



2022
MISSISSIPPI
CHILD CARE ACCESS &
AFFORDABILITY

Media Advocacy Toolkit



WHAT IS IN THIS TOOLKIT?

- Introduction to the Toolkit.....1**
- Press Release.....2**
- Strategic Personal Narrative Guide.....4**
- Senate Committee Social Media Info.....5**
- Social Media Posts.....5**
- One-Page Issue Brief.....8**

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

In the summer of 2022, a group of Mississippi lawmakers were tasked with making legislative recommendations related to families and young children from birth to 3 years old. On October 25th, the legislators will hold a hearing about child care access. In order to ensure that the committee hears the voices and perspectives of child care providers and families, and focus on solutions that are rooted in real issues, MELA created this toolkit to help amplify a few key recommendations.

Although there are MANY things that could (and should) be done to support the child care system, not all of them are legislative solutions. The recommendations in this toolkit can be addressed through legislative policy, and are rooted in three years of focus groups, interviews, and conversations with child care providers, early childhood advocates, and families. Although these solutions will not solve all of the issues to ensure that child care is accessible and affordable, we believe that they reflect significant progress and solve an immediate need.

In order to spread the word and help raise awareness about the importance of this issue, we put together this toolkit to try to make it easy for you, our partners. We hope that you'll use the social media posts on your business/organizational social media accounts AND your personal accounts, and will consider writing a letter to the editor or op-ed for your local newspaper. By amplifying shared message, we will gain traction and visibility to move toward a state-of-the-art child care system in Mississippi!

Sincerely,



Biz Harris

MELA Interim Executive Director

SAVE THE DATE: 2023 Early Childhood Capitol Day
Wednesday, January 18th, 2023

1pm-5pm at the Mississippi State Capitol in Jackson

We'll meet and advocate together for these issues and others that impact Mississippi's children.

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 25th, 2022

Contact: Chloe Lake

chloe@msearlylearning.org

Advocates Share Solutions to Increase Access to Affordable Childcare

Policy recommendations to promote teacher retention and reduce costs for families shared at Mississippi Senate Hearings on the needs of women, children, and families.

JACKSON, MS - On October 25th, the Mississippi Senate Study Group on Women, Children and Families hosted their third public meeting to hear from expert speakers on how the state can best support families. The study group, chaired by Senator Nicole Boyd, was appointed by Lt. Governor Delbert Hosemann in the wake of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* Supreme Court decision. The lawmakers are tasked with making legislative recommendations related to families and young children from birth to 3 years old. They held their first two hearings in late September, which focused on maternal and child healthcare, adoption, foster care, and child support.

The October 25th hearing focused on childcare availability. Dr. Cathy Grace, co-director of the Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning spoke at the hearing, and she expressed her appreciation for the study group's approach. "These hearings represent an opportunity to craft policies that are rooted in data and reflective of community voices. We are grateful to be given a platform to elevate the experiences and concerns of families and childcare professionals in our state, and to share data-informed solutions."

In preparation for this, the University of Mississippi's Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning, the Mississippi Early Learning Alliance (MELA), and other early education professionals across the state worked together to gather data and community input on policies that could immediately help make childcare more accessible across the state. These partners have identified four policies that could help make childcare more consistently available and affordable to all working parents, and incentivize childcare teachers to remain in the field:

- Promote childcare teacher retention through a voluntary wage supplement program funded through unallocated/unencumbered state dollars, such as excess lottery funds.
- Remove the child support requirement from the Child Care Payment Program application.
- Reduce the overall cost of childcare for families through a refundable Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.
- Transfer the maximum amount of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars allowed to increase funding to childcare assistance for eligible families.

"Childcare is a workforce issue. Parents and caregivers need childcare to go to work or school, and speaking from personal experience, if it costs a large portion of their income, it is not sustainable," said MELA's Interim Executive Director, Biz Harris. "But we've heard from childcare program directors across the state that they don't have enough staff to operate at full capacity, which means fewer spots for children. They have also told us that many qualified, passionate teachers are leaving for better paying jobs in the service industry or elsewhere. This puts directors in an impossible position as small business owners, because they know that their customers - the families in their communities - can't afford to pay more for the essential service they provide. It's an issue that's been present for years, but it's been exacerbated in the years since COVID-19 began."

