



ADVOCACY TOOL KIT

ADVOCATE FROM ANYWHERE!

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Welcome to Child Care Aware® of Missouri's Advocacy Tool Kit!

Child Care Aware® of Missouri believes in the power of advocacy and empowering families, as well as child care educators, to elevate their voices to decision-makers to make an impact on the issues they care about. Simply said, advocacy is standing up for what we believe in, sharing our passion, and sharing things we see. For example, you can just as easily advocate on behalf of a child to their teacher as you can about child care to your local, state, or federal legislators.

We understand this process can seem a bit daunting and intimidating. Child Care Aware® of Missouri wants to assure you that your voice does matter and can make a difference in the lives of Missouri children, families, early childhood professionals, and child care educators.

The purpose of this Advocacy Tool Kit is to help you feel confident in starting powerful conversations around the issues you care about with policymakers and elected officials. By combining and focusing many voices on child care issues, we have a much better chance of leaders listening.

This toolkit will provide you with a better understanding of your elected officials at the state level and how to contact them. You will find explanations of the state legislative process, voting, and elections. We provide information about the best times and ways to reach decision-makers, as well as a few sample emails or phone calls to help you start this process.

The single most important action you can take is to get to know and build a relationship with your legislator.

We hope you will also join Child Care Aware® of Missouri in our mission to impact a child's first two-thousand days by helping those who serve children. You can read more about our advocacy goals [here](#).

We are truly grateful for your role in the lives of young children and your willingness to learn how to elevate your voice on their behalf.

Carissa Figgins

Assistant Chief of Community Impact

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Two-Thousand Days to Make a Difference

Introduction to Advocacy

Advocacy is any action that builds support for a specific issue among stakeholders, elected officials, community members, the media, and the general public. You might not think of yourself as an advocate, but many of us take action every day!

As an advocate, you might:

- Stand up for what you believe
- Share your passion
- Share your experiences
- Provide input towards a solution

Why Should You Advocate?

As an early childhood advocate, you have an opportunity to educate elected officials and community leaders, become involved in issues, and improve outcomes that affect children, families, and early childhood educators.

Developing long-term relationships with the elected officials in your community is essential to becoming an effective advocate.

Tips for communicating and building relationships with your elected officials:

- Invite a legislator to visit a local child care program or your child care program
- Provide a legislator with information or educational materials on a particular topic
- Stay informed on legislative positions and current bills
- Testify before a legislative committee

(Start Early, 2021)

THE TOP THREE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT ADVOCACY

1. Advocacy is any action that builds support for a specific issue.
2. Anyone can advocate, and you may already be taking action without even realizing it.
3. Consider building a relationship with the elected officials in your community.



Child Care Aware® of Missouri 2022 Advocacy Focus Areas

1. To assist families and educators in advocating on their own behalf.

- Provide resources to early childhood educators and families to advocate on their own behalf utilizing our data, research, and information.

2. To engage and mobilize key legislators who will champion affordable and accessible child care for families and a significant wage increase for educators.

- Advocate to increase the access to early care and education for parents and children.
- Educate, create awareness, provide toolkits, and create a communication plan to involve staff, board members, working families, early childhood educators, and contracted Capacity Building Partners to inform legislators/policymakers on the importance of
 - Increasing workforce and wage compensation.
 - Increasing the capacity of child care across all regions of the state.
 - Highlight policies and processes to ease the financial burden on families.

3. To reduce the stigma associated with the early childhood profession.

- Create and sustain access for early childhood educators to higher education through the T.E.A.C.H. MISSOURI Scholarship Program and the CDA Scholarship Project.
- Maintain the involvement of decision-makers by elevating the public profile of the child care workforce and wage compensation by disseminating information on achievements within the early childhood workforce.

4. To support the early social and emotional development of young children.

- Advocate for ongoing financial support of access to higher education and training, emphasizing supports for child safety, health, and well-being.
- Increase awareness of the need for social support networks for children, families, and child care educators to address trauma and crisis.
- Advocate for the physical, social, and emotional well-being of children while under the supervision of child care educators.

