Colleen Curran 2020 VPA Nomination

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**Family had feared positive test 'was a death sentence'**

**Family of first Westminster Canterbury resident to test positive for COVID-19 tell their harrowing story**

**By Colleen Curran**

**April 1, 2020**

Two weeks ago, Lucy Fox thought her father was going to die.

Carter Fox, 80, was on a ventilator and couldn't talk. The coronavirus sent his oxygen levels plummeting. Medical staff at VCU Medical Center ordered the family out of the hospital to avoid spreading the disease, which had claimed more than 42,000 lives worldwide as of Tuesday afternoon, according to Johns Hopkins University research.

They couldn't see him or talk to him or hold his hand and tell him they loved him. They scribbled their goodbyes and hand-delivered them to the hospital, praying their notes would find their way to their dad's bedside.

"Please know that you are not alone. We are with you."

"I don't want to say what comes next ... Be strong. Rest. Breathe. Sleep. I love you. We love you."

"It was totally terrifying for those first 24 hours," said Lucy, 52. "Nobody knew what was going to happen. The doctors told us that he was in the highest risk group possible. We thought it was a death sentence."

On Monday, March 16, their dad became the first patient to test positive for the coronavirus at VCU Medical Center.

His health was failing fast, and nobody knew what to expect.

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Just one day earlier, Lucy and her siblings, Baylor, 47, and Faulkner, 56, were asking their parents for updates in a group text as Carter waited for test results at the hospital. It was March 15 and they weren't even thinking about the coronavirus.

All they knew was that their parents had just returned to Richmond from Florida, where they typically spend their winters. Hospitals were expected to fill up there. The state now has almost 5,000 confirmed coronavirus cases. Their parents' doctor advised them to return home.

"My parents follow rules down to the letter," Lucy said. Carter was the CEO of paper manufacturer Chesapeake Corp. from 1980 to 1997 and is known for his sound judgment and care for others. "If somebody would have told them, 'Don't cross state lines because you could spread it,' they wouldn't have."

Carter and Carol hopped an Allegiant Airlines flight back to Richmond.

They went to dinner at a friend's house and saw the political-satire group The Capitol Steps at Westminster Canterbury in Henrico County, where they are longtime residents. Carter felt weak.

This was before the calls for social distancing, before the alarm bells were ringing that anyone who traveled out of state should quarantine themselves for 14 days.

Still, the virus had shown what it could do - especially to seniors. It was raging by early March at a long-term care facility in Washington state, where it had infected 81 residents and killed 23 by the middle of the month, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That was across the country and far from their minds when the couple went to the doctor March 12 about Carter's persistent weakness. He had no fever, no cough, no shortness of breath. Carter had been dealing with Parkinson's disease for years, but otherwise he was fit and able.

The next day, they went to get blood work done and Carter fell in the middle of the lobby. That was a sign, Carol said, that something was very wrong.

She rushed her husband to the in-house health care facility at Westminster, which was going into lockdown due to the coronavirus. One week after they had returned from Florida, the nurse called to report that he had taken another bad fall. He couldn't get up and he couldn't stand.

"I said, 'We're going to the hospital,'" Carol decided.

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At VCU Medical Center, doctors and nurses were rushing in and out of their emergency room in gowns and masks, constantly taking his temperature and checking his oxygen levels.

"Dad said, 'I think they think I have the coronavirus. There are all these doctors here,'" Lucy said.

She thought he was joking. "Of course you don't have it," she texted back.

But he was deteriorating quickly. The doctors scanned his lumbar area and his head, for the fall, and took an X-ray of his lungs.

By evening, his oxygen levels still weren't up. The X-ray revealed he had pneumonia in his lungs. The doctors hurried him up the Intensive Care Unit where Carter and his wife were isolated from everyone else on the floor.

"They made me put on the protective gown and a mask," Carol said. "It looked like a raincoat."

Carter was tested for the coronavirus around midnight. At 4 a.m., the doctor came into the room, looking pained. Carter's test results still weren't back, but the doctor didn't like how low Carter's oxygen levels were.