Childcare workers in Mississippi make an average of \$19,490 annually, typically with no benefits. This is less than the average income for dishwashers and cashiers, and less than half the annual income of most prekindergarten teachers (\$42,952). Five other states have successfully encouraged teacher retention by offering a wage supplement for childcare workers that gets their pay closer to early educators in school-based settings. MELA and partners will recommend that Mississippi invest excess state lottery funds or other unallocated state funds in a wage supplement program that encourages childcare educators to remain in their jobs and to pursue educational opportunities and certifications to help them best support children during the critical early years.

Cost is another barrier families face in getting the childcare they need. Despite low teacher wages, childcare remains unaffordable for many families in Mississippi. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, childcare is considered affordable if it costs families no more than 7% of their income. In Mississippi, the average cost of infant care is \$5,436 per year for one child, nearly 12% of the median household income. These costs go up when families have more than one child. Care for an infant and a 4-year-old, for example, costs an average of \$10,220 per year - or almost a quarter (22%) of the median household income.

The Child Care Payment Program (CCPP), funded through the federal Child Care Development Block Grant, exists to help make childcare more affordable for working parents with the fewest resources. Increasing access to this program and ensuring that all eligible caregivers can fully participate will help parents get the childcare they need to remain in the workforce.

But while the Child Care Payment Program is a critical support for thousands of working parents in Mississippi, many do not meet the income requirements for CCPP assistance and are still paying more than 7% of their income on childcare. “Mississippi can bolster the economic stability of working families by creating a refundable Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit,” Harris said. “With these types of credits, families might receive up to 50% of what they spend for childcare back as a tax credit or refund. Many working parents are trying to choose between two bad options: losing paychecks or using a huge portion of those paychecks just to cover childcare. These tax credits could help working Mississippians increase their buying power and incentivize parents to remain in the workforce.”

More information about these policy recommendations can be found on the Mississippi Early Learning Alliance’s website, MSEarlyLearning.org. The hearings have been open to the public, and webcast and archived on the Mississippi Legislature’s YouTube channel (youtube.com/c/MississippiLegislature). The public is invited to email written testimony to WCFStudyGroup@senate.ms.gov. Comments will be presented to the full committee.

###

Mississippi Early Learning Alliance (MELA)

MELA was founded in 2019 to drive collective efforts in Mississippi to design an early care and education system that works better for everyone: childcare providers, families, employers, other early childhood professionals, and our children. MELA is working to build and leverage a powerful network of professionals, advocates and community members to achieve a common goal: *By 2030, Mississippi will have a state-of-the-art childcare system, fueled by robust data, cross-sector collaboration, and resources.* In addition to MELA’s long-term collective impact efforts, they work to meet immediate needs through curated communications and information-sharing, ad-hoc support for childcare provider-led initiatives, and programs such as a shared services platform for childcare providers, MSEarlyLearningResources.org, and the *Leading from Strength* Empowerment Network for Women of Color.



WRITING A STRATEGIC PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Shifting mindsets about an issue can take data and personal stories. One way to tell your story is to write a Letter to the Editor (short pieces--usually 250 words or less--that are in direct response to something recently published in the paper or an Op-Ed (longer pieces -usually 800 words or less-that don't need to be in response to a specific article in the paper but should be in connection to current events). An Op-Ed is more likely to be published if the author is a subject matter expert and/or well-known in the community. Below is some guidance on how to craft a strategic message. After you submit your letter or Op-Ed to your local newspaper, consider also sending it directly to the senate study committee at this email address: WCFStudyGroup@senate.ms.gov

INTRODUCTION: First, why is this issue important to you?: What value do you hold that makes you care? For example, "I believe every child deserves a strong start." If this is a Letter to the Editor be sure to mention the specific article to which you are responding.

STATE THE PROBLEM (Tell Your Story): Write about the child care challenges you've experienced. Are you a parent spending more on child care than you are on housing? Are you an employer who can't attract skilled workers with young children because of Mississippi's child care crisis? The more personal and specific you can be the better.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?: Paint a picture of a better future for children and families in Mississippi— what does it look like? Tie in the one of the ideas from the Issue Brief on the last page if possible!

CALL TO ACTION: Now that you have the reader's attention, let them know what they can do in one simple step to bring about the solution you outlined above. An example includes: Tell your legislators why you support increased public investments in high-quality, affordable child care. Visit www.msearlylearning.org to find out more.

CONTACT INFORMATION: Many papers will not print Op-Eds or letters to the editor if they do not include contact information, so don't forget this step!

Name, Email address, phone number, Hometown, and Hometown newspapers.

