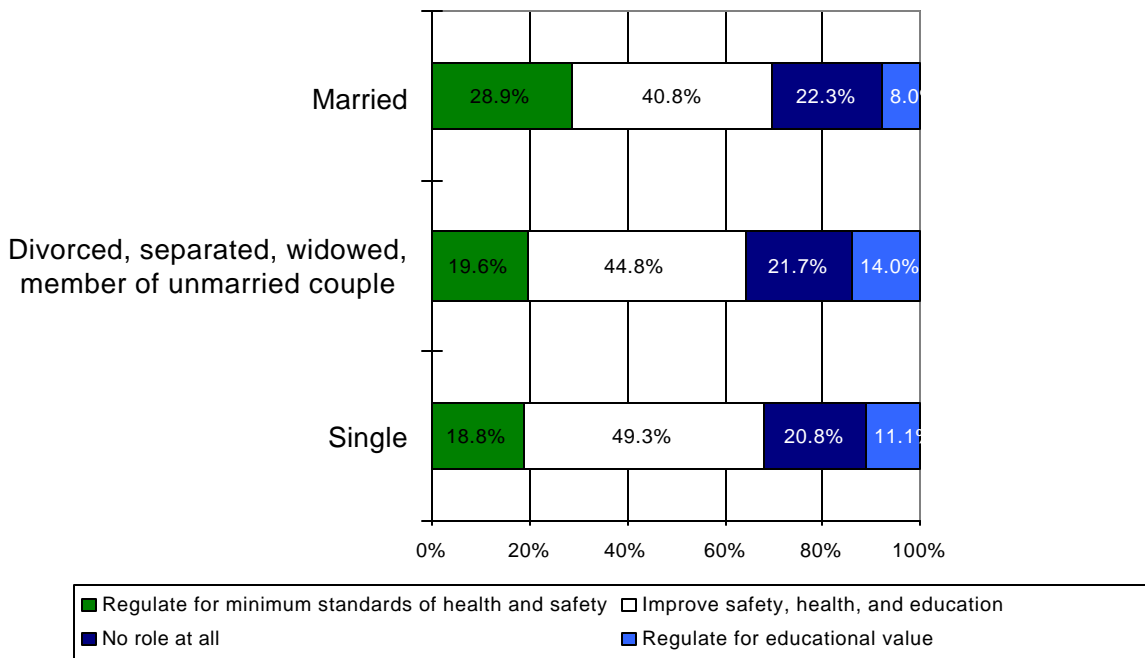
- ⊙ **Michigan residents are split on the proper role of government in child care regulation.** One quarter (25%) believe the government should set minimum standards of health and safety. Forty-three percent think the government should act to improve safety,

health, and education in child care. In contrast, about one-fifth (22%) feel the government should have no role at all. Only 10% say the government should regulate for educational value. (Q. 1—exact question wording is given below.)

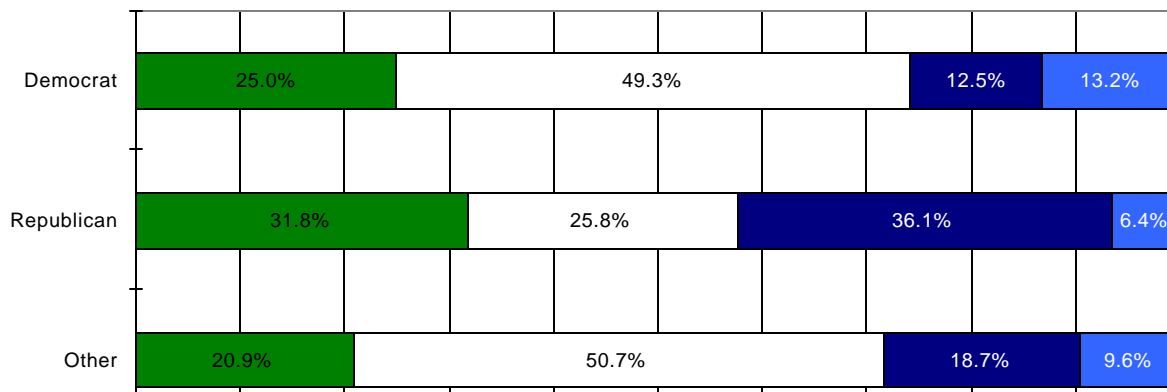
**Opinions vary somewhat by marital status, political affiliation, and community type.**

Figure 1 shows opinions on the proper role of government in child care regulation by marital status. About 41% of married Michigan residents and almost half of single residents favor improving safety, health and education, in contrast to only 15% of residents who are divorced, separated, widowed, or part of an unmarried couple. As Figure 2 shows, about 12% of Democrats favor no role at all for government, and 13% favor regulation for educational value. Many more Republicans (36%) favor no role at all for government and fewer (6%) favor regulation for educational value. Figure 3 shows that about half of both small town and urban residents favor improving safety, health, and education. Rural and suburban residents are less supportive of this choice (although the plurality of both groups still support it) and are more likely than other groups to favor regulation for minimum health and safety standards.

