



the Ounce

Early Childhood
Advocacy Toolkit

Early Childhood Advocacy Toolkit

Ounce of Prevention Fund



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This advocacy toolkit is designed to help parents, student groups, practitioners, and other advocates get involved in the public policy-making process by educating key audiences about, and developing support for, early childhood initiatives.

The Ounce of Prevention Fund gives children and their families the best chance of success in school and in life by advocating for and providing the highest quality care and education from birth to age five. We hope you will use this toolkit to join us as a leader for early childhood issues in Illinois and nationally. The Ounce can be a resource as you engage in advocacy work. Contact us at 312-922-3863 or advocacy@ounceofprevention.org to let us know how we can help you.

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Introduction to Advocacy

What comes to mind when you hear the word “advocacy?” A lobbyist in Washington, DC? A political rally with thousands of participants? Or perhaps a state senator speaking on the senate floor about the concerns of her community? These are all examples of advocacy, as are other types of actions that most of us take every day.

You are an advocate if you have ever:

- helped a family receive needed services;
- stood up for someone who was being treated unfairly;
- attended a parent/teacher conference at your child’s school;
- participated in a city council meeting.

This toolkit is designed to prepare you to successfully advocate for public policies that benefit young children and their families.

Advocacy is building support for an issue among audiences such as the general public, elected officials, the media, and key opinion leaders. Activities such as educating audiences about a topic, sharing illustrative stories, or working on a solution to a problem are considered advocacy. Individual citizens can always contact their elected officials as constituents. State and federal governments do not regulate the public at large from par-

ticipating in advocacy or lobbying activities. Remember to use your personal e-mail and telephone when contacting policymakers.

Lobbying is communicating with elected officials to influence their actions regarding a specific piece of legislation. Many nonprofits can legally lobby, as long as they do not exceed restrictions on how time and resources are expended based on federal Internal Revenue Service tax laws. Expert legal and tax advice should be sought by an organization before engaging in lobbying activities.

Advocacy activities that are not lobbying

- Invite a legislator to visit your program and hear about the work being done.
- Provide a policymaker with information or educational materials on a topic.
- Talk with the media about a specific social issue.
- Track legislative positions and voting records.

Learn more about permissible activities during an election in the Voting and Elections section.

Consult the following resources for additional information on advocacy guidelines for nonprofit organizations:

Alliance for Justice

(www.afj.org/assets/resources/resource/Electoral-Activities-Checklist.pdf)

Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest

(www.clpi.org)

Donors Forum

(www.donorsforum.org)

National Head Start Association

(www.nhsa.org)

Why Should You Advocate?

The goal of early childhood advocacy is to improve the lives of children and families by influencing legislators’ and policymakers’ opinions and activities. To carry out their responsibilities, public officials require and welcome the advice that well-informed people (like you) provide.

Types of Advocacy

Case Advocacy:

Intervening to address an individual child or family's problem. By being aware of and documenting service-delivery problems, providers can share important information and collect examples that help identify policy issues.

Strategies

- Research the rules or eligibility requirements of a particular program or policy.
- Document the problem, its history, and whether others have had similar difficulties.
- Meet with local agency staff and/or affected family to discuss a problem.
- File an appeal if services are denied.

Example

Tonya, a caseworker, has been working with the Ferguson family for several years. During a routine meeting she noticed that Ms. Ferguson brought along her youngest son, four-year-old Zachary. Ms. Ferguson explained that Zachary was with her, and not at preschool, because his child-care subsidy lapsed recently when his eligibility information was not received in time. In Tonya's experience, Ms. Ferguson was incredibly diligent and thorough in regards to eligibility paperwork. Knowing how important it was for Zachary to have consistent learning experiences at his age, Tonya called the family's child-care caseworker and learned that Ms. Ferguson's paperwork had been received but the information hadn't been communicated to Ms. Ferguson or the preschool director. The child-care caseworker called the preschool director to reinstate the subsidy for Zachary. He went back to preschool the next day.

Administrative Advocacy:

Creating new policies, revising guidelines, and resolving program problems through activities directed at administrative and governmental agencies with authority and discretion to change rules and regulations. Many decisions are made informally, so interacting with the managing entity—rather than working through the legislature— can be the most effective way to make a positive change.

Strategies

- Develop ongoing relationships with advocates and agency staff to influence decision making.
- Participate in forums where decisions are made.
- Provide reliable information about the impact of policy decisions in your community, agency, or program to build your credibility.

Example

Suzette, the local director of a home-visitation program, is frustrated because the state agency that provides her funding has told her that the program must use the approved developmental screening instrument. She and her staff have found that another comparable instrument that includes a more parent-focused process is extremely useful in helping to engage parents in conversations about their child's development. Suzette's staff has been using both screenings to satisfy the funder's requirement as well as have the desired outcome with families. During a site review, Suzette and her department liaison discuss the issue in-depth, and Suzette shows the liaison evidence of improved parent outcomes that they believe are linked to their preferred screening tool. After the site review, Suzette sends a follow-up e-mail to her liaison and his supervisor, asking them to reconsider their policy. After more investigation, the department amends its rule to allow programs greater flexibility in choosing from among a list of approved screening tools so that programs decide which tool better fits their local needs.

Legislative Advocacy:

Working with elected officials to educate them about policies or programs and to inform them of the impact of the program in their home district. Advocates can educate decision-makers and suggest policies that would benefit their community. Legislative advocacy activities can also include lobbying on specific bills or requested funding levels.

