

Child Care Voters



After traversing the Commonwealth for months and talking with hundreds of voters, the Child Care Voters campaign heard unequivocally from parents and child care providers: lawmakers are not doing near enough to fix Pennsylvania's child care crisis. Child Care Voters, a project of the Children First Action Fund, is building a powerful statewide movement of parents and supporters who are demanding lawmakers address the problems of cost and availability of high-quality child care.

In our eye-catching van, we travelled from Philadelphia to Bethlehem, Erie to Pittsburgh, and many towns in between, drawing attention from candidates, elected officials, and media. More importantly, we attracted parents and providers who clamored to share their child care struggles. Our staff and volunteers used these opportunities to mobilize them to transform their challenging experiences into tangible political action – voting and getting their networks to vote for candidates who support child care.



Also knowing it will take committed leadership on the federal and state levels to solve this ongoing crisis, Child Care Voters got congressional and state legislative candidates on the record via a candidate survey. One hundred eighteen candidates completed the survey, providing voters the insight they deserve.

Beyond the survey, Child Care Voters held five compelling candidate conversations in key legislative districts, so voters heard directly from candidates where they stand on child care funding, paid family leave, and other issues affecting families with young children.

Candidates running for state legislative seats in Chester, Allegheny, Erie, and Northampton Counties participated. In Bucks County – a pivotal region in the presidential race – Republican incumbents and a Democratic challenger addressed a large audience of voters.

The elections are over, but Child Care Voters isn't. We'll continue to mobilize voters throughout the legislative session – connecting them with their lawmakers and keeping the focus on solving the child care crisis.

Join the Child Care Voters Facebook page or contact Whitney Brown at whitneyb@childrenfirstpa.org or 215-563-5848 x161 to be a part of this exciting movement.

We're Turning 45

Next year, Children First celebrates 45 years of delivering results for children and teens in southeastern PA. It's an exciting milestone for everyone who has contributed to our growth and success. It's also a time to recommit ourselves to doing more to advance happiness, opportunity, and safety for every child in Pennsylvania.



We are planning a number of fun and meaningful activities throughout the year to commemorate our anniversary, such as a summer kids event, a musical evening in the fall, and a spring Champion for Children celebration that will top them all. **We look forward to marking this special year with you and thank you for your years of support.**



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Advocacy in Action

A Big Win for K-12 Public Education



\$1.1 BILLION

MORE for public education

Every school district gets more funding

Extra \$896 million going to schools with the fewest resources

Additional dollars for career/technical education & mental health in schools

For the first time ever, state lawmakers made meeting the needs of students in low-wealth school districts a state funding priority. The kids attending schools with the least resources got moved to the front to benefit from more than \$1.1 billion in new state aid for their schools.

The power of additional funding is undeniable. Pottstown Superintendent Stephen Rodriguez shared at a Children First press conference how funding increases are already having an impact in his schools. “I can share that we’ve added and hired a school counselor for every single one of our schools going from a total of four counselors for 3,400 students to 12. We have been able to purchase updated curriculum series, with all of the supports that go with them.”

Now students who have suffered the inequities of out-of-date textbooks, swollen class sizes, shortages of counselors, libraries, art classes or even working plumbing in their schools will be able to take for granted what wealthier schools have long been able to provide their students.

This alone would be enough to jump for joy but there’s an interesting twist. Republican and Democratic lawmakers also acknowledged that the state funding shortfall for low-wealth schools is real and significant, standing at \$4.5 billion. After decades of passing the buck onto local taxpayers, and a ten-year lawsuit to prove the case, PA lawmakers finally conceded that the state is obligated to level the education playing field. This year, the state funded the first 11% of the total shortfall.

Governor Shapiro and House Democrats put forward a \$1.4 billion FY 25 budget proposal that was chock-full of educational reforms. Senate leaders put the brakes on those ambitions, cutting hundreds of millions from funds for low-wealth schools and stripping out measures to reduce waste and abuse associated with bloated and suspect cyber charter schools which would have saved schools millions.

The deal also falls short in that it does not bind lawmakers to a timeframe to fill the \$4.5 billion funding gap. This means that districts can’t count on future funds necessary to launch sustained improvements to transform their schools. At least not yet. We’ll be back in Harrisburg next year and every year until that gap is filled.


Email [Priyanka Reyes-Kaura at priyankark@children-firstpa.org](mailto:priyankark@children-firstpa.org) to get involved in our education work.




Insure Every Child

A New Campaign from Children First

SMART MONEY



Covering Pennsylvania's Uninsured Kids Will Save Health Systems and Taxpayers Millions



children FIRST

THE ADVOCATE FOR KIDS

April 2024

There are more uninsured children in the Commonwealth than the total populations of Harrisburg and Scranton combined.

That’s nearly 145,000 children and teens who are being denied doctor’s visits, dental and vision care, mental health support, and treatment for long-term illness.

It’s well documented that when children are uninsured, their health, education, and life chances suffer.

When uninsured children do finally get medical care, it’s often in an emergency room after a moderate ailment progressed to a serious condition.

This is why hospitals are the epicenter of unpaid care and why state lawmakers must amend our Medicaid rules.

Pennsylvania hospitals absorbed \$772 million in uncompensated care for children in 2022, according to a Children First report, *Smart Money: Covering Pennsylvania’s Uninsured Kids Will Save Health Systems and Taxpayers Millions*.

Because rural counties have higher rates of uninsured children than urban counties, rural hospitals are carrying heavy uncompensated care costs.

The **Insure Every Child Campaign** is working to amend PA’s Medicaid rules so children unable to get coverage elsewhere would be able to get routine and emergency health care, and hospitals wouldn’t be left with unpaid bills.