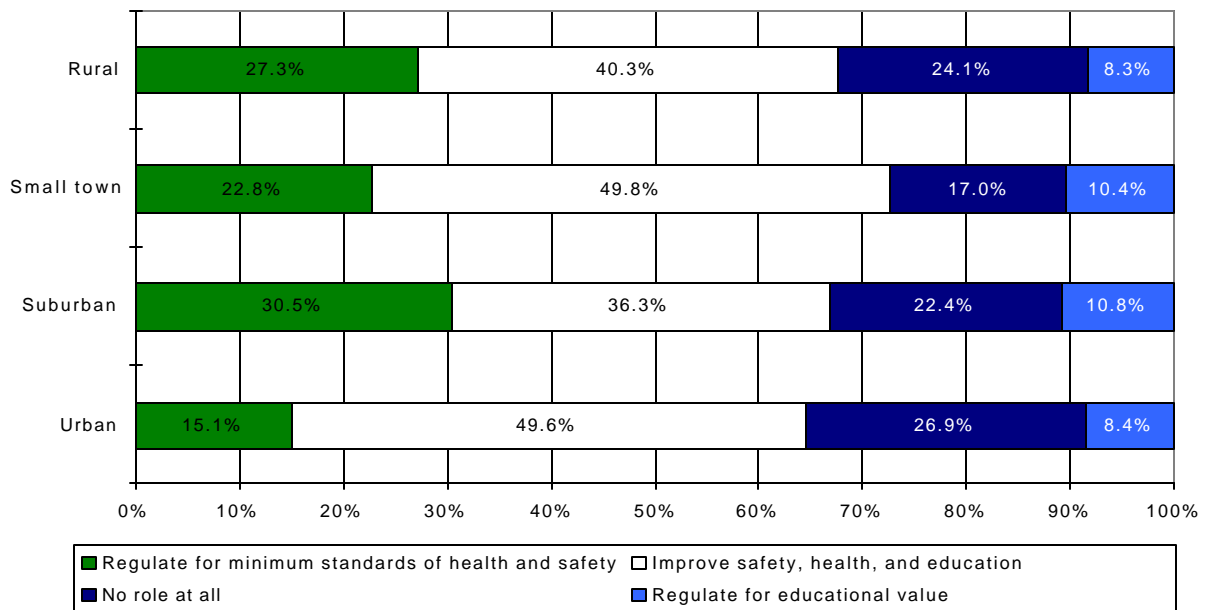
**Figure 1. Proper Role of Government in Regulating Child Care**  
by Marital Status



