The Kids Can’t Wait campaign goal:
Persuade NYS legislators and Gov. Cuomo to reform
New York’s Early Intervention and Preschool Special
Education systems, bringing them into compliance with
federal law and ensuring that young children receive
the services and therapy they need in a timely manner.

Welcome! We’re glad you are interested in advocating for young children with special needs. Too many are waiting for services and therapies that will help them thrive and grow. Kids can’t wait!

We’ve put together a few resources in this toolkit that are designed to help you be part of the solution. Please share this with your friends, family and anyone who might want to join the campaign. We’ll be updating these materials as needed, so please check back to our website to be sure you have the latest information.

What’s in this toolkit? 1) Fact sheets you can share with people who want to learn about this issue; 2) Tips for communicating and meeting with elected officials; 3) suggestions for speaking at public forums and writing a letter to the editor; and 4) sample messages to share on social media.

What can I do?

- Join the Kids Can’t Wait campaign by signing up at The Children’s Agenda’s Early Childhood page (under the "Agenda" tab at the top of the home page (www.thechildrensagenda.org))
- When you receive an advocacy action alert from TCA, click on it to send an email to your NYS Senator and Assemblymember.
- If you are involved in a faith-based organization or congregation, sign up for the Children’s Interfaith Weekend at www.thechildrensagenda.org.
- Use the sample social media (Twitter and Facebook) messages in the Advocacy Toolkit to raise awareness, keep attention focused on this issue, and promote solutions. Participate in special social media days when we’ll coordinate to amplify our message.

The Kids Can’t Wait campaign has already made a difference – both the NYS and Monroe County budgets have increased funding for developmental services! There’s much more work to be done, though. Thank you for concern – we look forward to advocating with you!
No child should wait for Early Intervention or Preschool Special Education services

When services are available early and on time, young children with developmental delays or disabilities are more likely to develop to their full potential, and the cost is significantly less than waiting until children reach school age.

When young children (ages birth – 5 years old) are not developing typically, federal law mandates that appropriate, timely services be available to help them reach their full potential.

Infants and toddlers (ages birth through 2) are served by the Early Intervention program and preschoolers (ages 3 – 5) are served by the Preschool Special Education program. By intervening early in a child’s life, when brain development is most rapid, the need for later special education services is reduced.

Average Annual Spending Per Child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Intervention</th>
<th>School Age Special Education</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$9,029</td>
<td>$31,423</td>
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IN MONROE COUNTY: Approximately 5,000 children benefit from Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education (PSE) every year.

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

Provider shortage:
The number of agency and individual providers of EI and PSE services such as speech, physical and occupational therapy, teachers of the deaf and blind, feeding specialists and other professionals is on the decline, largely because reimbursement rates are too low to cover expenses. As a result, wait lists for children in need are the longest they have ever been.

System complexity: Lack of coordination makes the programs expensive and confusing for families and providers.
- At age 3, a child transitions from EI to PSE, and parents must learn to navigate a new system.
- Therapists and teachers seeking payment face a complex billing system that requires too much time for successful reimbursement.
- Some reimbursement rates are set by the state and others are set by counties, making it difficult to set consistent policies and rates.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

1. Increase funding for the evaluators, therapists and teachers who provide these critical services by raising reimbursement rates set by New York State.
2. Improve the system serving these vulnerable young children by aligning and better coordinating the Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education programs.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Speak up! Tell your friends, neighbors and – most importantly – your NYS legislator about this crisis, and what action is needed to help kids get the services they need, when they need them.
- Join the “Kids Can’t Wait” campaign at www.thechildrensagenda.org. Once you’re a member, you’ll be informed about opportunities to take action.
**Kids Can’t Wait!**
No more delays in Preschool Special Education services

When services are available early and on time, young children with developmental delays or disabilities are more likely to develop to their full potential, and the cost is significantly less than waiting until children reach school age.

When young children (ages birth – 5 years old) are not developing typically, they are eligible to receive services such as physical, occupational and speech therapy.

Federal law mandates that appropriate, timely services be available to children of all ages. Infants and toddlers are served by the Early Intervention program and preschoolers are served by the Preschool Special Education program.

![Mary Cariola Children's Center Classroom Rate](image_url)

**IN MONROE COUNTY:** Approximately 2,700 children ages 3 – 5 benefit from Preschool Special Education (PSE) every year. PSE services are overseen by the NYS Education Department and operated through local school districts.

**WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?**

These programs are funded with local, state and federal dollars. Right now, inadequate funding in New York State is driving professionals out of this field. With providers not available, children are waiting weeks or even months for support they need to thrive and grow.

**WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?**

1. Increase funding for the evaluators, therapists and teachers who provide these critical services by raising reimbursement rates set by New York State.

2. Lift the maximum allowable rate for PSE Special Classes to bring it in line with rates for K-1 special education programs.

**WHAT CAN I DO?**

- Speak up! Tell your friends, neighbors and – most importantly – your NYS legislator about this crisis, and what action is needed to help kids get the services they need, when they need them.