Child Care Aware® of Missouri 2022 Advocacy Focus Areas

High-quality child care is an essential component of Missouri's economy. Suppose families do not have a quality child care program to take their children to each day. In that case, they cannot help contribute to the economy or financially provide for their family. However, quality child care programs cannot exist unless there are dedicated early childhood educators to staff these programs. Early childhood educators play an essential role in the economy and the foundational years of a child's life.

Despite their critical role, child care educators are not adequately compensated for their work, resulting in high turnover in the field. This results in many child care programs operating at a reduced capacity due to lack of staff or running the risk of burning out or overworking the current staff. When a child care program retains quality staff, it can best serve the families in their community. When families have a positive environment to take their children to each day, they can perform their best at work.

Child Care Aware® of Missouri has a unique responsibility to educate and build awareness across the early childhood landscape, including families, educators, community stakeholders, and the business community. We have identified four advocacy areas for the 2022 legislative session.

1. Workforce and Wage Compensation

Early childhood educators are essential to a child's future well-being and play a significant role in a child's learning and development. As professionals, early childhood educators spend considerable time planning curriculum, supporting brain and socio-emotional development, and supporting the needs of families outside of the classroom.

- Early childhood educators are essential to the economy and allow for families to go to work each day.
- Despite their critical role, the average pay rate in Missouri for an early childhood educator is \$10.45 an hour. Compared to the average pay for a Kindergarten teacher at \$27.68, early childhood educators pay the penalty by choosing to work with younger children (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2020).
- In addition to facing low compensation rates, early childhood educators are surrounded by high turnover in the field and no policies that outline minimum education requirements.
- Public K-12 teachers in Missouri receive employee benefits such as paid vacation and sick time, retirement plans, professional development days, health insurance, parental leave, etc. However, early childhood educators do not typically have access to employee benefits.

2. Affordability

Child care is a significant investment for most families. For some, child care costs are higher than their annual income.

- High prices put a strain on family budgets and can lead to extensive debt for families.
- In Missouri, the average cost for an infant and a 4-year-old to attend child care is around \$16,000 a year in a child care center and \$10,000 a year for family child care. A single parent could expect to pay about 40% of their income for infant care at a center-based facility. A two-parent household, living at the poverty level could expect to pay nearly 70% of their income for infant care at a center-based facility (Child Care Aware® of America, 2019).
- Families may qualify to receive child care subsidies through the state, but subsidy payments to programs do not reflect the full cost of care. This leads to high co-pays for families to help cover the cost of child care.

"I live in rural Missouri, and I make about \$270 a week at my job. I have three children, two-year-old twins and an eight-year-old. It costs me \$250 a week to send my children to child care. This is my co-payment to my child care program despite being eligible for the child care subsidy program. I take pride in my work, and having a job is very important to me. However, it seems like it would just be more beneficial for me just to be a stay-at-home mom."

Mom in Camden County

3. Investment

Without child care, Missouri does not work. However, child care choices for families are constrained by the cost of care, low supply, and high demand in significant portions of the state.

- Investments in high-quality early childhood experiences positively impact a child's well-being and governmental budget. Children who receive quality early childhood learning experiences earn higher wages as adults and draw on fewer government resources (Lynch, 2015).
- When parents have access to high-quality child care, they can increase their work hours, avoid missing workdays, and pursue further education (Hamm, 2019).
- Across the United States, working families lose more than \$8.3 billion in wages annually due to inaccessible child care (First Five Years Fund, 2022).

"There are 11 child care programs in my community, and all of them are full with a waitlist. I need child care immediately so I can go back to work. I just do not know what to do." **Family in Randolph County**

4. Child Well-being

Child care educators create safe physical environments to shape social emotional development of young children. They play a crucial role in developing healthy habits that will follow these young children into their adult life.