Strategies

- Communicate with legislators and staff through letters, e-mails, phone calls, or personal visits.
- Testify before relevant legislative committees.
- Work with legislators to compel agency administrators to adopt your proposal.
- Meet with staff of the governor's office and the legislature to draw attention to your issue.
- Invite legislators to visit your program and see how policies affect people in your community.

Example

Mary was experiencing severe postpartum depression. She had health insurance and access to great prenatal care, yet none of her doctors ever asked her about how she was feeling. Within weeks of having her baby, she was admitted to a psychiatric unit in the local hospital for treatment for postpartum depression. After recovering, Mary wanted to help other women living through the same ordeal. She called her state senator, and together they drafted legislation that would require doctors to screen women for postpartum depression and to provide expectant mothers and their families with information about perinatal mood disorders. Mary testified for a legislative committee and lobbied legislators in Springfield. Over the next several months, Mary and other advocates worked to pass the bill.

Media Advocacy:

Using media to increase public awareness and influence broader public debate about early childhood issues. Keeping your issue in the news creates public recognition and support, thereby increasing its practical and political importance.

Strategies

- Express your point of view through letters to the editor and call-in opportunities.
- Contact local reporters when your organization has news to share (i.e. increase/decrease in state funding or human-interest story about a family).
- Contact local radio and television stations about appearing on local talk shows or public-affairs programs to share your expertise.
- Meet with the editorial board of newspapers.
- Identify families or other impacted organizations and ask them to write letters or make calls as well.
- Share pertinent local media coverage with elected officials from your community.

Example

Anne, the director of a home visitation program at the county health department, reads a story in her local newspaper about the number of children under age one who enter the child welfare system because of abuse or neglect. Anne writes a letter to the editor, detailing community resources available through her agency to help coach new parents through the exhausting, overwhelming, and exhilarating first weeks and months of their child's life. Anne includes outcomes evidence from her program and national statistics on how home-visitations programs reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect.

Frame Your Message



Many of our key audiences (legislators, legislative aides, agency staff, reporters, business, and civic leaders) often have very little time to discuss complex issues. Given these time constraints, it is imperative to develop a succinct message about early childhood issues that will capture the audience's interest. Advocates must also be capable of communicating a clear and concise message in a number of different formats: letters, e-mails, speeches, and meetings with public officials.

The message needs to:

Engage the Audience

State the **P**roblem

Inform Others about Potential Solutions

Call to Action

The EPIC format, trademarked by the grassroots advocacy organization RESULTS (www.results.org), is a useful way to create a concise but powerful statement.

The following chart shows how you can frame your message for different audiences. If, for example, you operate an early childhood program and are trying to develop support for a bill that provides capital funds to build new early childhood facilities, you would want to tailor your message to lawmakers, practitioners, and the business community. Here is how you would use the EPIC approach.

Engage the Audience

Identify the audience you are trying to influence. Choose information and language that will resonate with the audience and help it understand the issues.

State the Problem

Clearly and concisely define the problem. Choose the most compelling component of the issue for each audience. Think about:

- What is the problem?
- Who is affected by the issue?
- Why does the issue need to be addressed at this time?
- Where is the problem greatest?
- When is intervention needed before there are negative consequences?
- How are children, families, and the community being affected?
- What local data can you provide to emphasize how the problem is affecting the community?

Inform Others about Potential Solutions

Be prepared to suggest and discuss practical solutions. Consider your specific recommendations, the evidence you have to support them, and how these solutions might be funded.

Call to Action

The call to action required will vary according to the audience and the problem at hand, but make sure to clearly define the “ask.” The action requested should be specific and give your audience an immediate way to get involved.

Lawmakers

I am your constituent and the director of an early learning program in your district that provides services to more than 100 children and their families in our community.

Our community has grown tremendously in the past several years. We regularly have to turn away many children who could benefit from our program because we don't have enough classroom space for them. There is a vacant building next to our business where we could expand and serve many more families. However, our current funding will not cover renovation costs.

The capital bill includes funding for early childhood facilities. If the bill is approved, it would allow us to apply for at least a portion of the cost of a renovation project, and would go far in helping us reach our goal of serving many more children in our community.

Would you support the capital bill that includes early childhood facilities funding? Would you ask your legislative leaders to also support this initiative?

Early childhood practitioners

As a fellow early childhood professional, you are likely concerned about providing both the best learning environment for children and a stimulating work environment for your employees.

Our community has grown tremendously in the past several years, and more parents are seeking early childhood programs for their children. Perhaps your program has had to turn away children because there is not enough classroom space. Or you may want to expand your facility, but your current funding will not cover the costs.

The state legislature is considering a capital bill that includes funding for early childhood facilities. If the bill is approved, it would allow programs to apply for funding to build or renovate facilities and help them serve many more children in the community.

Would you call your legislators and ask them to support the capital bill that includes early childhood facilities funding?

Business community

Early childhood programs are proven to prepare children for school and help them become productive citizens in the future. High-quality early childhood programs are necessary for a strong future workforce.

Our community has grown tremendously in the past several years, and more parents are seeking early childhood programs for their children. But programs regularly have to turn away children because there is not enough classroom space.

The state legislature is considering a capital bill that includes funding for early childhood facilities. If the bill is approved, it would allow programs to apply for funding to build or renovate facilities and help them serve many more children in the community.

Would you call your legislators and ask them to support the capital bill that includes early childhood facilities funding?