If you need help finding a contact or where to submit your op-ed or letter to the editor, please contact chloe@msearlylearning.org

SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS

Below you'll find the social media handles for the Senate Study Group on Women and Children. Make sure to tag them in your posts!

Senator Nicole Boyd (R) - District 9

Facebook: @nicoleakinsboydmssenate

Twitter: @NicoleAkinsBoyd

Instagram: @nicoleakinsboyd

Senator Kevin Blackwell (R) - District 19

Facebook: @senatorkevinblackwell

Twitter: @KevinBlackwell5

Instagram: N/A

Senator Rod Hickman (D) - District 32

Facebook: @HickmanForDistrict32

Twitter: @SenRodHickman

Instagram: @hickmanology

Senator Angela Hill (R) - District 40

Facebook: @angela.b.hill.92

Twitter: @angelabhil1

Instagram: N/A

Senator Chad McMahan (R) - District 6

Facebook: @McMahanForMississippi

Twitter: @mcmahanms

Instagram: @mcmahanchad

Senator Angela Turner-Ford (D) - District 16

Facebook: @SenatorAngelaTurnerFord

Twitter: @aturnerford16

Instagram: N/A

Senator Brice Wiggins (R) - District 52

Facebook: @bricewiggins

Twitter: @bricewigginsMS

Instagram: @bricewigginsms

Senator Hob Bryan (D) - District 7

N/A

Senator Dean Kirby (R) - District 30

N/A

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

On a desktop, click to open the image, then right-click the image and select "save image as." On a mobile phone, you can take a screen shot of the image. You can now share the image with your social media post! Above each image we've written some copy you can use or tweak -or you can write your own- to help deepen understanding. You do not have to post ALL of them, or use them in order! But, we began with posts about teacher pay, moved to the business/workforce case for supporting child care, and ended with the problem with affordability to parents.

1. FB/ IG Post Language: A NAEYC survey found that 81% of respondents said that insufficient pay is the main reason child care teachers leave the field. This means that higher pay could make an impact in teacher retention. This is critical for solving our childcare supply issue in Mississippi. Working families need the legislature to take action on childcare so they can get back to work.

1. Twitter Post Language: A NAEYC survey found that 81% of respondents said that insufficient pay is the main reason educators leave the field. This means that legislature-sponsored higher pay could make an impact in teacher retention and child care access in MS.



2. FB/ IG Post Language: MS Childcare Teachers make an average of \$19,490 a year. That's less than annual incomes for cashiers (\$20,920), and dishwashers (\$20,310). All work is important to our economy, child care teachers are helping to raise and educate our children. Shouldn't their pay be comparable to other early childhood educators? By supporting child care teachers with additional funds, the legislature can ensure that teacher wages increase and costs don't go up for families.

2. Twitter Post Language: MS Childcare Teachers make an average of \$19,490 a year. That's less than the avg incomes for cashiers, and dishwashers. Child care teachers are helping to raise and educate our children. Shouldn't their pay be comparable to other educators?

Child care teachers make an average of \$19,490 a year. That's less than the average annual income for cashiers and dishwashers.

— U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS
MAY 2020 OCCUPATIONAL EMPLOYMENT AND WAGE STATISTICS

LET'S DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!
VISIT WWW.MSEARLYLEARNING.COM

Mississippi child care teachers make less than the average annual income for cashiers and dishwashers.

Preschool teachers (school-based)	\$42,952
Cashier	\$20,920
Dishwasher	\$20,310
Childcare worker	\$19,490

LET'S DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!
VISIT WWW.MSEARLYLEARNING.COM

3. IG/FB Post Language: Solving the child care crisis in Mississippi isn't JUST an educational issue. It's a major workforce problem that business leaders want the legislature to tackle. Because Mississippi employers lose about \$553 million per year due to worker absences and employee turnover due to lack of childcare, the legislature must take action to support the workforce behind the workforce.

3. Twitter Post Language: Solving the child care crisis in MS isn't JUST an ed issue. It's a major workforce problem that business leaders want the legislature to tackle. MS employers lose about \$553 mil/year due to worker absences & turnover due to lack of childcare. MS needs to take action.

“As policymakers and business leaders consider ways to position Mississippi for success, investing in childcare could enable Mississippi to fully capitalize on its resources.”