Already 12 states and Washington, D.C. have programs that make it possible for every child to get coverage. Colorado and Minnesota are joining that list next year. Even the deep red state of Utah does a better job than Pennsylvania making sure every child is insured, including children who are growing up without legal citizenship documents.

In these states, they insure every child. Pennsylvania must do the same.

To get involved in our health work, email: info@children-firstpa.org



The Building Blocks

Understanding Racial Equity in Early Childhood Education

Fewer Black and Hispanic children in Philadelphia attend high-quality child care as compared to white children, and the reasons are more complex than cost or availability. Groundbreaking research by the Racial Equity Early Childhood Education Council illustrates how racial disparities in the child care sector hold back Black and brown children and their teachers. A major problem is the poverty-level wages of early learning teachers – an average of \$15.15/hour. Women make up the majority of the child care workers; women of color are more likely to be in the lowest paid positions – and are rarely center manager or owner. Plus, workplace benefits like health insurance, paid vacation time, or even an eight-hour day aren't the norm in an industry running on razor-thin margins.

"Representation matters profoundly, and this absence of diversity [in leadership] denies children the chance to see themselves reflected positively in positions of authority and perpetuates a cycle of marginalization and missed opportunities," said Unis Bey, Executive Director of Grays Ferry Early Learning Academy and co-author of the report, *Racial Equity on the Forefront: Priorities of Early Childhood Providers in Pennsylvania*.

Other systemic issues that must be addressed within the early learning sector:

- Recruiting teachers who share religious or cultural practices with students.
- Translators to communicate with parents who don't speak English.
- Resources to navigate the various and complex government regulations.
- Culturally competent social workers to help children with mental health needs and learning differences.

Children First is proud to collaborate with the Provider Council to dismantle structural racism and biased practices within the early childhood education sector. The dynamic Provider Council members are early childhood education providers in Philadelphia and – despite the overwhelming demands of their field – are developing policies and practices to embed racial equity in all aspects of child care quality improvement.

Read the new Children First report, *Priorities of Early Childhood Providers in Pennsylvania* at www.childrenfirstpa.org/earlylearning. Learn more and find out how to support this work by emailing Dawn Nock at dawnn@childrenfirstpa.org.



A Report from the Children First
Racial Equity Early Childhood Provider Council
July 2024

Parent Power for Change

Building a Powerful Coalition of Parents



Another amazing year of Parents Empowered for Change! This dynamic Children First program is building a cadre of parent advocates with passion, skills, and experience to improve their communities. Ten more parent leaders completed the novel Children First Empowerment Fellowship. The Empowerment Fellowship is a seven-month program anchored in the advanced topics of advocacy, social impact, and movement building. Participants build their political muscle by learning to navigate the political landscape and create successful advocacy strategies. The curriculum is also structured so each graduate designs a final project – a blueprint that defines a problem and their plan to solve it. Their projects are ambitious.

For example, Jazmin Banks (pictured presenting her project) plans to launch a podcast to spotlight the problems she and far too children and parents experience in the foster care system. As a foster mother, she raised 15 children, most with mental health challenges or intellectual disabilities. She was a fierce advocate for every one of those kids but felt very isolated when the system was unresponsive to her children's needs, creating conditions to leading to what she describes as a "foster child to prison pipeline."

We are also proud to stand with these dynamic parents in meetings with lawmakers, community leaders, and the media. Our advocacy work is markedly more effective when parents are our partners because they are the authority on what their children need. "Children First includes parents as equals in meetings and press conferences in Harrisburg and Philadelphia. It's very powerful sharing our experience on what children need to thrive because it's our real life, not just numbers on a page," said Maritza Guridy, a parent leader and Empowerment Fellowship alumnus.

Pennsylvania's children have brighter futures because more parents are empowered for change. If you or someone you know are interested, contact Inella Ray, Director of Parent Advocacy & Engagement, at inellar@childrenfirstpa.org or (215) 563-5848 ext. 151.



Donor Salute

For many years, Jacquie and David Griffith have been passionate Children First supporters. They were introduced to Children First when David worked at Episcopal Community Services and quickly became interested in the breadth and depth of our impact.

Jacquie joined the Board of Directors this past June, jumping right in with her enthusiastic interest in fundraising. Once she realized that 2025 is Children First's 45th anniversary year and we have lots of fundraising and visibility activities planned, Jacquie redoubled her commitment. She and David stepped up to be the first lead donors in our anniversary fundraising campaign, making a significant investment in the organization's continued success. "I am so inspired by the work we have done and continue to do across our region," says Jacquie. "I hope our donation inspires others to join us as we kick off this important campaign."

In addition to her tireless commitment to Children First, Jacquie's volunteer leadership service also includes the Trinity Church Solebury, Phillips' Mill Community Association, New Hope/Solebury Library, and Bryn Mawr School of Social Work. We are fortunate to be among the organizations she so generously supports with her time and talent! **We hope you can be like Jacquie and Dave and support our work. Contact Caroline King at carolinek@childrenfirstpa.org or 215-680-0077.**

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Impressed?

You've had a chance to read all about our impactful advocacy for kids and now you might be thinking...

"This is so great! How can I help?"

There are many ways to get involved: send messages to your elected officials with our weekly *Take Action Tuesday* campaigns, come to Harrisburg or City Council with us to meet with lawmakers, join us at one of our many press conferences or other events, and – of course – make a donation of any amount.

More and more of our supporters are choosing to sign up to give an automatic monthly credit card donation; they just "set it and forget it" and we are so grateful for the steady stream of support.

Thank you for your interest in our work and we hope to hear from you!

Contact Caroline King at carolinek@childrenfirstpa.org or 215-680-0077.