Communicate with Elected Officials

Developing personal, ongoing relationships with elected officials is the most effective way to secure lawmakers' support on children's issues. You can build these relationships through phone calls, letters, e-mails, in-person meetings, and scheduled program tours.

General Tips

As you are building these strong, personal relationships, it is important to remember that:

- Policymakers care about issues that affect their constituents and they respond to concise, persuasive arguments that are easily understood and communicated.
- Letters, e-mails, and phone calls are effective ways to communicate. Five or six letters or phone calls on a specific issue will encourage the elected official to pay much closer attention to that issue. Personalized letters are always most effective.
- You know much more about children's issues than your elected official. Leverage your knowledge to educate and build up a relationship with your elected official so that you are seen as a resource for information on children's issues and possible legislation.
- Sharing stories about children and their families and how they are affected by an issue is very effective at building support for your position.
- Legislators' staff members are wonderful resource. Developing a good relationship with legislative staff can lead to direct contact with a legislator over time.

Phone Calls, Letters, and E-mails

Correspondence from constituents reminds elected officials that the public is tracking specific issues, legislation, and their voting records. Whenever communicating with legislators through a phone call, letter, or e-mail, remember these tips:

- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- Make sure you touch on every point you wish to convey.
- If possible, keep written correspondence to one page, and phone calls to five minutes.
- When addressing a specific piece of legislation, refer to the bill number.
- Include factual and, if possible, local information and examples that support your viewpoint.
- Stay on topic—discuss one issue per written communication or conversation.
- Include a call to action, specifying what you want the lawmaker to do.

If making a phone call, practice your remarks. The more you rehearse, the more comfortable you will be delivering your message when it counts. Practice with another person to identify any areas where your message isn't clear or effective.

Written correspondence to U.S. representatives and senators takes an extended period of time to reach them because all mail is carefully screened for safety. It is recommended that you fax letters to your representative's and senators' district and Washington, DC, offices.

See the Resources section for samples of a phone-call script, letter, and e-mail.

In-Person Meeting with Your Elected Official

Legislators want to be responsive to their constituents and their needs and will spend time with visitors when possible.

Scheduling a Visit

- Schedule an appointment with policymakers in advance of your visit.
- Have several dates and times available for a face-to-face meeting. When calling to make an appointment with a member of Congress, ask for the scheduler, not the legislator. If the scheduler is not available, leave a message and follow up with another phone call.
- Let the scheduler know what issue you want to discuss with the legislator.
- If the representative won't be available during your visit, ask to meet with a staff person knowledgeable about your issue.
- Find out how much time you will have with the policymaker.
- After making an appointment, leave your name and contact information with the scheduler as well as the names of any relevant organizations you are affiliated with.

Meeting with Your Representative

- Dress professionally.
- Practice your talking points.
- Look for common ground and compliment the official for past support if applicable.
- Allow the elected official time to ask questions and share observations or opinions.

- Anticipate opposing arguments. Be prepared to defend your perspective and stay focused on suggestions for constructive solutions.
- Ask elected officials what it would take for them to change their minds. Several communications may be necessary to effectively persuade a policymaker.
- Be friendly, firm, and positive in your messaging even if your legislator does not share your perspective. A rational, balanced conversation will keep the official's door open to future contact.
- Bring informational materials such as fact sheets, articles, or research studies to leave with the legislator and staff. When possible, use local data. For example, cite how many children under five live in their district and how many early childhood slots are available.
- Remember that you are an authority with content knowledge and expertise to share.
- Do not forget a call to action. Let the legislators know what you want them to do: vote for a bill, talk with colleagues, sponsor legislation, etc.
- Offer to provide relevant follow-up contact or materials after the meeting.
- Take notes, particularly if further contact is expected.
- Thank your legislators or their staff members for the time they've spent and any supportive actions they will take.

After the Meeting

- Follow up with an e-mail thanking

the legislators or staff persons for their time and reminding them of any action commitments they made.

- Let them know what follow-up action they can expect from you if you offered to provide their office with further information.
- Talk with other advocates about the meeting and strategize next steps.
- Do not send photocopied letters to legislators. It is better to send brief personalized letters than to send letters that have clearly been duplicated.

Invite Elected Officials to Visit Your Program

The visual impact of showing policy-makers firsthand where children play and learn is worth a thousand words. Site visits give elected officials the opportunity to connect the policies they make with real children and providers in their districts. Site visits are a great strategy for building lasting relationships and impressions.

- Find out when your state or federal legislators will be in your area. Congressional calendars can be found at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov. In addition to recesses, members of Congress may also be home on weekends or holidays. Session calendars for the Illinois General Assembly can be found at www.ilga.gov.
- Invite your legislators. Remember to give sufficient advance notice if there is a specific occasion when you would like them to visit.
- Confirm the date and time of the visit one week in advance. Ask if others will be accompanying the legislator, and let them know if the local media will be present.
- Inform parents and staff that the legislator will be visiting and assure them that they and the children do not need to do anything different or special. Invite them to participate if they wish.
- Invite the local media to attend, making sure to get parental permission for children's photographs or names to be used in stories.

On the Day of the Visit

- Be available to welcome and introduce your legislator to children, staff, parents, and other guests.
- Use the opportunity to inform your official about important issues affecting young children and their families in the district.
- Showcase an activity that demonstrates a strong age-appropriate learning environment as a way of informing the official about the importance of your work with young children.
- Encourage your official to participate in an activity.
- Take photos to use for your program's newsletter and to send to the legislator with follow-up correspondence.
- Maintain the relationship with a follow-up thank-you note and further communication when you have specific information about early childhood issues to share.
- Add the official's name and address to your mailing list to maintain contact and provide updates.



