



Toolkit For Early Care & Education Advocates

Welcome to the Illinois Action for Children Advocacy Toolkit

This toolkit provides the information and resources community leaders need to confidently take action on important child care and early education issues and make advocacy a part of everyday life. We encourage you to start building the next generation of advocates with the help of this guide.

- Introduction
- Traditional Advocacy
- Online Advocacy
- Advocacy Tools



illinois
action for
children

Who We Are

Illinois Action for Children is a catalyst for organizing, developing and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most. Over the years, we have successfully formed a common voice and vision for advancing high quality, accessible and affordable child care programs and early education opportunities. As a result, our successes have helped children develop to their fullest potential and provided an important support for their families.

The Public Policy and Advocacy Program has four goals:

1. **Advocate** for systems of early learning that are responsive to the needs of families and their children and foster the development, health, and well-being of all children.
2. **Collaborate** with individuals and organizations to encourage participation in civic and community life and, in that way, bring about meaningful changes in the public arena.
3. **Promote** quality improvement to early care and education programs and best practices for providers, programs, and policymakers.
4. **Support** families in making the best choices for their children and achieving economic stability.

Contact Us!

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www.actforchildren.org/for-advocates

Welcome to the Illinois Action for Children Advocacy Toolkit!



Advocates are people that care passionately about an issue and take action to create meaningful change. Advocating for accessible, affordable, and quality child care policies and programs means brighter futures for children and economic stability for working families.

We encourage families, providers, and anyone with a stake in high-quality early care and education to get involved.

Sign Up to Be An Illinois Action for Children Advocate!

Visit www.actforchildren.org/for-advocates

Email advocacy@actforchildren.org

Call 773.564.8843

Traditional Advocacy

Your partnership is essential to building brighter futures for Illinois' children and families. There are so many ways to involve your community in advocacy and the strategies are not one-size-fits-all. You know your community best and what will work for them.

Here are some traditional advocacy ideas to get you started:

1 Set Up an In-District Meeting

Find out when your local legislator will be at home in your district. Reach out to their district office to set up a meeting and use this time to build and maintain your relationship with them.

How-to:

- Visit www.elections.il.gov to identify your state senator and state representative.
- Locate their district office and contact information by visiting www.ilga.gov.
- Reach out to your legislator by calling their district office.



Tips For Meeting With Your Legislator

Do Your Homework: Listen and learn about issues affecting children and working families. Research both sides of the issue you want to talk about. Make sure you're familiar with any recent developments. Know how the legislator has voted in the past on early care and education issues.

Personalize Your Message: Share stories about your program, the families you work with, and the children you care for to bring the issue to life for your legislator.

Present Your Case: In addition to giving your issues a personal angle, numbers and facts can be powerful. We can provide you with data and research that will compel a legislator to care and prioritize your issue.

Leave Information: Give your legislator information to look over that summarizes the issue. Answer any questions that you can and make sure to leave your business card or contact information.

Follow Up: Send a thank-you note right away, answer any outstanding questions the legislator had from your meeting, and continue to keep in touch with them. Debrief the meeting with your colleagues and discuss what went well and what needs improvement. To help you debrief, contact the Public Policy & Advocacy Team.

2 Engage Key Stakeholders

Meet with individuals and groups that understand the concerns and challenges facing working families and their children.

- The annual Spring Into Action Conference & Advocacy Day is held each spring and brings individuals together for policy-oriented and professional development workshops, networking opportunities, and a visit to the state capitol to meet our legislators.
- Regional Public Policy Caucuses are held at varying times throughout the year with one statewide caucus held in the summer. These meetings give advocates a chance to work with public policy staff to shape policy and legislative priorities, to learn and network with other advocates, and to identify emerging public policy issues in child care and early education.

3 Arrange a Program Visit

Another way to build a relationship with your legislator is to arrange for them to visit your early care and education program. Let them experience what you do – this is a rare opportunity for you to have your legislator's undivided attention when presenting your issue.



Tips for Arranging a Program Visit

Set a time that works for both the legislator and the children.

Select a program with enthusiastic children and staff to help you welcome your legislator.