**Figure 2. Proper Role of Government in Regulating Child Care**  
by Political Affiliation

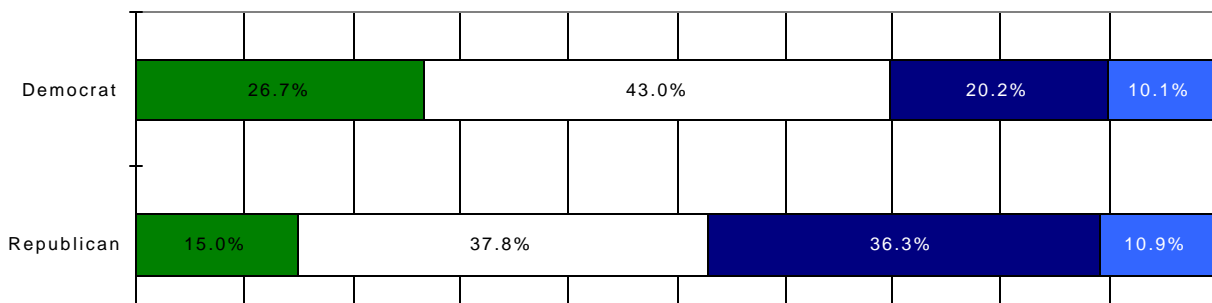


**Figure 3. Proper Role of Government in Regulating Child Care**  
by Community Type



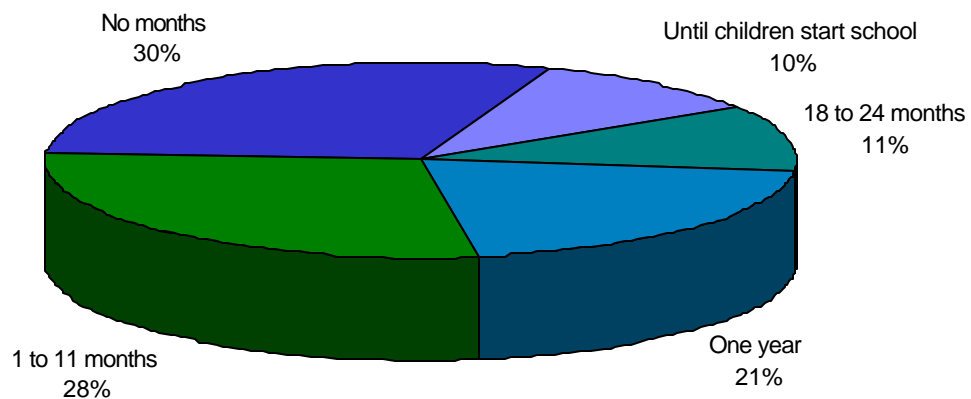
**Most Michigan residents think that people trying to get off welfare will have a difficult time finding adequate child care in the area where they live.** Only 9% think finding child care in their area is very easy and 25% think it is somewhat easy, compared to 25% who think it is very difficult and 41% who feel it is somewhat difficult. (Q. 2) As Figure 4 shows, 47% of Republicans compared to 30% of Democrats and of people who are neither Republicans nor Democrats feel it is somewhat or very easy.

**Figure 4. How Easy it is for People Trying to Get off Welfare to Find Adequate Child Care**  
by Political Party Affiliation

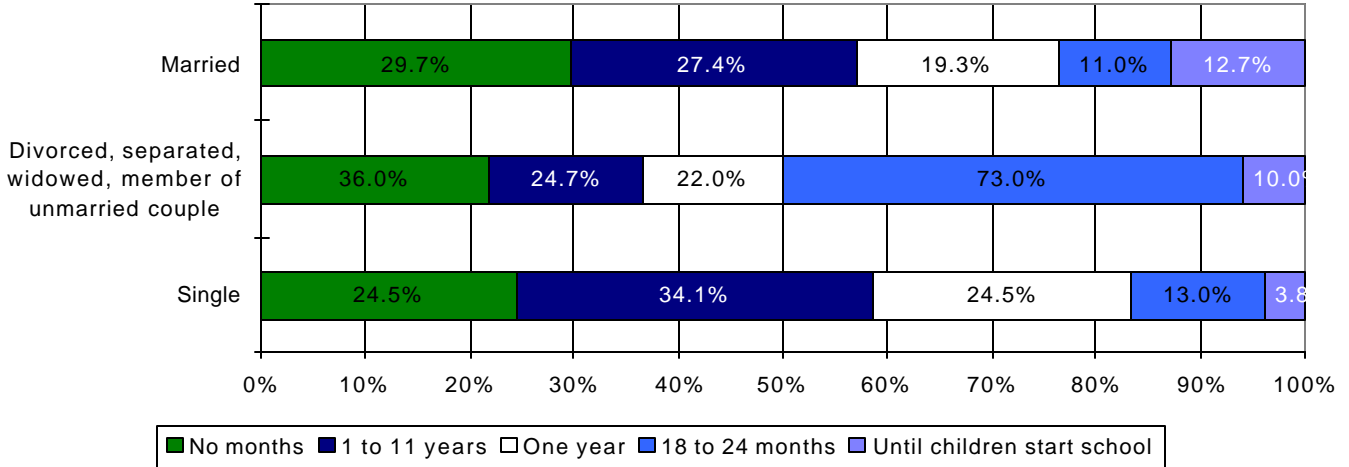


**There is little agreement on how many months after birth children need to have a parent stay at home with them.** (Q. 3) As Figure 5 shows, responses range from no months (30%) to until the children start school (10%). Opinions differ somewhat by marital status, political affiliation, and community type. Compared to others, a greater proportion of residents who are divorced, separated, widowed, or part of an unmarried couple favor no months (Figure 6). Almost two in five Republicans (39%) favor no months at home for parents, contrasted to 29% of those who are neither Republicans nor Democrats and 21% of Democrats (Figure 7). Suburban residents are slightly less likely than others to favor staying home until a child starts school and more likely to favor staying home for 18-24 months (Figure 8).