United States Congress

The United States Congress is the nation's bicameral legislative body in Washington, D.C. The Senate is made up of 100 senators, two from each state who are elected for six-year terms. Elections occur on a rotating basis; about one-third of the Senate is up for re-election every two years. The 435 members of the House of Representatives are each elected for two years from districts within each state determined by population. Each chamber of Congress is divided into committees that focus on specific legislative areas. Committee members are generally the first to hear and work on bills.

Contacting Your Federal Elected Officials

Look up your elected officials by address at advocacy.ounceofprevention.org. The U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 can transfer calls to the appropriate legislator's office.

It can be difficult to contact federal representatives directly. When you call their offices, you will most likely speak to a staff member. You can ask for the legislative aide who handles the issue you are calling about or leave a message about your opinions on legislation with the person who answers the phone. Federal legislators have staff members who generally take care of the day-to-day policy issues, briefing them before important debates and votes.

Senators and representatives are usually available in their district offices

during congressional breaks. You can schedule meetings with them or invite them to local programs or events by contacting the district office and speaking to the scheduler. They may also hold town hall meetings or appear at public events where you can communicate directly with them.

If you are in Washington, DC, you can visit your elected officials in their offices. This can be a great way to build relationships and to advocate for issues directly. Most legislators offer weekly constituent events, open to all visitors from their home district. Also, staff members are usually available to give tours and answer questions whenever the office is open. Call the office before your visit for more details. For further tips on visiting your representative, see page 12.

For more information about bills being considered by either chamber of Congress, voting records, or committees, go to www.house.gov, www.senate.gov, or www.thomas.gov.



Illinois General Assembly



The Illinois General Assembly is the state's legislative body. It is a bicameral structure composed of a 59-member Senate and a 118-member House of Representatives. It is charged with the following legislative responsibilities: enacting, amending or repealing laws; passing resolutions; adopting appropriation bills; and conducting inquiries on proposed legislation. In addition, the Senate is charged with advising and consenting on most gubernatorial appointments to state offices, boards, and commissions.

The General Assembly normally convenes on the second Wednesday in January every year and adjourns at the end of May, although this calendar can be extended depending on the legislative needs in a given year. In the fall, it reconvenes for two weeks for a veto session.

Legislators work in committees on specific subjects, such as education, transportation, or labor. Most of the detailed work on bills is done in committee before they go to the chamber floor for discussion and voting.

Contacting Your State Elected Officials

Look up your Illinois elected officials by address at advocacy.ounceofprevention.org. There you will find addresses and phone numbers for your state legislators' Springfield and district offices.

The **General Assembly** Web site (www.ilga.gov) lists all senators and representatives, their district offices, and Statehouse contact information. The site also provides legislative calendars, allows a user to search for bills and track their progress, and lists all Senate and House committees.

The **Capitol switchboard** at (217) 782-2000 can transfer calls to the appropriate legislator's office.

How a Bill Becomes Law

Legislation is introduced by a senator or representative in his or her chamber and given a reference number.



The bill is then passed on to the relevant committee or committees within that chamber, depending on the topic of the legislation.



The committee(s) hold hearings and assign the bill to subcommittees if necessary.



The committee(s) discuss the bill and debates potential changes.



The committee(s) votes on the bill, and if passed by a majority it then moves to the full chamber.



The bill is heard and debated in the chamber and may be put up for a vote.



Once the bill has passed a majority vote in both chambers, it moves to the executive office to be signed into law by the governor or president.

Illinois Legislation

- A bill must pass one chamber before being passed onto the next chamber. If a bill is amended (changed) in the second chamber, the changes require the approval of the first chamber.
- Testimony from the public is heard during the committee hearings. Speaking in person or submitting a written testimony is a great way to have your voice heard.
- After a bill is approved by both chambers, the governor has 60 calendar days to sign or veto the bill. If he does not act within that time, it automatically becomes a law.

Federal Legislation

- Bills with similar content are developed in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Differences between the two bills are then reconciled by a Conference Committee. The reconciled version of the bill requires the approval of the full House and Senate.
- The president can either sign the bill, actively veto it, or decide not to act. If Congress adjourns before 10 days and the president has not signed the bill, it is a “pocket veto.” If the president does not act in 10 days and Congress is still in session, the bill automatically becomes law.

Lobby During the Legislative Process

Thousands of bills are introduced at the state and federal levels each year; most never become law. In many instances, a bill's fate hinges upon a critical mass of support or opposition from unions, chambers of commerce, nonprofit advocacy organizations, and grassroots organizations. By voicing support to policymakers for bills related to early childhood issues, you can play a major role in the policy-making process by helping to move bills forward and expand awareness of the issues.

At the state level, you may have the opportunity to **testify before the committee** that is responsible for the bill in a committee hearing. You can also submit written testimony. At the federal level, testifying is generally not open to the public. However, it is effective to contact the committee members regarding a bill. If your legislator is on the relevant committee, contact him or her prior to a committee vote. If your legislator is not on the committee, ask him or her to speak to the committee chair.

Even if there is not a specific bill to discuss, you should talk to legislators about the importance of early childhood investments in your community, offer to be a source of information on early childhood issues, and ask your legislator to support the funding and policies needed for high-quality programs.

If a bill is passed out of committee and is read, discussed, and amended on the floor of the initiating chamber, you have the opportunity to expand your outreach to your legislator via telephone, letter, or e-mail. Should the bill pass through the chamber, you will have an opportunity to replicate these processes as the bill moves through the second chamber.

