



KOREAN WOMEN'S  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE

# Political Mamas

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## Who We are

Political Mamas originated from the Hankyoreh's weekend column that started being published in early 2017. At that time, Rep. Jang Ha-na, a young proportional representative member of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, began writing columns regarding mothers and politics with the main purpose of gathering people who would participate in the initiative. To this end, she visited the editor-in-chief of the Hankyoreh. Deeply impressed by her words; 'If you are of one mind with me, let's meet and work together,' I went to meet her in a heartbeat. As a result, we met for the first time on April 22 with likeminded people of 30~40. They told very touching and various stories about their lives, explaining why they decided to join the gathering and what they wanted to do. This led to setting up a committee for promoting the establishment of a non-profit organization. As a result, the inaugural general meeting for the organization was held on June 11. Lee Go-eun, Jang Ha-na, and Cho Sung-sil, who were appointed as co-chairs of the group, first met in April when the first gathering was held. We were desperate and ardent enough to very actively push ahead with the scheme. The initiative was firmly based on the sense of solidarity and kinship coming from the identity of mothers. We prepared to set up the organization via online channels that operate on a 24/7 basis, holding an offline meeting of the preparatory committee once a week. We frequently communicated via phone to share roles. Our aim is to create an ideal society and a better labor environment where mothers do not lose their self-esteem and can enjoy decent lives as members of society. In the process of trying to apply our ideas to our group culture, our organization has consistently grown in size. In May, we published a book titled 'Political Mamas are The Ultimate Winners', co-authored by about 10 members. We also appeared on an SBS TV program titled 'Emergence of Angry Moms' and various other programs against the backdrop of issues surrounding private kindergartens which grabbed keen attention from our society. These have caused the number of members to jump significantly.

## What we do at 'Political Mamas'

Political Mamas refers to an organization that was established with the aim of resolving political, economic, and socio-cultural difficulties facing children and their nurturers by directly participating in politics. Our main mission is to address issues such as 'inequality in child care' and 'career interruption' by directly taking part in politics. Women's career interruption attributed to child birth and child care tends to last for a long period of time. Moreover, the most widely agreed-upon messages among those that we have posted on online community cafes or Facebook have been related to these two issues. Political Mamas consists of members who study how they should solve their problems as mothers and turn their ideas into action. When the kindergarten corruption emerged as a big issue at the second half of 2018, we recognized its seriousness and naturally took specific actions as a group. Also, we would like to cultivate politicians who participate in institutional politics. This relates to creating a structure where we cooperate with politicians by continuously identifying various issues including 'inequality in child care' and 'career interruption' based on what we experience as mothers and consistently producing news, rather than nurturing one or two heroic politicians. We also have a group of parents who act as governors for community child care centers, kindergartens, and so forth, as well as those working at the National Assembly. Likewise, we have carried out a diversity of activities including story funding, workshop operation, and the release of statements in order to resolve problems for ourselves via direct participation in politics.

## Focusing on the issues of 'inequality in childcare' and 'career interruption'

Central and local governments have worked hard to resolve the issue of low fertility but what matters is a 'labor'. It is very important to prevent women from experiencing career interruption at the initial stage. In Korea where labor markets are inflexible, once women leave the markets, they can not easily reenter them. Even though they are successfully reemployed, job security is rarely ensured. Educational programs for the promotion of women's reemployment are usually composed of contents that lack variety, neither making use of their experiences nor nurturing their aptitude. Related laws are deemed to have been well-prepared but we can not be sure about whether they have been effectively implemented. In other words, maternity and child

care leaves ensuring job security should take root in our society. Current laws relating to maternity and child care leaves fail to specify sufficient punishment against violators. For example, some well-known companies have yet to operate child care centers and often opt to pay penalties rather than operate such centers. Therefore, we have urged the government to identify how work-life balance system apply in real situations through smart labor inspections and to impose stronger penalties for the violation of related provisions.

For instance, the Presidential Committee on Aging Society and Population Policy established the goal of promoting society where work-life balance is maintained but its policies and programs are deemed to have failed to meet such an objective. In other words, the government has yet to successfully achieve a paradigm shift. We think that the authorities should allocate HR and budget to creating an employment structure where job vacancies resulting from maternity and child care leaves are properly filled, rather than spending the budget for the payment of child birth grants (, etc) that ultimately ended in failure. Of course, it is true that cash support is a great help to parents who give birth to and take care of children. However, we do not agree with the belief that setting up the goal of encouraging child birth and offering cash support will increase the number of babies born. When a destructive typhoon caused the government to order schools to close temporarily last summer, parents had no choice but to feel upset. If the Ministry of Education should order schools to close for one or two days due to natural disasters, it should cooperate with the Ministry of Employment and Labor to lay clear guidelines to give parents days off. This means that committees or Ministries responsible for child care and labor should work coherently, consulting one another. To put it another way, child care and education should be discussed along with labor issues.

## What do you think 'Mamas' means?

Many women have expressed their view that their existence as women is not fully recognized after they become mothers. This means that they can not be represented without mentioning their children. They ask themselves whether they can exist not only as mothers but also as women themselves. Against this backdrop, I wanted to challenge the social perception that mothering should be put first before anything else, anywhere and anytime. When we decided to use the word Mamas for the name of our organization, we also worried about the possibility that the word may solidify the existing image of mothers. However, we thought that inequality may also come from the premise that we as women

and members of society can equally compete with men without making public the existing issue of mothering. By choosing the word Mamas for the name of our organization, we tried to confront and overcome the reality.

We also attempted to create social motherhood. Not only biological mothers but also fathers, communities, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and adoptive parents can play a mothering role, at the same time working as members of Political Mamas. Cooperating with them, Political Mamas will do its utmost to effectively resolve a variety of difficulties and problems facing children.

### **What would you like to say to mothers who are not political mamas?**

I believe that mothers have power to change the current situation. You are not the only one who should take responsibility for these problems. You can not resolve them alone. Based on experiences that we have accumulated as mothers, we can become successful political mamas. Mothers have struggled to find feasible solutions to diverse issues including career interruption, inequality in child care, and child education. We should form an alliance, rely on one another, and work together. I would like to say, 'Please do not be afraid, let's meet together. If you are of one mind with us, let's work together!'