"The doctor said he wanted to get him on a ventilator right now, to get ahead of this thing, before it became an emergency," Carol said.

Hospitals in New York, Italy and elsewhere have faced shortages of the machines, which help keep people breathing, as the number of infections surges past capacity. Virginia has more than 8.5 million people and 2,000 ventilators on hand, according to the Virginia COVID-19 Unified Command Joint Information Center.

Before Carol could process what was happening, the hospital told her to pack Carter's things and leave.

Cellphone, wallet, clothes. She had to warn Westminster, which had been on lockdown since March 11, when someone had tested positive dozens of miles away. She had to call the kids.

"You need to come now," she told them. "Something is really wrong with your dad."

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Faulkner was in quarantine after returning home from overseas. Lucy drove up from North Carolina. Baylor rushed down from Rhode Island.

By the time they arrived, they couldn't see their father at VCU or their mother, who was now in quarantine at Westminster Canterbury.

All they could do was wait and wonder whether their dad was still alive, unable to see him or hold his hand; or comfort one another.

All they could do was stand 6 feet apart and wait.

"Fifteen hours came and went. We heard on the news that there was one confirmed [coronavirus] case in Richmond being treated at MCV. We were like, 'That can't be Dad.' But it was," Lucy said.

On Tuesday morning, March 17, Carol received confirmation: Carter had tested positive. He was on a ventilator, heavily sedated, at high risk for mortality.

A doctor friend of Faulkner's said that at best, their dad had a 10% chance of survival.

"Nothing was normal. That's what stands out about the coronavirus," Lucy said. "Normally, when your elderly parent goes to the hospital, you go there too. You wait, you ask the doctor what's happening."

The Fox children made contact with Susan Richards, a nurse manager, who helped put them in touch with their dad's nurses: Morgan, Kate, Erin, Mykala, Reed and Elizabeth.

"They were so incredible," Lucy said. "We started faxing letters to the ICU and they read them to Dad. Then they papered the walls with them. They took such good care of him. Risking their own personal health."

The nurses said that the breathing tube was uncomfortable and making their dad agitated. Carter's grandsons sent jazz standards that the nurses played for him.

"Who has time for this? We're in a pandemic. It was the kindest, sweetest thing," Lucy said, her voice thick with tears.

Meanwhile, Carol was working with the CDC and the VDH to retrace their steps. Everybody they had come into contact with had to go into a 14-day quarantine. Unfortunately, that meant all 288 people who had gone to the performing arts center to see The Capitol Steps. Also, 48 Westminster staff members had to go into quarantine.

Staff members put notices under all residents' doors notifying them that a resident had tested positive and not to come out. All meals would be delivered to Westminster's 870 residents going forward.

"One sweet person called me and said, 'Don't feel guilty.' But of course, I felt guilty," Carol said.

Baylor returned to Rhode Island where he teaches oceanography and climate modeling at Brown University. Even with all of the strain, the family retained a sense of humor about what was happening to them.

"It was like being in a crazy sci-fi movie," Lucy said.

Her brother decided to bring his mother's dog, a Havanese, back with him since his mother was on lockdown. The dog was handed off by a Westminster staff member in a hazmat suit. Baylor was so worried about contamination, he doused the dog with hydrogen peroxide in the parking lot.

"I was worried I was going to bleach him," Baylor said.

But he had a family at home: a wife and two teenage sons, and he didn't want to infect them. When he returned to Rhode Island, he quarantined himself in one room of the house for a week.

Finally, after almost a week in the ICU, their dad turned a corner.

His oxygen levels were up. He was taken off the ventilator. He could breathe. He had a videoconference with the family on Zoom.

"MCV saved my dad's life," Lucy said.

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Carol said that she never doubted for a minute that her husband would pull through. "I knew he was getting such good care," she said.

Her children never told her their terrible concerns. "Hope until the very last minute seemed like a good thing," said Lucy, who is a social worker.

On Friday, March 27, almost two weeks after checking into the hospital, Carter was transported from VCU Medical Center to the 24-hour health care facility at Westminster.