There are numerous opportunities to influence decision-makers during the legislative process.

When a bill is introduced, write and call your representatives. This lets them know the issue is important to their constituents. Ask your representatives to speak with members of the relevant committees working on the bill.

As the bill moves forward in the second chamber, begin to extend your lobbying activities to include the governor's or president's office. Executive support can make or break a bill and overriding a veto is not easy at the state or the federal level.

Maximize your impact. At each step in the process, ask your colleagues and friends to participate as well. Give them basic information about the bill and contact information for their legislators. The impact supporters or opponents make depends, in part, on the number of people who participate.

Work with the Media

The press is a very powerful tool for shaping public opinion. Newspapers, radio shows, and television news programs are looking for stories on relevant topics that have broad public appeal. Citizens can write letters to the editor, call talk shows, and suggest topics to reporters to stimulate interest in early childhood issues.

Write Letters to the Editor

- Letters are most effective when they are in response to a published article. Include the article name and publication date in your letter. Send your letter within 24 hours of the publication date to have a better chance of getting it published.
- Be concise. Shorter letters, generally around 200 words, are more likely to be printed.
- Use clear language that will resonate with the average person.
- The first line of the letter should be a strong statement to draw the reader in.
- Keep it relevant and time-based by mentioning what issues are currently in the news.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms associated specifically with your program.
- Be accurate and avoid personal attacks.
- Close your letter with the thought you want readers to remember.
- Find the letter-writing guidelines of your local newspaper (generally on the editorial page or on the Web site). Make sure you adhere to the word limit and include your name, address, and phone number.

Tips for Early Childhood Programs

General Tips

- Get your stories ready. Use real-life testimonials to demonstrate why your program is important and how it affects children and families.
- Build media relationships. Get to know reporters and local radio-show hosts to build interest in early childhood issues.
- Invite reporters to visit your organization to see first-hand the positive impact your program has on young children.
- Identify spokespersons. One or two staff or board members should be able to represent your organization and your messages. You may want to identify a few families who illustrate success stories and are comfortable talking to the media.

Contact the Media

- If you have news to share, write a press release that incorporates your key messages.
- Do your homework. Read your local newspapers, watch local TV news programs, and listen to local radio news shows. Make a list of the names of reporters who cover education and state government, and get their contact information.
- Do you have existing relationships with reporters? Contact them first to see if they are interested in your story.
- When you call or e-mail a reporter, keep your pitch short and to the point.

Media Interviews

- Make sure your spokespersons are prepared with unified key message points.
- Arrange to have photo opportunities that show the positive aspects of your program.
- Know your stats. Well-used, easy-to-understand numbers can make a strong case for early childhood programs and spending to support those programs.
- Be understandable. Avoid jargon that is specific to your program. Speak in terms that the general public will understand.
- Keep to the facts. NEVER make up or exaggerate data or stories.
- Be confident during the interview. You are the expert on your program and the benefits of early childhood services in your community.

For more media-relations tips, consult the Community Media Workshop (www.newstips.org).

Voting & Elections



To make early childhood issues and programs a top priority on the legislative agenda, we have to make early childhood an issue in elections, learn candidates' positions, and most importantly, vote on election day. In the months leading up to elections, elected officials and candidates are generally accessible throughout their districts at local events. These events are opportunities to talk publicly about the importance of early childhood issues and to find out about an official's or candidate's support for them.

While individual citizens have the right to participate in political campaigns and vote, laws limit the participation of nonprofit organizations in electoral activities.

Elections

State and federal elections take place every even-numbered year. Federal elections held during non-presidential election years are known as mid-term elections. There are two main dates to keep in mind each election year: the date of the primary election and the date of the general election.

The Illinois primary election takes place on the first Tuesday in February during each election cycle. The primary election reduces the field of candidates to one per political party in preparation for the general election.

The general election takes place on the first Tuesday in November after the first Monday of the month. The general election is when voters select which candidate will represent them in public office at the state and federal levels.

Voter Registration FAQs

What are the voter registration requirements?

- Must be a U.S. citizen.
- Must be at least 18 years old by election day.
- Must have been a resident of the precinct at least 30 days prior to election day.

What forms of identification are needed to register to vote?

- Two forms of identification with at least one showing a current residence address (when registering in person).
- When registering by mail, one form of identification is needed that shows current residency.

Do I ever have to re-register to vote?

- Only if you move or legally change your name.

When can I register to vote?

- Voter registration takes place year-round.
- Registration must take place at least 27 days before election day.
- Individuals who miss the registration deadline are still eligible to vote as long as they register or transfer their registration at the office of an election authority under the guidelines of “grace period registration.”

Where can I register to vote?

- Any municipal, county, state, or other government office.
- At the office of any elected official.
- Schools.
- Public libraries.
- Military recruitment offices.
- Driver’s license facilities.
- Via mail.
 - Download voter registration applications in English and Spanish at <http://www.elections.il.gov/VotingInformation/Register.aspx>
 - Voter registration applications must be postmarked prior to the close of registration.

When can I consider myself officially registered to vote?

- When you receive your voter ID card in the mail.
- If a voter ID card is not received within three weeks after registering, call the election office.

How can I vote absentee?