— UNTAPPED POTENTIAL REPORT, MISSISSIPPI ECONOMIC COUNCIL

LET'S DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!
VISIT WWW.MSEARLYLEARNING.COM

4. IG/FB Post Language: In 2021, more than 1/2 of parents reported missing work due to child care issues, which means child care is a MAJOR workforce issue. By supporting child care teachers with additional funds, the legislature could increase child care supply and help families get childcare who need it to go to work.

4. Twitter Post Language: In 2021, more than 1/2 of parents reported missing work due to child care issues. By supporting child care teachers with additional funds, the legislature could increase child care supply and help families get childcare who need it to get to work!

Mississippi employers could make an additional \$553 million per year if we solved worker absences and employee turnover due to childcare issues.

— UNTAPPED POTENTIAL REPORT, MISSISSIPPI ECONOMIC COUNCIL

LET'S DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!
VISIT WWW.MSEARLYLEARNING.COM

5. IG/FB Post Language:

When parents leave the workforce because they don't have access to child care, Mississippi revenues from income tax decline and businesses also lose in earning power. By supporting child care teachers with additional funds, the legislature could increase child care supply and help families get childcare who need it to go to work.

5. Twitter Post Language: MS could make an additional \$120 mil in taxes every year by supporting child care solutions. By supporting child care teachers with additional funds, the legislature could increase child care supply and help families get childcare who need it to go to work.



6. IG/FB Post Language:

In Mississippi, the average cost of infant care is \$5,436 per year, or 11.7% of a median family's income for one child. Care for two children—an infant and a 4-year-old—costs an average of \$10,220 per year, or 21.9% of a typical family's household budget. And according to the National Women's Law Center, a single mother in Mississippi earning the median income (\$26,305) would have to pay nearly 40% of her income to pay for center care for an infant and a four-year-old. To help keep parents (especially single-mothers) in the work force, we need to make child care more affordable.

6. Twitter Post Language:

A single mother in MS earning \$26,305 would have to pay nearly 40% of her income to pay for center care for an infant and a 4yr old. To keep parents (especially single-mothers) in the workforce, we need to make child care more affordable.



POLICY SOLUTIONS

to Increase Access to Affordable Childcare

October 2022

The Mississippi Early Learning Alliance (MELA), the University of Mississippi's Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning and other early care and education professionals across the state have been working together to gather data and community input on policies that would immediately help to meet the childcare needs of working parents and caregivers. These partners have identified two foundational strategies:

1. Increase the supply of qualified early educators in childcare setting by increasing teacher pay.
2. Reduce childcare costs for working parents and families.

We Can Recruit and Retain Qualified Teachers in Childcare Settings.

We need Mississippi to invest funds in strategies & programs that make entering and staying in the childcare industry a competitive choice for qualified Mississippi workers. This means paying childcare teachers a wage closer to that of other early educators, such as teachers in school-based prekindergarten classrooms.

However, we know that raising tuition rates is not a solution that will work for Mississippi families, as childcare is already not affordable for many families making the median income in our state. **Other states have successfully encouraged teacher retention by offering a wage supplement for childcare workers that gets pay closer to the starting school-based prekindergarten salary.**

We Can Reduce Childcare Costs for Working Parents and Families.

We know that childcare programs are already operating on thin margins, and reducing tuition rates for families would threaten many childcare centers' ability to remain open. Reducing rates is not a viable option for these small businesses. However, there are other ways to reduce costs for families.

1. The Child Care Payment Program (funded through the federal Child Care Development Fund) exists to help make childcare more affordable for parents with the fewest resources. We need to ensure that our working parents with the greatest need face as few barriers as possible to accessing this program. **One barrier that could be immediately removed by the Governor is the requirement that single mothers cooperate with child support enforcement to participate in this program.**
2. Many Mississippi residents do not qualify for CCPP assistance, but are still paying more than 7% of their income on childcare. These families also need help reducing childcare costs. **Mississippi can bolster the economic stability of working families by creating a refundable Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.** These types of credits exist in 15 states, including Louisiana and Arkansas. With these credits, families receive up to 50% of what they spend for childcare back as a tax credit, which encourages parents to remain in the workforce.



*This brief was prepared by the Mississippi Early Learning Alliance in preparation for hearings held by the Mississippi Senate Study Group on Women, Children and Families. **Learn more about these policy recommendations on MSEarlyLearning.org.***

**THIS TOOLKIT WAS PREPARED BY
THE TEAM AT**



MISSISSIPPI EARLY LEARNING ALLIANCE

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE WWW.MSEARLYLEARNING.ORG
FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD CARE AND WAYS TO MAKE IT**