"He's a little disoriented," Carol said. "This was a major, major illness. It's going to take a long time to recover."

The Fox family reached out to the Richmond Times-Dispatch to share their story. While Carter's health continues to improve, he was unable to participate in an interview.

"My main takeaway is that the health care system is great if you can get access to it," Baylor said. "We were lucky to have this happen early on so that the hospital had the capacity to handle this."

Middle-of-the-road projections assume that 40% of the U.S. population will become infected with the coronavirus over the next six months and that hospital emergency rooms and critical care units will be overwhelmed, according to Dr. Ashish Jha, director of the Harvard Global Health Institute.

Peak severity here will occur May 17, according to University of Washington projections. On that day, analysts predict Virginia will have 329 intensive care beds available and need 223 more. The research indicates more than 2,000 infected people will have died in Virginia by Aug. 4.

"Speaking with my scientist hat on, this makes it clear to me that we need to make sure we don't overwhelm the health care system. It made me much more determined to stay home and isolate from my family," Baylor said. "Save the hospital beds for the people who really need it. It means trying to stay distant, so that everyone will have as good care as he had."

Carol doesn't know when she'll be able to see her husband again. First, he has to have two successful negative tests. But she can wait, she said. She's just so happy to have her husband back on the Westminster premises, a few feet from her door.

"We've been married for 57 years. In all that time, we've never slept apart," she said.

She ordered a new mattress that's lower to the floor to make it easier for him to get in and out.

"It's all ready for him."

**The uncertain future of music venues in Richmond during COVID-19**

**Dark stages, no music, no crowds: Venues, artists await the next act**

**By Colleen Curran**

**May 24, 2020**

Music venues across Richmond — like The Broadberry, The National, Dominion Energy Center and the Altria Theater — have been shuttered since mid-March because of the coronavirus.

Now, more than two months later, those venues are still closed and they don’t know when they’ll be able to reopen.

“When I go into The Broadberry now, it’s kind of like a museum. All of my paperwork is sitting on the bar. My desk is still set up like it was the week everything got canceled. It’s eerie,” said Lucas Fritz, owner of The Broadberry and The Camel. “It’s like time stopped March 14 and we’re in a time warp.”

“The million-dollar question is: When will we reopen? Right now, we’re in the wait-and-see mode,” he said. “Hope for the best and plan for the worst.”

Most music venues think they won’t be able to open until Phase Three of Gov. Ralph Northam’s plan to reopen Virginia and have no clear timeline yet for when that will happen.

“In the same way the restaurant industry has been affected, anyone who makes their living by entertaining groups of people is out of work,” said Fritz, who had to lay off more than 75 staff members at his two venues.

“We have zero income. The Broadberry is completely closed with no revenue coming in. We still have to pay rent, utilities and insurance fees on a monthly basis. We’ve been burning through cash since March,” Fritz said.

Last year, The Broadberry hosted 166 concerts, with about 300 people on average in attendance per show. Fritz also runs a concert promotion and booking company called The Broadberry Entertainment Group, with Jessica Gordon. Together they booked 552 concerts across 18 venues from Richmond to Washington in 2019.

At The Camel, Fritz was able to adapt by opening the restaurant side of the business and offering takeout and delivery seven days a week. He also applied for and received federal Paycheck Protection Program loans for The Broadberry, The Camel and The Broadberry Entertainment Group and was able to hire back some staff. But those loans will run out on June 10, and a reopening date for the venues is still unknown.

“I’m living off savings at the moment,” Fritz said.

“Different venues will probably open at different times. I think there will be smaller shows before larger shows. Outside shows before inside shows," said Gordon, who books concerts for The Broadberry, The Camel, Ashland Theatre and Richmond Music Hall at Capital Ale House, among others.

“It’s honestly unknown,” she said.

For instance, in Phase Two, if social gatherings of 50 people or less are allowed in interior spaces, Gordon is thinking about booking a small, intimate concert at the Ashland Theatre, with social distancing throughout the theater.