Make sure your legislator gets to interact with children. Take photos and share them with your parents and partners!



4 Do an Advocacy Drop

Gather petitions, letters, or crafts expressing support for your issue to deliver to your legislators' offices.

- (Pictured below) Illinois Action for Children advocates collected bouquets of paper flowers from children, parents, teachers, and staff across the state. Around Mother's Day, advocates delivered them to legislators' offices asking them to support working moms and all caregivers that support families.



5 Host a Community Forum

A community forum is an effective way to get that target audience together. Invite your legislator to attend the event to talk about an issue and answer questions. To make sure you have good turnout, create a plan for reaching your audience. Here are some questions to help you create your community outreach plan:



- **Who is your target audience?** What groups do you want to communicate with? Be specific: not just “community members,” but “working families, local business owners that employ parents in your program.”
- **How will you reach the members of your target audience?** Usually, calling or emailing these individuals directly is the best way to secure commitments. Also consider sending flyers, starting a phone tree, or mailing invitations.
- **How will you get your target audience interested in your forum?** People will come to your forum if they can understand the benefit for them to participate. Your announcements should be bold, concise, and written in the language that they speak, if needed.
- **Who can you partner with?** If your program is a member of a larger coalition, invite the other member groups to expand your reach to others. Invite media, advocacy groups, and other potential collaborators to your forum, if appropriate.

To ensure that your community meeting runs smoothly and accomplishes your goals, create an agenda, assign roles and establish a format for the meeting. Below are some questions to help you organize your forum:

- **What is the purpose?** Identify and articulate goals for the meeting. What are the essential messages and relevant facts you want the audience to take away from the meeting?
- **What will be the format of the meeting?** Will there be a panel discussion or separate presentations? Will the panel/presenters include legislators? How much time will be allotted for the panel/presentations? How much time will remain for comments or a question and answer session? How can you make the meeting interactive so that it engages the target audience? How will you accommodate language or other needs such as disabilities?
- **Who will be invited to speak?** If the speakers are legislators, share with them the issues that will be discussed at the forum. Provide them with background materials on the issues. Who might be possible substitute speakers if your chosen legislators/other speakers aren't available? How can you include the voices of parents or other early care and education leaders?
- **Are the speakers familiar with the overall structure of the meeting?** Share a draft of the agenda with the panelists/presenters. Make sure they are comfortable with the structure and time frame for the meeting.

6 Attend a Rally

Rally Day, usually held during the legislative session, mobilizes early care and education leaders and families to speak with one voice on legislative priorities. They meet directly with legislators to advocate for those priorities. There is no denying that there is power in numbers.



7 Organize a Call-In Day

Ask your friends, family, and neighbors to call key legislators on the same day to deliver messages of support for your issue. Tell your supporters to:

- Call their legislator. Provide them with the legislator's contact information, which can be found at www.elections.il.gov.
- When they get someone on the phone, they can say:

"Hello, my name is _____ and I live in your district. I am a parent/educator of # children and I believe that access to high quality, affordable child care is important to all families. I ask that you vote for/vote against/support specific bill number or legislation title. Thank you."

8 Place an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor

Write an opinion piece or letter to the editor for a local, state, or national news outlet. Use state and local data (See *Advocacy Tools* section for samples and tips.)

9 Collect Stories

Work with your staff and families to collect stories about the impact of early learning programs on children and families. Send them to Illinois Action for Children and share with your legislators. Be sure to include photos, audio and video whenever possible.



Media Tips

Invite local press to any advocacy events you are planning.

Send out a media advisory featuring quotes from speakers or attendees immediately after any events you host. (See *Advocacy Tools* section for sample media advisory.)

Online Advocacy

More and more advocacy is happening online. Social media allows us to partner with advocates, stakeholders and policymakers everywhere. Not sure where to start? We can help!

1 Facebook

Facebook is great for spreading the word about events, posting stories on early care and education, and sharing resources.

- Posting pictures or infographics on Facebook can communicate simple messages and make your issue understandable for people who aren't as familiar with it. Images tend to draw much more attention to your page than text alone.
- Illinois Action for Children regularly posts stories about early care and education that you can share on your own page.