- Early childhood is a time of rapid growth and development. It is very important for children to develop healthy habits, positive mental health, and coping skills that will influence their social and emotional development throughout life.
- Quality, early childhood educators with knowledge of appropriate classroom practices lay the groundwork for developing a child's physical, social, and emotional needs.

Types of Advocacy

Case Advocacy

Case advocacy acts on behalf of an individual, group, or family. It is crucial to document service-delivery problems and share necessary information to identify policy issues.

A case advocate might:

- Be familiar or research eligibility requirements of a specific program or policy
- Document a problem and reach out to others to inquire if they have had similar issues
- Meet with local agency staff to discuss solutions to the problem

Administrative Advocacy

Administrative advocacy provides input and influences rules, agency policies, regulations, and executive orders. Decisions are often made informally, so interacting with the managing entity can be an effective way to achieve positive change!

An administrative advocate might:

- Develop and maintain relationships with agency staff to influence decision making
- Participate in a forum or focus group opportunities with early childhood stakeholders and state officials
- Provide reliable information on how the implications of a policy will affect your community

Legislative Advocacy

Legislative advocacy is working with legislators to educate and inform them on policies or programs that will impact their constituents.

A legislative advocate might:

- communicate with legislators or their staff through multiple channels such as emails, letters, phone calls, or personal visits
- testify before legislative committees
- meet with staff of the governor's office to help draw attention to the issue in your community
- Invite legislators to your business to help them understand how policies impact early childhood

The Top 3 Things About Types of Advocacy

1. Case advocacy acts on behalf of an individual, group, or family.
2. Administrative advocacy is influencing rules, policies, and regulations.
3. Legislative advocacy is working to inform and educate legislators on early childhood issues.



Media Advocacy

Media advocacy uses mass media to create awareness and influence others on early childhood issues strategically. By bringing your case to the media's attention, you can create public support and recognition.

A media advocate might:

- Reach out to local reporters to make them aware of the lack of child care options for families in your area
- Contact local radio or television stations to share your expertise on early childhood
- Mobilize other professionals or families to support the issue as well
- Share important local media coverage with your elected officials
- Utilize your social media accounts to draw attention to an issue

(Start Early, 2009)

How a Bill Becomes a Law

A bill is introduced by a Senator or Representative to their chamber.



The bill is assigned to a committee. The committee holds hearings and work sessions.



The committee votes on the bill and then it is sent to the floor for a debate. Sometimes filibusters can happen, and the bill is stalled.



The bill is sent to the second chamber where legislators hold hearings and work sessions.



Once the bill passes in the second chamber, it is sent to the floor for a debate and is read a third time. Sometimes the Senate and the House bills will be different and a conference committee is appointed to reconcile the bills.



After the bill passes a majority vote in both chambers, it will move to the executive office (Governor's office). The Governor can either sign the bill into a law or veto the bill.



If the Governor vetoes the bill, the Senate and House can override the bill with a two-thirds majority vote.



When to Advocate During the Legislative Process

Each year, thousands of bills are introduced in the legislative process. However, many of these bills never become laws. Often, the outcome of a bill depends significantly on the support or opposition from chambers of commerce, unions, nonprofit advocacy organizations, and grassroots organizations. You can voice your support for early childhood bills and play a significant role in helping a particular bill move forward. You have the power to influence the decision-making process.

When a bill is filed:

Bill filing starts on December 1st, before the legislative session begins in January. You can call and write your representatives to let them know that the issue is critical and ask them to speak with other members of relevant committees.

If a bill moves through a committee:

You can continue to write, email, and call your legislator and express the importance of the particular bill. At the state level, you could have the opportunity to testify or submit written testimony in response to a bill in front of a hearing committee.

If the bill moves forward in the second chamber:

You can begin to extend your outreach activities to include the Governor's office. Executive support can change the course of a bill drastically.

However, the legislative process starts well before the formal session. Policymakers utilize July-December to create and hone objectives for the upcoming session. This time is the longest part of the legislative process, so informing and educating lawmakers before the legislative session begins is just as important.