But overall, “music venues will probably be the last [businesses] to open,” said Lisa Harrison, owner of The Tin Pan in Henrico County. “We’re hoping that maybe by mid- to late August, we could have a limited capacity performance from 50 to 100 people and do some social distancing, all in accordance with the governor's and CDC guidelines.”

The Tin Pan’s capacity is 220, and while they can accommodate smaller shows, Harrison said they’re not in any rush to do so. All of her staff are currently collecting unemployment and she doesn’t want to call them back too soon, in case the virus resurfaces and The Tin Pan has to shut down again. She also knows that it might be a while before audiences feel safe inside music venues again.

“We have an older clientele, around 55 and over, we want them to be safe," Harrison said. "They may not feel comfortable coming [to a music venue for a while], which I completely respect. It’s really a wait-and-see situation. My first priority is to take care of my staff, my customers and our artists."

Which brings up the issue of personal protective equipment, or PPE.

Many music venues are wondering, what will reopening look like? Will concertgoers need to wear masks for a one- to two-hour performance? Would that be comfortable? And what about the artist? Will they need to wear PPE?

**Larger venues**

It’s not just the smaller venues that are hurting. It’s also the big ones, like the Altria Theater and Dominion Energy Center.

“We haven’t had a show since March, and we don’t know when we’ll have another,” said Tim Miller, a spokesman for ASM Richmond, which manages the Altria Theater and Dominion Energy Center.

ASM Richmond has furloughed half of its 35 full-time staff and released all of the part-time and contract staff.

“Wicked,” originally scheduled for June, has been canceled with no rescheduled date. Alice Cooper was supposed to perform in July, but he canceled. Other events are being rescheduled, like Kansas, Gordon Lightfoot, and the Steve Martin and Martin Short duo show.

“We were having a really good year up to this,” Miller said. “Hamilton” drew in record crowds, and Altria concerts such as Tedeschi Trucks Band were sellouts. But now, the future is completely unknown.

“We can do a lot of things to provide a safe environment, like cleaning and social distancing. We’re looking at a lot of different possibilities, like skipping rows or skipping seats and what the capacity could be. But ultimately, the promoter has to be comfortable to bring a show or an event to our venues. And the public has to be comfortable to come to our venue,” Miller said.

“We can do everything right, but we’re dependent on a lot of other people to have [an event] take place in our venue,” he said.

“I think until there is a vaccine or treatment, people are going to be concerned about being in close quarters with people they’re not familiar with,” Miller said. “We know people are anxious to come back to the theater and to experience live shows. But my sense is that there will be concern for a while about being close to people they don’t know.”

**Outdoor concerts**

Outdoor concerts may seem to have more flexibility than indoor spaces, but they’re still limited by capacity guidelines, such as no more than 10 people in a social gathering during Phase One of Virginia’s plan.

Friday Cheers, the outdoor concert series on Brown’s Island normally held in May and June, had to cancel its entire season.

At Innsbrook After Hours, they are waiting for how the governor sets forth guidelines to reopen.

Aaron Lewis is currently on the schedule for June, and they have several artists on the books for July, such as Indigo Girls, Ludacris and Hanson. But that could change, owner Matthew Creeger said.

“The fact is right now that in addition to the governor's guidelines, the touring schedules for many of the bands ... are in flux based on cancellations and restrictions in other venues and states," Creeger wrote in an email. "We are constantly in contact with the agents and managers about the shows we have scheduled. This is as much a puzzle for them as it is for us.

“We expect over the next few weeks to have a much clearer vision of how our season will be impacted, but if we are not up and running in June, we certainly hope to have shows at some point in July or August.”

Virginia Credit Union Live!, the outdoor amphitheater at Richmond Raceway, has also had to shelve most of its concerts until the fall. The Avett Brothers has been postponed until October, while both Chicago and Primus are being rescheduled.

Innsbrook After Hours has had a few cancellations, like the Steve Miller Band. Others like Jamey Johnson, Billy Currington and Lynyrd Skynyrd are being rescheduled to later in the season.

When they do reopen, their capacity will be determined by guidelines set forth by state and local officials, Creeger said.