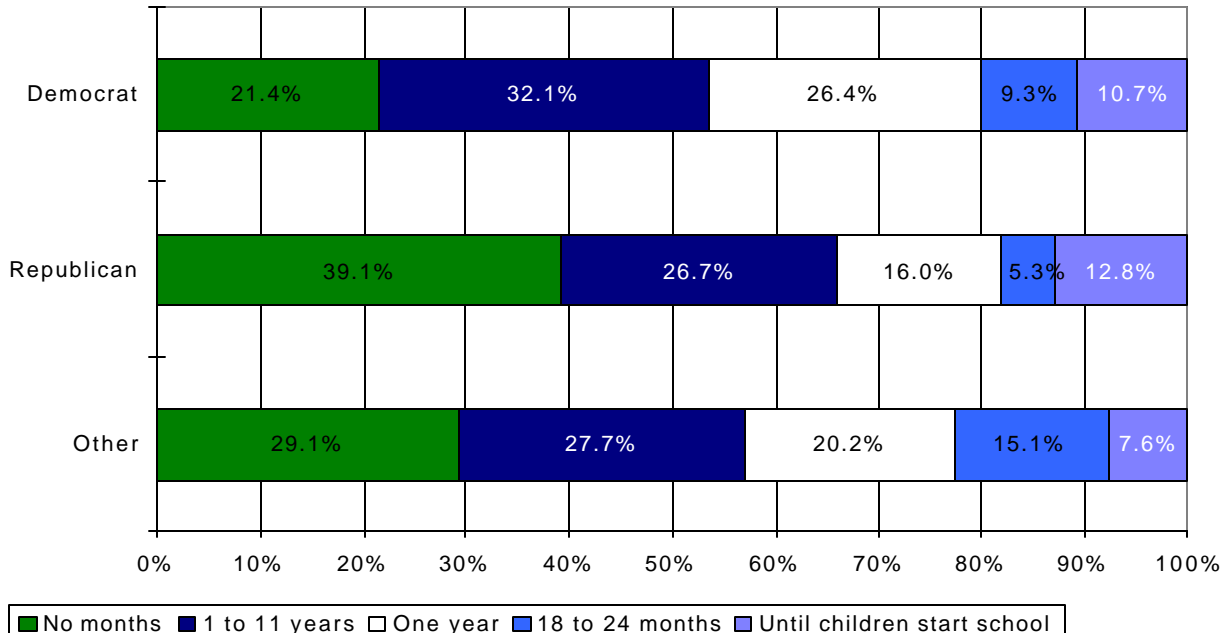
**Figure 5. How Many Months After Birth Need a Parent Stay Home?**



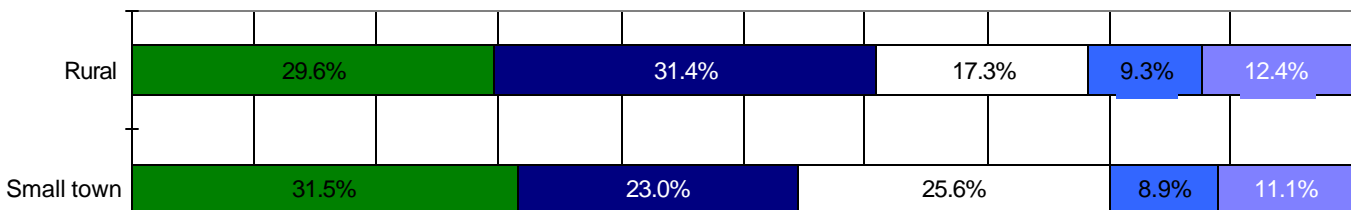
**Figure 6. How Many Months After Birth Need a Parent Stay Home?**  
by Marital Status



**Figure 7. How Many Months After Birth Need a Parent Stay Home?**  
by Political Party Affiliation



**Figure 8. How Many Months After Birth Need a Parent Stay Home?**  
by Community Type



## Child Care

- **Two out of five (38%) Michigan parents with children under age 5 report they or a spouse provides child care; 30% use a child care center, or family or group home; and 32% use some other form of child care.** (Q. 4)

**Over a third (35%) of these parents say “quality” is the most important reason for having this type of child care.** One in ten (12%) say convenience; 13% say work schedule is most important; and 12% say the most important reason is so the child can be with a parent when young. Almost three in ten (28%) indicate that another reason is most important. (Q. 5)