Check out IAFC's Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/ILaction4children.



Illinois Action for Children shared America's Edge's photo.
Posted by Adam Summers [?] · 2 hours ago

In case you missed our post last week, here is a compelling new report from ReadyNation / America's Edge Illinois regarding the business/economic benefits and impact of investing in early care and education – definitely worth a read!

Illinois business leaders release new report, citing research that every \$1 invested in Illinois preschool produces nearly \$2 of local business activity.

<http://wp.me/pQzWS-1ht>

Early Learning Investments Help Illinois Businesses

New Investments → EARLY LEARNING CENTERS → TEACHERS & STAFF → Make Purchases → MAIN STREET BUSINESSES → New Sales → MORE JOBS

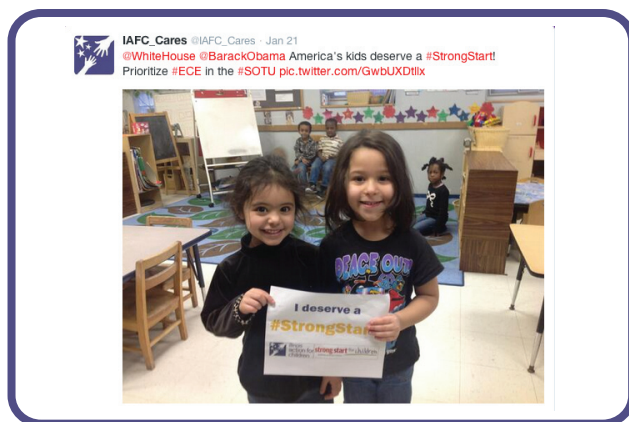
Like · Comment · Share

2 Twitter

Twitter can be used to create and continue conversations about your issue.

Follow Illinois Action for Children on Twitter at [@IAFC_Cares](https://twitter.com/IAFC_Cares).

In January 2014, we joined advocates all over the country to collect pictures of children and adults who support early learning. Together we tweeted them at the President using the hashtag **#StrongStart** to urge him to include early learning in his State of the Union Address



- **Commonly used early care and education hashtags:**

#StrongStart **#InvestInKids** **#ece**
#PreKForAll **#earlyed**

- **Host a “Tweetchat”**

Choose a day to discuss an issue on a hashtag like **#earlyed**. When lots of people are using that hashtag at the same time, that topic is “trending.” This can encourage conversation around your issue and raise its popularity among the social media circles you follow and those that follow you.

3 Grassroots Messages

Use email blasts to get information to your network and generate messages to policymakers. Similar to a call-in day, organize a week or day of action for your advocacy partners to send emails to relevant legislators.



4 Virtual Meeting

Organize an online event to raise awareness about your issue and engage people who may not be as involved in advocacy or are located far from where you typically host events. Virtual events can happen through a webinar or, more easily, a Google Plus Hangout.



Advocacy Tools

Creating Powerful Messages

Child care and early education issues impact many people living in your community - whether they realize it or not. If we want to convince people how to vote or what policies to support, we want to be thoughtful in how and what we communicate. The ideas and messages that move us to action might not resonate with other people. The following are some tips that will help you deliver effective advocacy messages.

1 Know Your Audience

Not every message works for every audience. Be familiar with the interests and politics of the people you want to talk to and pick messages that best fit them. For example, a legislator that doesn't believe government should use funds for social services may be open to hearing about the importance of child care in helping parents access work. Parents might be more interested in how early care and education helps their child succeed in school and life.

2 Be Clear

Try not to use jargon, acronyms, or references to names that people might not know. For example, say the "Child Care Assistance Program" rather than "CCAP" or "Department of Human Services" rather than "DHS."

3 Be Honest

Always be honest with your audience. If a question comes up and you are not quite sure what the answer is, never make up an answer. It's okay to say "I don't know the exact source of that research, but I can put you in touch with the group that does" or "I can follow-up with you later on that point." Make sure to follow up- it's part of building credibility.