“We are looking forward to learning exactly what the restrictions might be so that we can plan accordingly. If there are significant restrictions, our bigger shows will be impacted,” he said. He also said that Innsbrook After Hours is looking into extending its season into October.

**Rescheduling and refunds**

While there are still shows on the books for late June at The Broadberry, The Camel and The Tin Pan, both owners said they feel almost certain those shows will be canceled because of state guidelines and restrictions. As for July and August, that's still a question mark for many venues, too.

"We're at the mercy of the booking agents and the artists. They decide when an event will be canceled or postponed. Beyond that, it's up to them," Gordon said.

"Some artists are saying they don't want to come in July, that it's too soon. Others are saying they don't want to do anything until 2021," Harrison said.

Most tickets at local venues have been refunded if shows have been canceled or rescheduled.

At The National, which is owned by AEG Presents, tickets aren't refunded until a rescheduled date has been secured. But that has left some fans, like Henrico's Brian Murray, a few hundred bucks out of pocket for shows he bought tickets for. He goes to roughly 30 to 40 concerts a year and purchased several tickets to spring shows at The National.

"I've called The National. I've contacted AEG Presents; I've tried to contact [the ticketing site] AXS.com. But it's been very frustrating. They say, 'Hold on to your tickets. When we have a rescheduled date, you'll get your money back.' But those shows could be postponed indefinitely. That money belongs to the fans."

As for future shows, Murray said he would attend a concert if venues are able to reopen this year.

"I've been watching streaming concerts lately, but there isn't anything like the real experience of being there," he said.

**An artist's perspective**

Seven days into a four-week tour, J. Roddy Walston was on his way to the SXSW Music Festival in Austin on a solo tour with local band Palm Palm when he got the word that music venues, festivals and businesses were shutting down because of COVID-19. They had to turn around and come home.

Now back in Richmond for the past three months, Walston has found himself out of work and looking at a bleak future as a performing musician.

"Looking long-term, it's pretty scary and abysmal. I'm a musician and it's my job. It's all performers' jobs. It's pretty weird to be like, 'You can't do that anymore,'" Walston said.

But at the same time, he said, he's in no rush to perform and doesn't want to get anybody sick. But it leaves musicians and small venues, especially, facing a crisis, he said.

In the age of streaming music like Spotify, "we've been told that it's OK if no one pays for your music, because it will get them to a show and you can sell tickets," Walston said.

But now, there are no concerts and no tickets to sell. Walston said he's concerned that many small clubs won't be able to survive the shutdown. And musicians don't make much, if anything, from streaming services.

"We are used to feast and famine. There's no security in what I do," Walston said of his 20 years touring and making a living as a musician. But now, he has a wife, a 4-year old daughter, bills to pay, and no income coming in.

He has been applying for unemployment, but his application hasn't been approved and he spends his days calling numbers, hoping to talk to a real person to see if his application will be processed.

As for the future, he said that he hopes "we all take a minute and try to reset and not have some fantasy of things going back to the way it was. The way it was wasn't so great," he said. "I hope we can all find the strength and the willpower to revolutionize our own little world."

**A plan for the next act**

Gordon, who books shows for The Broadberry, The Camel and others, has launched the Independent Promoter Alliance, along with her friend Dave Poe in New York.

The nonprofit's goal is to address the challenges ahead for midsize to large venues that can hold from 200 to 4,000 people and to share solutions. In just a few weeks since its launch, the alliance has grown to more than 300 members across the U.S. and has received national coverage in Billboard and Pollstar.

"We are addressing the challenges that will emerge in every market, including Richmond, such as the likelihood of low ticket sales in the fall due to the economic state of the country, as well as the oversaturation of markets since every tour is being rescheduled," Gordon wrote via email. "There are going to be way more shows than normal this fall, and far fewer people will have money to buy tickets."

In short, Gordon said she's hoping the alliance will reshape the way the industry works and make music venues more viable for the future.

"I think there could be a lot of pent-up demand for theater, live entertainment and sporting events as a result of this [break]," Miller said. "When things open up again, it's going to be interesting to see if people are willing to take the risks to see a show and be entertained. I don't think we'll know until we get there."