(Start Early, 2009)

The Top 3 Things About Advocating During the Legislative Process

1. Bill filing starts on December 1st.
2. Write, email, and call your legislator throughout the process.
3. Executive support can be essential.



Testifying and Public Hearings

To become a law, every bill in Missouri will have a public hearing before a Legislative Committee. You could have an opportunity to speak at a public hearing and let your state legislators know your opinion, and share your experiences. Below are some things you need to know about the process and some tips to help you follow proper procedures.

Information on Public Hearings:

Scheduled hearings can be found by visiting the Senate (www.senate.mo.gov) or the House website (www.house.mo.gov). Copies of the bills are also available on the House and Senate websites.

What to Know and What to Expect:

- Know the time and location of the hearing
- Be on time – if you are late, you can submit written information and a witness form (found in the hearing room) after the hearing is over.
- When you arrive, complete and turn in a witness form to the Chair's staff. Witness forms can usually be found on the witness table facing the Committee members' chairs.
- You should also be sure to provide enough copies of any written testimony to every committee member and committee staff.
- Generally, witnesses have the opportunity to present testimony as those favoring the bill, those opposing the bill, and those who are neither for nor against the bill but would like to provide information on the bill.
- Be prepared for questions and comments from committee members – if you are unsure of an answer, let the committee know you will follow up with a written response.
- Utilize your own experience and knowledge, but be prepared to support your viewpoint with facts and data.

The Top 3 Things about Testifying & Public Hearings

1. Utilize this opportunity to inform and educate legislators on important issues.
2. Always be respectful to committee members, staff, and other witnesses.
3. Use your expertise and knowledge but be prepared with facts and data to support your opinion.



Presenting Your Testimony:

- When it is your turn to testify, you should address the chairperson first and then the committee members.
- Introduce yourself, the name of the organization you represent, and if you favor, oppose, or provide information about the bill.
- Identify the bill by its number.
- Time is usually limited to 3-5 minutes. Briefly explain your recommendation and your position on the bill.
- Be prepared to present your testimony in one minute – your time may be limited.
- Avoid using acronyms or other technical languages.
- If a committee member asks you a question, be sure to respond with “Chair or Senator/Representative (Last Name).”
- If you do not know a committee member’s name, refer to them as “Senator” or “Representative.”
- Always thank the committee member for their service.

Follow-up:

- Committee will typically vote on bills about a week after they take public testimony. Sometimes the committee will vote right after the public hearing.
- Committee action is public, so you can stay and listen to debates/votes.
- Find out how the committee voted by following up with the committee chair's staff or tracking the bill online.
- Consider sending thank you notes to each committee member, thanking them for their time, and summarizing your testimony.

Other Helpful Tips:

- Familiarize yourself with the names of the Legislators who are on the committee by looking up their pictures and biographies on the House and Senate websites.
- Be respectful and do not insult or criticize committee members, staff, or other witnesses.
- Do not respond to inappropriate comments.
- This process can be intimidating, so be sure to relax and take it one step at a time.

(Missouri Foundation for Health, 2021)

How to Talk with Elected Officials

When using any form of communication with an elected official, be sure to define yourself. Let them know that you are essential and an expert on the issue. Make sure the elected official understands that your issue is a priority. Be sure to connect your issue with a larger plan and public appeal.

Developing a relationship with elected officials is the most effective way to earn support on early childhood issues. Personal relationships with mutual trust can be established by scheduling program tours, phone calls, letters, in-person meetings, and social media. Below are some helpful tips to make sure your voice is heard.