- You must vote in person the first time you vote.
- Learn about the rules and procedures surrounding absentee voting at:
<http://www.elections.state.il.us/Downloads/ElectionInformation/PDF/absevote.pdf>

For more information

- Voter registration in Illinois
<http://www.elections.state.il.us/Downloads/ElectionInformation/PDF/registervote.pdf>
- Voter rights
http://www.elections.state.il.us/Downloads/VotingInformation/PDF/Illinois_Voter_Information.pdf

Permissible Election Activities for 501(c)(3) Organizations

501(c)(3) public charity organizations are strictly forbidden from engaging in any political activity in support of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. However, 501(c)(3) public charity organizations can engage in nonpartisan voter education activity and in a limited amount of lobbying. Read the Alliance for Justice’s checklist of permissible election activities for 501(c) organizations at <http://www.afj.org/assets/resources/resource1/Electoral-Activities-Checklist.pdf>.

Resources



- A. Sample Legislator Phone Call and Letter/E-mail
- B. Early Childhood Acronyms
- C. Glossary of Legislative Terms
- D. Key Illinois Early Childhood Organizations
- E. Key National Child and Family Organizations
- F. Illinois Maternal & Child Health Organizations
- G. Related Government Agencies

A 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 birth-to-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 in support of legislation that increases funds for needed early childhood programs in your legislative district. These funds will greatly 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 birth-to-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 early learning center, (name of center), has a waiting list of XX children, and without additional funds, I am unable to serve them. 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.

B Early Childhood Acronyms

- AOK** All Our Kids: Early Childhood Networks
- CAEYC** Chicago Metro Association for the Education of Young Children (also CMAEYC)
- CCDBG** Child Care Development Block Grant
- CCR&R** Child Care Resource and Referral — Agencies in each state that provide parents with information about early childhood services that are available in their communities. They may provide training for early childhood professionals, recruit providers, and advocate for early childhood services.
- CDA** Child Development Associate — A credential earned by an individual who has demonstrated his or her skills in working with young children by completing the credentialing process. It is administered by the Council for Professional Recognition.
- CPS** Chicago Public Schools
- DCFS** Illinois Department of Children and Family Services
- DHHS** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- ECBG** Early Childhood Block Grant
- EHS** Early Head Start
- EI** Early Intervention — Refers to a general type of intervention, or to the state program, EI, that delivers services to children ranging from developmental screening to intervention.
- EPSDT** Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment services for children under age 21 enrolled in Medicaid
- Great START** Program that seeks to improve early childhood services by encouraging professionals to further their education in the field. It supplements income based on the education level achieved and staying in an early childhood job. (START = Strategy to Attract and Retain Teachers)
- HFI** Healthy Families Illinois — Network of home-visiting programs in Illinois, including Healthy Families and Parents Too Soon programs.
- IAEYC** Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children
- IDEA** Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act
- IDHS** Illinois Department of Human Services
- IEP** Individualized Education Plan — Refers to the process that schools, teachers, and parents create for a child who has been found eligible for special education, part of Part B of IDEA.
- IFSP** Individual Family Service Plan — Refers to the service plan that the providers and parents create for a child who has been found eligible for early intervention services in Part C of IDEA
- IHSA** Illinois Head Start Association
- INCCRRA** Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies
- ISBE** Illinois State Board of Education
- PFA** Preschool for All
- TANF** Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

C Glossary of Legislative Terms

ADOPTION Approval or acceptance of amendments, resolutions, or laws.

AMENDMENT Proposal to change the language of a bill or a law and offered in committee or on the floor of the House or Senate.

APPROPRIATION Allows spending for specified purposes.

APPROPRIATIONS CONTINUING Stop-gap measures that fund programs and agencies between the beginning of the fiscal year (July 1 for Illinois state government and Oct. 1 for the federal government) and the date on which the governor or president signs the regular appropriations bill into law. In the absence of continuing appropriations, the government would shut down because there would be no authority to spend money without a funding bill in place.

APPROPRIATIONS REGULAR Measures that fund agencies or programs for a full year.

APPROPRIATIONS SUPPLEMENTAL Spending that is approved outside the normal annual appropriations process either to pay for unanticipated or extraordinary expenditures or to fund activities authorized too late for normal budgetary deadlines. Supplemental appropriations bills are usually considered mid-year, after the approval of the regular appropriations bills.

AUTHORIZATION Provision in law that establishes an agency or program and allows for spending for that agency or program.

BALANCED BUDGET A budget in which revenues equal spending.

BILL The main vehicle employed by members of the General Assembly or Congress for introducing their proposals.

BUDGET DEFICIT The amount by which spending exceeds revenues.

CAUCUS A closed meeting of legislators of one party; or any group of legislators who meet formally because of their interest in specific issues.

CHAIR Designation of the current presiding officer.

CHAMBER The House or Senate chamber where sessions are held.

COLA Cost-of-living adjustment.

COMMITTEE A subdivision of the House or Senate that considers legislation. Committees also undertake investigations within their areas of expertise. Most committees are divided into specialized subcommittees. Committees and subcommittees hold hearings and debate legislation. Most amendments to legislation occur at this level.

CONFEREES Senate or House members appointed to serve on conference committees. Conferees are often appointed from the committee or committees that reported the legislation and they are expected to try to uphold the Senate or House position on measures when they negotiate with conferees from the other body.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE A temporary, ad hoc panel composed of House and Senate members who work out differences in legislation that has passed both chambers.

CONFERENCE REPORT The compromise product negotiated by the conference committee. The conference report is submitted to the House and Senate for approval.

DISTRICT The area of the state represented by a legislator.

FISCAL YEAR Any accounting period of 12 months. The fiscal year for Illinois state government begins July 1 and ends June 30. The federal fiscal year begins October 1 and ends September 30.