**The first female recession: Women in Richmond and beyond are leaving the workforce in record numbers during COVID**

**Working women are cutting back hours or leaving jobs during the pandemic to manage child care responsibilities**

**By Colleen Curran**

**Oct. 25, 2020**

When the pandemic hit, Richmonder Kari Altizer was a financial adviser about to give birth to her first child, a boy, at the end of March.

"I wasn't sure I was going to make enough money to afford day care. My clients were dropping off. And I wasn't sure where I wanted my baby to go during the pandemic. I didn't know what was safe," Altizer said.

She decided to quit her job and stay home with her son - a decision that many women are having to make during the pandemic when demands of work, child care and the coronavirus are causing women to leave the U.S. workforce in record numbers.

Experts are calling it the first female recession. For the first time, women are falling behind in the U.S. job market after decades of progress.

Women account for 52.6% of job losses between February and August, or 5.6 million jobs, according to data released this month by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Since February, there are 2.6 million fewer women in the labor force. In September, 617,000 women dropped out of the workforce, in comparison to only 78,000 men.

Unemployment has been especially hard on Black and Latina women, with the unemployment rate above 10%, while the rate for white women is 7.3%, according to data from the Labor Department.

At the end of July, almost 1 in 3 mothers ages 25 to 44 reported they weren't working because of COVID-19-related child care issues, compared to around 1 in 10 fathers.

Despite the fact that women have been nearly equal participants in the workforce for 50 years and earn more advanced degrees (including bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees) than men, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, they still earn less money on average than men - and shoulder the brunt of household and child care responsibilities at home.

"Women earn 81.5 cents to the dollar that men make," said Renee Haltom, vice president and regional executive at the Richmond Federal Reserve. "The economic choice usually falls to the woman to stay home."

Plus, women still bear a disproportionate amount of work at home. Women spend 30% more time than men on household activities and twice as much time caring for children as fathers, Haltom said.

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When child care centers started closing in March, many working moms found themselves having to make a difficult choice.

When Allison Miessler's day care for her 2½-year-old daughter shut down, she didn't know what to do. She was working full time in the city's clerk office, a job she'd held for almost two years. She was able to work from home, but also had to occasionally go into the office. Her days were busy: filled with Zoom calls, projects and deadlines. Her husband works at Virginia Commonwealth University in development and was also able to work from home, but had a similar hectic schedule.

They had to move in with her parents in Louisa County for five months just to have help with child care. But as the months wore on and the difficulties continued, Miessler knew her current job and family responsibilities didn't align anymore.

After six years building her present career, she decided to pivot and in July took a part-time job with a nonprofit that allowed her more flexibility and time with her daughter.

When her day care opened back up in August, her daughter was able to return. But when it reopened, it raised prices. Before the pandemic, her child care cost was around $1,120 per month; after, it went up to around $1,400 per month. Nationally, the average cost of child care has increased 47% during the pandemic, with smaller groups, heightened sanitation needs and additional staffing as factors in the rising expense, according to data from the Center for American Progress.

And like many child care centers in the area, it offers only full-time care, so Miessler and her husband are paying for full time, even though they're using it only part time.

"I feel like I've taken a step back in my career. I never thought I would go part time and not be moving up in salary. This was a different route that I didn't plan on taking," said Miessler, who is trained as a social worker.

But she values the flexibility her new job offers.

"I like working part time right now. And there is a possibility to get more hours in the future," she said.

For single mom Tiffany Gray, mom of two twin boys in eighth grade, the pandemic has been tough. She is a clerk for the United States Postal Service, and her hours can be long. Some days, she works from noon to 10:30 p.m.

Her children are in virtual school, and she has to leave them home alone. She fields phone calls from her kids and from their teachers during the day, but she has to rely on them to get their own schoolwork done.

Sometimes she has to call them and remind them to turn their cameras on. Sometimes the teacher reaches out and lets her know that one of her sons was sleeping during class. She is juggling, constantly juggling, her responsibilities as a mother and a provider.

"I get calls all day long," Gray said.