When communicating with elected officials via phone calls, letters, and emails:

- Identify yourself as a constituent, and be sure to include your full name, address, and phone number
- Keep your communication brief and concise
- If possible, limit written communication to one page and phone calls to about 5 minutes
- If you are addressing specific legislation, always use the bill number
- Be sure to include facts and use local information and examples to support your point
- Include a call to action and let the legislator know what you want them to do

When scheduling an in-person meeting with your elected official:

- Communicate with the elected official's assistant via phone or email to coordinate an appointment
- Have several dates and times available and plan on only meeting for 10-15 minutes if you are meeting your elected official at the Capital.
- It may be beneficial to plan your visit when your elected official is in their home city from June to December.
- Let the legislators' assistant know what issue you would like to discuss with the legislator.
- Come to the meeting dressed professionally and prepared with talking points.

The Top 3 Things to Know About Talking with Your Elected Official

1. Keep communication brief and concise.
2. Come prepared and end with a call to action.
3. Always thank your elected official.



- Anticipate opposing arguments and be prepared to defend your perspective
- Be friendly and positive, even if you disagree with the legislator's viewpoint
- Bring educational materials and relevant data to help persuade the legislator on the importance of the issue
- Be sure to end with a call to action – do you want the legislator to vote for a specific bill, sponsor legislator, talk with colleagues, etc.
- Always thank your legislator and their staff members for their time and any action they plan to take
- Be sure to follow up after the meeting via email and thank legislators/their staff for their time, and remind them of commitments to action they made

Inviting elected officials to visit your local program can significantly demonstrate to policymakers first-hand the environments required for positive early childhood experiences. These visits allow elected officials to connect the policies they create with children and educators in their district and see how they make a difference.

When inviting elected officials to visit your program:

- Find out when legislators will be in your area by viewing the session calendar for the Missouri General Assembly
- Give sufficient notice to the legislator if there is a specific time you would like them to visit
- Confirm the data at least one week in advance and find out how many people will be visiting with the elected official
- Inform local media to attend, but be sure to let the elected official know and get permission from parents for photographs/names to be used in the media
- On the day of the visit, be available to welcome the elected official and introduce all staff, children, and parents.
- Use the visit as an opportunity to inform the official about important early childhood issues and demonstrate the importance of a robust age-appropriate learning environment.
- Take photos to send to the official with follow-up correspondence, and it could be a great addition to your program newsletter.
- Follow-up after the visit with a thank you note and continue the relationship when you have specific information to share about early childhood.

(Missouri Foundation for Health, 2021)

How to Frame Your Message

Before you begin your advocacy work, you will need to create concise messaging. Highlight the importance of change and call for action from your audiences. You should not assume elected officials or other community members are well-versed in all the details of early childhood issues. This is where your advocacy can have a significant impact!

Developing clear and concise messages about the issues within early childhood is a powerful tool. You can use the **EPIC** format to **E**ngage, state the **P**roblem, **I**nforn your audience, and share a **C**all to action to create a meaningful message.

Your message should:

Engage the audience

- Identify your audience
- Choose information that will resonate and educate them on your issue

State the **P**roblem

- Clearly and briefly describe the problem
- Consider the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of your problem.

Inform your audience about possible solutions

- Be prepared to discuss solutions
- Consider providing evidence for your recommendations.

Call to Action

- Keep your request specific and clear
- Give your audience an immediate way to get involved

(Start Early, 2009)

The Top 3 Things to Know About Framing Your Message

1. Do not assume elected officials are well-versed on early childhood issues.
2. Be clear and specific.
3. Remember the EPIC format.



The EPIC format is trademarked by the organization RESULTS (www.results.org)