HEARING Committee session, usually open to the public, to take testimony to gather information and opinions on a proposed program or legislation.

LOBBYIST An individual who seeks to influence the outcome of legislation or administrative decisions. The law requires some lobbyists to formally register.

MINORITY LEADER The highest ranking minority party post; chief policy and political strategist for the minority party.

MOTION A formal request for action made by a legislator during a committee hearing or floor session.

READING Presentation of a bill in the Illinois General Assembly. A bill is either in first, second, or third reading until it is passed by both houses.

REAPPORTIONMENT The redrawing of election-district boundaries.

RECESS An official pause of any length in a committee hearing or floor session that halts the proceedings for a period of time but does not have the finality of adjournment. At the federal level, a recess may be used to refer to a break of a number of days in a legislative session.

REFERENDUM The method by which a measure adopted by the legislature may be submitted to the electorate for a vote.

RESOLUTION An opinion expressed by one or both houses that does not have the force of law.

RULES Those ideas that govern the operation of either or both houses.

SENATE PRESIDENT The highest-ranking, presiding officer of the majority party in either the U.S. or Illinois Senate.

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE The highest-ranking, presiding officer of the majority party in either the U.S. or Illinois House.

SURPLUS The amount by which revenues exceed spending.

UNFUNDED MANDATES Any provision in legislation, statute, or regulation that imposes a responsibility on a state or local government, for which adequate funding to carry out the responsibility is not appropriated.

VETO The procedure by which a governor or president rejects a bill.

D Key Illinois Early Childhood Organizations

Chicago Metropolitan Association for the Education of Young Children

30 E. Adams St., Suite 1000
Chicago, IL 60603
312-427-5399 (phone)
312-427-5028 (fax)
Web site: www.chicagometroaeyc.org

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois

70 E. Lake St. Suite 720
Chicago, IL 60601
312-986-9200 (phone)
Web site: www.fightcrime.org/state/illinois

Illinois Action for Children

4753 N. Broadway, Suite 1200
Chicago, IL 60640
312-823-1100 (phone)
773-769-8020 (fax)
Web site: www.actforchildren.org

Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children

40 Adolff Lane, Suite 1
Springfield, IL 62703-6305
217-529-7732 (phone)
Web site: www.illinoisaeyc.org

Illinois Head Start Association

176 N. 1700 E
Paxton, IL 60957
217-379-2198 (phone)
217-241-3508 (fax)
Web site: www.ilheadstart.org

INCCRRA

(Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies)
1226 Towanda Plaza
Bloomington, IL 61701
309-829-5327 (phone)
309-828-1808 (fax)
Web site: www.inccrra.org

Latino Policy Forum

20 E. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1550
Chicago, IL 60604
312-376-1766 (phone)
312-376-1760 (fax)
Web site: www.latinopolicyforum.org

Ounce of Prevention Fund

33 W. Monroe St., Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60603-5400
312-922-3863 (phone)
312-922-3337 (fax)
Web site: www.ounceofprevention.org

Voices for Illinois Children

208 S. LaSalle St., Suite 1490
Chicago, IL 60604
312-456-0600 (phone)
312-456-0088 (fax)
Web sites: www.voices4kids.org

E Key National Child and Family Organizations

Alliance for Justice

11 DuPont Circle NW, 2nd Floor
Washington, DC 20036
202-822-6070 (phone)
202-822-6068 (fax)
Web site: www.afj.org

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (funds Kids Count projects in all states)

701 St. Paul St.
Baltimore, MD 21202
410-547-6600 (phone)
410-547-3610 (fax)
Web site: www.aecf.org

Birth to Five Policy Alliance

PO Box 6756
Leawood, KS 66206
913-642-3490 (phone)
913-642-3441 (fax)
Web site: www.birthtofivepolicy.org

Center for Law and Social Policy

1015 15th St. NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20006
202-906-8000 (phone)
202-842-2885 (fax)
Web site: www.clasp.org

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

820 First St., NE, Suite 510
Washington, DC 20002
202-408-1080 (phone)
202-408-1056 (fax)
Web site: www.cbpp.org

Children's Defense Fund

25 E St. NW
Washington, DC 20001
202-628-8787 (phone)
800-CDF-1200 (800-233-1200)
Web site: www.childrensdefense.org

Committee for Economic Development

2000 L St. NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
800-676-7353 (phone)
202-223-0776 (fax)
Web site: www.ced.org

Families and Work Institute

267 Fifth Ave., 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10016
212-465-2044 (phone)
212-465-8637 (fax)
Web site: www.familiesandwork.org

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

1212 New York Ave. NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005
202-776-0027 (phone)
Web site: www.fightcrime.org

First Five Years Fund

33 W. Monroe St., Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60603-5400
312-453-1844 (phone)
312-453-3337 (fax)
Web site: www.ffyf.org

National Association for the Education of Young Children

1313 L St. NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005-4110
202-232-8777 (phone)
Web site: www.naeyc.org

National Black Child Development Institute

1313 L St. NW, Suite 110
Washington, DC 20005-4110
202-833-2220 (phone)
202-833-8222 (fax)
Web site: www.nbcdi.org

**National Center for Children in Poverty
Columbia University School of Public Health**

215 W. 125th St., 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10027
646-284-9600 (phone)
646-284-9623 (fax)
Web site: www.nccp.org