She wears a pair of AirPods and talks to her kids and their teachers while she works. She said her boss knows about her situation and has been supportive.

Like many parents, she doesn't know when Richmond Public Schools will go to back in-person classes, but she hopes it's sooner rather than later.

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In June, economists confirmed that the U.S. is currently in a recession.

In a recent speech at a women's summit in West Virginia about the economic impact on women during the pandemic, Tom Barkin, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, said women are necessary for economic growth.

"[O]ur best opportunity [for economic growth] is to bring more women into the workforce - and retain them. And there is untapped potential, as just over two-thirds of prime-age adults not in the labor force are women," Barkin said.

But faced with such issues as lower pay and expensive child care, "for many … women, the fundamental economic equation just didn't make sense," he said.

The pandemic is especially hard on single mothers.

"Balancing work, child care and virtual learning seems utterly impossible for single parents and workers who can't work from home," Barkin said.

Jennie Wood is a divorced single mom of two girls, ages 5½ and 8. She had been working freelance as a consultant for the past two years in business services and events. But during the pandemic, events evaporated, and she knew they wouldn't be coming back anytime soon.

"I also saw that I wouldn't be able to work in an office because the kids weren't going back to school," Wood said. "As things opened back up, I was not able to find anything affordable that allowed me to work around my kids."

In Virginia, the average cost of a baby for a year at a day care is more than $14,500, according to Child Care Aware of America. For older children up to age 4, the cost is around $11,500. That's about as expensive as a year of college.

She was jobless for four months and was able to draw unemployment. Through a connection, she finally landed a part-time job as a senior strategist in a marketing firm owned by a single mom.

Remote work and flexible schedules are the norm in her new position. Wood splits custody with her ex-husband, which also meant she had two days to devote to work without the children.

"We all work around our kids [at my new job]. No one looks at you sideways if you have to go somewhere," Wood said.

Just last week, her daughters returned to school in Goochland County for five days a week from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. But that still leaves entire afternoons where she needs child care. Just this week, she had a job arranging flowers for an event and brought her girls with her. They played on their iPads while she worked.

Wood said working moms need more support: whether that's from the government, the state, the community or their jobs.

"Some kind of child care subsidy would have helped," she said. "I live across from the Y. I would have loved to have been able to send them for part of the day, but it costs $150 per week per kid. An extra $1,200 a month [for child care] isn't doable for a lot of people right now."

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Many experts worry that women stepping back from the workforce will have long-term consequences such as continuing the gender pay gap, missing out on promotions and learning new skills, and loss of job growth.

For Kari Altizer, who quit her job as a financial adviser when she had her baby in March, she worried about money while being out of work. Her husband is an operations manager at a local restaurant who took a month of paternity leave and then was furloughed for a month. She worried how she would make up her income. How would she pay the bills?

When a former client reached out to her asking if she knew of anyone looking for work, she offered herself up for the job. It was in a different field and in a different position: as the sales and marketing manager of The Maid Brigade.

"I never thought I'd work for one of my clients or for the cleaning industry," Altizer said. But the new job offered things her old job didn't. It was a growing industry, and they offered to pay for day care or allow her to bring her baby to work.

"I work with my baby every day. I bring him to the office. He's growing up around a work environment," she said.

Her office now doubles as a nursery. She has a desk and a laptop for herself, as well as a playpen, a jumper and a high chair for her son. But it hasn't been easy, and it also means she's doing two jobs at once.

"It's an adjustment to have my baby crying [in the office] and for my co-workers to be okay with it," she said. Since the coronavirus, she thinks that co-workers have become more understanding of other people's challenges, especially child care for working parents.

And that could be a silver lining for working women who have been asking for more flexible, supportive work environments for years.

"I do think there might be a cultural shift, not that it outweighs all the costs women have incurred [during the pandemic]," the Fed's Haltom said. "We've undergone this great experiment with COVID. We've discovered by force that working remotely or more flexibly has worked out quite well.

"Some workers may never go back into the office. Or on a limited schedule like two days per week for collaboration. No one has any idea where this will settle out. But I will be shocked if there isn't greater flexibility [for working women]."