- **A large majority (85%) are satisfied with their current child care arrangements for children under age 5.** One in ten would prefer other arrangements, and 6% do not know. (Q. 6)
- **About one fourth (24%) of Michigan parents with children between 5 and 17 say these children are old enough to take care of themselves.** Another quarter (22%) use a child care center or a family or group home; 23% say they or a spouse provides child care; and 30% indicate some other form of child care. (Q. 7) We don't have exact ages for the children; possibly those left alone are mostly teens.
- **Overall, 32% say “quality” is the most important reason for having this type of child care; 22% say convenience; and 46% indicate that another reason is most important.** (Q. 8)
- **The vast majority (88%) of Michigan parents are satisfied with their current child care arrangements for children 5 to 17.** Eight percent would prefer other arrangements, and 4% report they do not know. (Q. 9)

- ⊙ **While transportation to child care is never a problem for most people (62%), 23% have problems rarely and 15% experience difficulty occasionally to much of the time.** Altogether 69% use transportation (mostly their own cars) to get their children to child care. (Qs. 10 and 11)

## DISCUSSION

Only a small portion of Michigan residents indicated support for governmental units to regulate the educational quality of child care. With a substantial group thinking that government should play no role at all, any movement toward increasing the expectations or quality of the programs through regulation would not likely receive support. However, the status quo, of the government maintaining minimal standards for health, safety and education through the licensing and registration process, appears to be supported.

Availability of child care continues to be perceived as a problem, with many residents indicating how difficult it is to locate care. With the community expecting welfare recipients to return to employment right after childbirth, availability is likely to continue to be perceived as a serious problem, particularly for infants. Infant care is extremely labor intensive, thus, more expensive than care for other age groups. Within the context of welfare reform, making infant care available requires making it affordable to low-income families.

In this, as in other studies, the majority of parents report satisfaction with the care their children receive. A large majority (85%) were satisfied with current child care arrangements for children under 5. About 35% thought quality was the most important reason for having the type of child care they chose. It is also clear that factors such as parental work schedules, transportation, and desires of parents to spend time with young children influence child care decisions and arrangements. For children between 5 and 17, most parents (88%) were satisfied with current child care arrangements. We do not know if responses would vary more if we had used smaller age groupings, e.g., 5 to 7, 7 to 9, etc. With about a third considering quality as the most important reason for choosing care, it is clear that many families are basing their child care decisions on other criteria. Convenience is one of the major considerations.

Nearly 30% of parents of young children use a child care center. As many as 15% of the parents indicate problems with transportation to child care. Thus, child care providers might consider the utility of small neighborhood programs. They might also consider building facilities on access routes or providing transportation services. If low income parents of young children are to work, the availability of affordable transportation must be addressed.

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

The full wording of questions for the items discussed in this briefing paper follows. The order of questions conforms with the order in which they are discussed above. Numbers in brackets are the actual question numbers on the survey instrument. Overall, the interviews lasted an average of 23 minutes. The questions discussed in this report consumed about four minutes of that time. Only people with children under age 5 living in their households were asked questions 4-6, and only those with children aged 5-17 in their households were asked questions 7-9. Only people with children in child care were asked questions 10 and 11.

- Q. 1. In general, what role do you think the government should have in regulating child care? Do you think it should: (1) Regulate for minimal standards of health, safety, (2) Regulate for educational value, or (3) Act to improve safety, health, and education? (4) Do you think government should have no role at all? [PQ1]
- Q. 2. To the best of your knowledge, how difficult or easy is it for persons trying to get off welfare to find adequate child care in the area where you live? Would you say it is very difficult, somewhat difficult, somewhat easy, or very easy? [PQ2]
- Q. 3. In your opinion, for how many months after birth do you think young children need to have a parent stay home with them? [PQ3]
- Q. 4. What type of child care do you use most of the time for your child(ren) under 5? [GRF1]
- Q. 5. What is the most important reason for having this type of child care [for children under 5]? [GRF2]
- Q. 6. Are you satisfied with your current child care arrangements for your children under age 5, or would you prefer some other arrangements? [GRF3]
- Q. 7. What type of child care do you use most of the time for your child(ren) between 5 and 17? [GRF5]
- Q. 8. What is the most important reason for having this type of child care for your child(ren) between 5 and 17? [GRF6]
- Q. 9. Are you satisfied with your current child care arrangements for your children between 5 and 17, or would you prefer some other arrangements? [GRF7]
- Q. 10. What type of transportation do you usually use to get your child(ren) to child care? [GR9]
- Q. 11. How frequently do you have problems with this transportation? Would you say much of the time, frequently, sometimes, only occasionally, rarely, or never? [GR10]