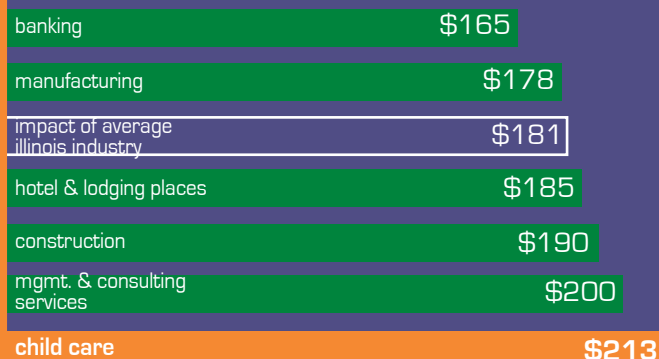
4 Personalize Your Message

Your message becomes more powerful if you can connect it to why the issue is important to you. Stories and anecdotes about your program, the families you work with, and the children you care for help bring the issue to life for someone that may be unfamiliar with it.

5 Use Data to Support Your Message

In addition to giving your issues a personal angle, numbers and facts can be powerful. Data and research can provide a compelling case for a legislator to care and prioritize your issue.

\$100 Spent on Child Care has Larger Economic Impact than \$100 Spent on Other Industries



Advocacy Tools

Key Facts About Early Care And Education

As you create your messages for various audiences, particularly legislators, here are some important facts. Illinois Action for Children can help you develop your message.

Early Care and Education helps children prepare for the future.

Long-term studies show that children who participate in Early Care and Education have:

- Greater language development
- Better mathematical ability
- Fewer behavioral problems in kindergarten

As adults, these children have:

- Increased high school graduation rates
- Increased higher education attainment
- Higher rates of workforce participation

Early Care and Education helps families go to work and support their family.

- Parents with school-age children miss an average of eight days of work each year because of the lack of after-school care. Businesses lose up to \$300 billion per year nationwide because work productivity decreases due to lack of after-school care.
- In 2002, unscheduled absenteeism from work cost an average of \$60,000 per year for a small company and more than \$3.6 million for a large company.
- One quarter (1/4) of employee absences are due to family issues such as children's illnesses or unscheduled breakdown of early care and education arrangements.

Early Care and Education helps Illinois' state economy.

- The child care industry in Illinois generated more than \$2.6 billion in gross receipts and employed 69,000 full-time employees.
- According to the Center for Law and Social Policy, for every dollar spent directly on child care is over two additional dollars generated in sales in the local economy.
- For every dollar that is cut from child care programs, the local economy loses two dollars.

Sources:

The Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Illinois 2005, A report by Illinois Action for Children, Chicago Metropolis 2020 and Illinois Facilities Fund.

Policy Report Brief: Investing Wisely During Fiscal Crisis: The Case for Fully Funding Child Care, January 2013.

Advocacy Tools

Further Information About Early Care And Education

Community Profiles are a snapshot of the early childhood education landscape in your legislative district.

→ Please visit <http://www.actforchildren.org/for-advocates/action/community-profiles/>

Read and download reports, briefs, and publications produced by Illinois Action for Children.

→ Please visit <http://www.actforchildren.org/research-data/research-reports/>

- The Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Illinois
- Choices in the Real World: The use of family, friend and neighbor child care by single Chicago mothers working nontraditional schedules
- Cook County Parents, Nonstandard Work and Child Care

Statistics on families, children and child care in Chicago, Cook County and Illinois

→ Please visit <http://www.actforchildren.org/research-data/data/>

- Child Care in Cook County
- Families, Children and the Need for Child Care
- Child Care and Early Education Programs
- Family, Friend and Neighbor Child Care
- The Cost of Child Care
- Children Eligible for Child Care Assistance
- Families in Poverty

Policy Briefs and Reports

→ Please visit <http://www.actforchildren.org/for-advocates/champion/>

Results on a provider survey evaluating the child care licensing system in Illinois as well as recommendations to improve the quality of providers' child care licensing experiences.

- Making the Grade Child Care Licensing Report Card

Recommendations outlining the top priorities of child care providers in Illinois that care for infant and toddlers.