National Child Care Information Center

10530 Rosehaven St., Suite 400
Fairfax, VA 22030
800-616-2242 (phone)
800-716-2242 (fax)
Web site: www.nccic.org

National Conference of State Legislatures

444 N. Capitol St. NW, Suite 515
Washington, DC 20001
202-624-5400 (phone)
202-737-1069 (fax)
Web site: www.ncsl.org

National Council of La Raza

Raul Yzaguirre Building
1126 16th St. NW
Washington, DC 20036
202-785-1670 (phone)
Web site: www.nclr.org

National Governors Association

444 N. Capitol St., Suite 267
Washington, DC 20001-1512
202-624-5300 (phone)
202-624-5313 (fax)
Web site: www.nga.org

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child

Harvard University
50 Church St., 4th Floor
Cambridge, MA 02138
617-496-0578 (phone)
617-496-1229 (fax)
Web site: www.developingchild.net

National Women's Law Center

11 Dupont Circle NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036
202-588-5180 (phone)
202-588-5185 (fax)
Web site: www.nwlc.org

**Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
(Shriver Center)**

50 East Washington St., Suite 500
Chicago, IL 60602
312-263-3830 (phone)
312-263-3846 (fax)
Web site: www.povertylaw.org

Voices for America's Children

1000 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20005
202-289-0777 (phone)
202-289-0776 (fax)
Web site: www.voices.org

Zero to Three

National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families
2000 M St. NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
202-638-1144 (phone)
202-638-0851 (fax)
Web site: www.zerotothree.org

F Illinois Maternal & Child Health Organizations

American Academy of Pediatrics, Illinois Chapter

1358 W. Randolph St., Suite 2 East
Chicago, IL 60607-1522
312-733-1026 (phone)
312-733-1791 (fax)
Web site: www.illinoisAAP.com

Campaign for Better Health Care

Champaign Office
44 E. Main St, Suite 414
Champaign, IL 61820
217-352-5600 (phone)
217-352-5688 (fax)

Campaign for Better Health Care

Chicago Office
1325 S. Wabash Ave., Suite 305
Chicago, IL 60605
312-913-9449 (phone)
312-913-9559 (fax)
Web site: www.cbhconline.org

Chicago Asthma Consortium

4541 N. Ravenswood Ave., Suite 303
Chicago, IL 60640
773-769-6060 (phone)
773-769-6505 (fax)
Web site: www.chicagoasthma.org

IFLOSS Coalition

1415 E. Jefferson St.
Springfield, IL 62703
217-789-2185 (phone)
217-789-2203 (fax)
Web site: www.ifloss.org

Illinois Action for Children

4753 N. Broadway, Suite 1200
Chicago, IL 60640
312-823-1100 (phone)
773-769-8020 (fax)
Web site: www.actforchildren.org

Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition

1256 W. Chicago Ave.
Chicago, IL 60622
312-491-8161 (phone)
312-491-8171 (fax)
Web site: www.ilmaternal.org

Ounce of Prevention Fund

33 W. Monroe St., Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60603-5400
312-922-3863 (phone)
312-922-3337 (fax)
Web site: www.ounceofprevention.org

Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law (Shriver Center)

50 E. Washington St., Suite 500
Chicago, IL 60602
312-263-3830 (phone)
312-263-3846 (fax)
Web site: www.povertylaw.org

Voices for Illinois Children

208 S. LaSalle St., Suite 1490
Chicago, IL 60604
312-456-0600 (phone)
312-456-0088 (fax)
Web site: www.voices4kids.org

Related Government Agencies

Chicago Public Schools

Office of Early Childhood Education
125 S. Clark St., 9th Floor
Chicago, IL 60603
773-553-2010 (phone)
773-553-2011 (fax)
Web site: www.ecechicago.org

Chicago Public Schools

Chicago Community Partnership Program

400 W. 69th St.
Chicago, IL 60621
773-535-3245 (phone)
773-535-3643 (fax)
Web site: www.ecechicago.org

Chicago Department of Family and Support Services

1615 W. Chicago Ave.
Chicago, IL 60622
312-743-0300 (phone)
312-743-0400 (fax)
Web site: www.cityofchicago.org
(click on “City Departments”)

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

406 E. Monroe St.
Springfield, IL 62701-1498
217-785-2509 (phone)
Web site: www.state.il.us/dcfs

Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services

201 S. Grand Ave. East
Springfield, IL 62763-0001
217-782-1200 (phone)
Web site: www.hfs.illinois.gov

Illinois Department of Human Services

Child Care and Development
401 S. Clinton St., 7th Floor
Chicago, IL 60607
312-793-3610 (phone)
312-793-4881 (fax)
Web site: www.dhs.state.il.us

Illinois Department of Public Health

535 W. Jefferson St.
Springfield, IL 62761
217-782-4977 (phone)
217-782-3987 (fax)
Web site: www.idph.state.il.us

Illinois State Board of Education

Early Childhood Education Division

100 N. First St., 2nd Floor, Room E216,
Springfield, IL 62777
217-524-4835 (phone)
866-262-6663 (toll free)
217-782-4321 (fax)
Web site: www.isbe.net/earlychi/default.htm

U.S. Department of Education

400 Maryland Ave. SW (mailing address)
Washington, DC 20202
800-872-5327 (phone)
Web site: www.ed.gov

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20201
202-619-0257 (phone)
877-696-6775 (toll free)
Web site: www.hhs.gov

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33 W. Monroe St., Suite 2400

Chicago, IL 60603-5400

312-922-3863 (phone)

312-922-3337 (fax)

Web site: www.ounceofprevention.org