	Engage the Audience	State the Problem	Inform Your Audience	Call to Action
Lawmakers	I am the owner of a family child care business in your district.	Our community is in desperate need of more licensed child care options. I have to turn families away almost every day and have a waitlist almost a year long. I have heard from other community members that would be willing to open a child care business, but they need business support and funding opportunities to get their program started.	The federal government has included \$10 billion in relief funding for child care. This funding could support new or existing child care programs and assist them in opening a business or expanding their current business where child care is desperately needed.	Will you support this funding being used to start new child care businesses or expand current businesses? Will you ask your legislative peers to address the lack of child care in many areas of the state?
Early Childhood Professionals	As an early childhood educator, I am sure you have received many calls from families that need child care.	Our community is in desperate need of more child care options. Many families cannot find care for their children, and many programs have year-long waitlists. Has your program had to turn away families because you are at capacity?	The federal government has included \$10 billion in relief funding for child care. This funding could support new or existing child care programs and assist them in opening a business or expanding their current business where child care is desperately needed.	Will you call your legislators and ask them to consider utilizing this funding to support new child care programs or expand existing programs?
Business Leaders	Early childhood programs are essential to our state's economy. If families do not have a quality child care program to take their children to each day, they cannot financially provide for their family.	Our community is in desperate need of more child care options. Many families struggle to find child care for their children, and it can impede their ability to go to work or do their job effectively.	The federal government has included \$10 billion in relief funding for child care. This funding could support new or existing child care programs and assist them in opening a business or expanding their current business where child care is desperately needed.	Will you call your legislators and ask them to consider utilizing this funding to support new child care programs or expand existing programs?

Sample Legislator Phone Call and Letter/E-mail

Sample Phone Script

- Hello, I am (your name), a constituent in Representative/Senator _____'s district.
- I am calling to speak with Representative/Senator _____ about early childhood programs in our community.
- I ask that you support (bill name) to increase funding for high-quality early learning programs.
- The first five years are the most important of a child's development. Economists, business leaders, and researchers agree that high-quality early childhood services are among the smartest public investments we can make.
- Early childhood programs provide the best and most cost-effective way to give at-risk children the chance to succeed in school and become more productive adults.
- I ask that you vote to support legislation that increases funds for needed early childhood programs in your district. These funds will significantly affect the lives of young children and families in our community.
- Thank you for your hard work.

Sample Letter/E-mail

Dear Representative/Senator _____,

I am writing to you about the importance of early childhood programs in our community.

As a constituent in your district, I ask that you support (bill name) to increase funding for high-quality early learning programs in our community. Research tells us that children who participate in high-quality early learning programs have better language, math, and social skills than their peers who missed this opportunity. They are also more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to become involved in crime, and more likely to become positive, productive citizens as adults.

The first five years are the most important of a child's development. Economists, business leaders, and researchers agree that high-quality early childhood services are among the smartest public investments we can make. Early childhood programs provide the best and most cost-effective way to give at-risk children the chance to succeed in school and become more productive adults.

My family child care program (name of your business) has a waiting list of XX children, and without additional funding, those families may go without child care. Please vote in support of (bill name) so that all the children in our community will be prepared to enter school ready to learn. Thank you for your hard work.

How to Engage Families as Early Childhood Advocates

The first two-thousand days of a child's life are critical for brain development and learning. Early childhood educators and families know best the importance of advocating for the success of future generations. Advocacy is an essential part of building strong communities and enhancing the lives of Missouri's youngest children. Families and early childhood educators should rally together to raise a powerful, collective voice to demand change.

When engaging children and families as early childhood advocates:

- **Lead by example:** Help the children and families in your program become advocates by holding yourself to a high standard and engaging in advocacy opportunities. Be knowledgeable on key players such as the legislators and stakeholders in your community and how to contact them. If families have concerns, be prepared to direct them to the right place to amplify their voice.
- **Build relationships:** As early childhood educators, you serve as a liaison between families, state legislators, and decision-makers. Developing a relationship with legislators will help you become confident. Then, you can help your families develop relationships, share their stories, and be a part of powerful conversations to create change.
- **Motivate and Inspire:** Engage the children and families in your program in ways that boost their enthusiasm. Consider asking them to be present for a legislator's visit, having children create thank you notes for legislators, or setting up a lunch and learn for families and legislators to connect. You can help identify barriers families might be facing that prevent them from telling their story.

The Top Three Things You Can Do to Engage Children and Families

1. Build Relationships
2. Lead by example
3. Motivate and Inspire



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