- High Quality Infant and Toddler Care in Illinois Policy Brief

Advocacy Tools

Sample Letter To A Legislator

Date

The Honorable Mary Smith
1400 Main Street
Any town, State Zip

232 Capitol
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Dear Senator Smith:

The first paragraph should be an introduction of who you are and why you are writing.

- Give your name and the name of your program or affiliation
- Indicate that you are a constituent
- Describe the issue/legislation you are addressing

The next paragraph(s) should state the reasons why you are writing about the issue/legislation.

- Be persuasive and personalize this section as much as possible
- Talk about your own experiences or the experiences of the children or families you serve
- Support your position with data (use data that is as specific to the legislative district if possible)
- Most importantly, state the reasons why this issue is important to you as an advocate for early care and education

Your final paragraph should restate your position and thank them for his/ her support.

- Ask specifically that they support or oppose the issue which you are writing about
- State that their assistance and help is vital
- Indicate that you look forward to hearing from him or her
- Thank them

Sincerely,

Sign your name

Print your name

Your address

Your e-mail

Your phone number

Advocacy Tools

Letters To The Editor

Letters to the editor not only reach out to community members, they also call elected officials' attention to issues. When more than one letter is published on an issue, elected officials often assume that many people care about that topic. The newspaper editorial staff may find the issue newsworthy and further coverage and editorial positions may follow.



Tips

1. **Provide a clear, concise message** – state why the issue is important to the community served by the newspaper.
2. **Proofread** – check for spelling and grammar.
3. **Don't use jargon** – anyone reading the paper should understand your points.
4. **Pay attention to length** – most newspapers specify a word limit on letters.
5. **Include your address and phone number** – most newspapers call you before printing your letter to verify that you wrote it.
6. **You can find the address or e-mail address** to send your letter on the Op-Ed page of the publication.

Illinois Action for Children is available to answer any questions about using the media effectively. Contact Illinois Action for Children's Communications & Media Project Manager at 773.564.8801.

Sample Letter To The Editor

College Savings plan? What about a child care savings plan?

Dear Editor:

We hear a lot about how hard it is for families to afford a college education for their children, but you don't often hear that preschool education can be just as expensive. My local child care center charges almost \$9,000 per year to care for my 3-year-old. The cost of many child care centers is actually higher than tuition and fees to a state college, but unlike saving up for college, you don't have 18 years to save up for child care.

If I didn't qualify for the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program, there's no way I'd be able to keep working. Even with child care assistance, my co-payments still take up more than 15% of my income. If we want parents to have good jobs and children to grow up successful, we need to make child care more affordable for working families by revising the current co-payment scale in Illinois.

Sincerely,

Advocacy Tools

Sample Media Advisory

[Insert Organization's Logo]

Contact: [Name/Email/Phone number of local contact]

'Day of Action' Takes Early Learning Message to Legislators
Parents tell lawmakers to fund vital programs for children and families

[Name of City/Town, State] – This Mother's Day, Illinois Action for Children is bringing together children, parents, teachers, and staff to make and decorate bouquets of flowers for elected officials and ask them to support working moms and all caregivers that support families.

[Paragraph about your local event]

The IDHS Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is a critical work support and early learning opportunity for Illinois' children. The program serves over 150,000 children and **enables 85,000 families to work**. In Illinois, **over one million women** with children under the age of 18 years work to support their families.

Unfortunately, recent budget cuts to Early Childhood Education have had a devastating impact on children and families. These cuts hurt job growth for parents and reduce early learning options for children. Illinois must stop cutting and start investing in our youngest learners.

WHO: [Name of Local Organization], Parents, Children, Child Care Providers, Advocates, Illinois Action for Children

WHAT: [Insert brief description of your event] A Day of Action in support of working moms and their children's caregivers.

WHEN: [Insert Date and Time]

WHERE: [Insert Location/Address of Event]

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The Public Policy & Advocacy Department is always available as a resource and support for your advocacy efforts.

Contact us at 773.564.8843 or advocacy@actforchildren.org.