- Join the “Kids Can’t Wait” campaign at [www.thechildrensagenda.org](http://www.thechildrensagenda.org). Once you’re a member, you’ll be informed about opportunities to take action.

- If you are involved in a faith-based group or congregation, sign up for the Children’s Interfaith Weekend at [www.thechildrensagenda.org/partnerships/interfaith/](http://www.thechildrensagenda.org/partnerships/interfaith/)
When services are available early and on time, young children with developmental delays or disabilities are more likely to develop to their full potential, and the cost is significantly less than waiting until children reach school age.

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Federal law mandates that appropriate, timely services be available to children of all ages. Infants and toddlers are served by the Early Intervention program and preschoolers are served by the Preschool Special Education program.

In Monroe County: On any given day, 1200-1300 children in Monroe County are receiving EI services. There are 200 – 300 referrals per month to Monroe County’s EI program. In June 2019 there were 200 children waiting for EI services.

What is the problem?
These programs are funded with local, state and federal dollars. Right now, inadequate funding in New York State is driving professionals out of this field. With providers not available, children are waiting weeks or even months for support they need to thrive and grow.

For example, nearly one out of 5 infants and toddlers in New York State are forced onto waiting lists now – and that’s growing. In Monroe County, one-third of children birth to three years old spent time on a waiting list to receive these critical early services in 2016.

What is the solution?
1. Increase funding for the therapists and teachers who provide these critical services by raising reimbursement rates set by New York State.
2. Urge the Governor and NYS Legislature to require that insurance companies fully cover Early Intervention claims.

What can I do?
- Speak up! Tell your friends, neighbors and – most importantly – your NYS legislator about this crisis, and what action is needed to help kids get the services they need, when they need them.
- Join the “Kids Can’t Wait” campaign at www.thechildrensagenda.org. Once you’re a member, you’ll be informed about opportunities to take action.
- If you are involved in a faith-based group or congregation, sign up for the Children’s Interfaith Weekend at www.thechildrensagenda.org/partnerships/interfaith/
## Communicating With Legislators

### Phone Calls
1. Identify yourself.
2. Identify the issue, bill number or name of the bill.
3. State your position & how the bill will personally affect you or the community.
4. Offer suggestions or alternative strategies to resolve the issue.
5. Be specific about the action you want from the legislator (support/oppose/amend the current legislation).
6. Request a letter of reply stating the legislator’s position on the issue.
7. After the call, follow up with a personal letter that reiterates your call.

### Written Correspondence (Mail & Email)
1. Spell the legislators name correctly & ensure you use the correct contact information.
2. Keep it brief. Avoid the use of informal language, especially with emails. Keep letters to one page. Try to discuss only one bill or issue in a letter.
3. Identify yourself. Begin with an introduction of yourself or the organization on whose behalf you are writing.
4. Get to the point. State the name & number of the bill or issue & your position at the beginning of the letter/email.
5. Explain why your position is important to his or her constituents & how it will impact them. Use supporting facts.
6. Offer suggestions or alternative strategies to resolve the issue.
7. Identify the action request. Be specific.
8. Sign your name & include a return address so the legislator can send a response.

### Social Media
1. Write compelling posts that other constituents can read & comment on, encouraging dialogue & raising awareness of the issue/concern. Don’t be afraid to be visual (share pictures from your meeting or TCA infographics).
2. Avoid politics (talking about elections, candidates & races).
3. Tie your post to existing conversations or campaigns using hashtags (#) & handles (@). On fb use hashtags like #KidsCanWait or #TCA & on Twitter/Instagram use both hashtags and handles like @TheChildrensAgenda.
4. Share posts from other people or your legislator’s office and comment thoughtfully.
5. Build an audience of followers. Remember that legislators want to engage with those who have the following to positively influence the way that other constituents view their efforts.
# Personal Visits with Legislators

## Before the Visit

1. Call the legislator’s office & ask to speak to the scheduler.

2. Make an appointment
   - Explain to the scheduler that you would like to setup a meeting with your legislator.
   - Provide details of the date & time, & who will be attending.
   - If the legislator is unable to meet, ask to meet with their staff person handling the issue.
   - Follow up by sending a hard copy of the meeting request.

3. Prepare for the meeting
   - Plan on the meeting lasting between 15-30 minutes.
   - Prepare a “Leave Behind”. The “Leave Behind” should be a one page synopsis of your position, highlighting why your position is important. Make copies to distribute.
   - Educate yourself about the legislator – their background, political philosophy & the number of community associations in their district.
   - Develop 2-3 key points that you want to convey.
   - Consider what questions may be asked & develop concise answers to those questions.

4. A week before the meeting contact the scheduler to confirm.

## During the Visit

1. Arrive 5-10 minutes prior to the meeting.

2. Briefly introduce yourself & the other attendees.

3. Clearly explain the issue.
   - Refrain from reading your “Leave Behind. Use laypersons’s terms & personal experiences to convey how the issue affects you or your community.

4. Invite questions. Then ask directly for his or her support.

5. Thank the legislator or staff person for their time.
   - Sum up any commitments made by the legislator.
   - Offer to provide further information or a meeting with other residents.
   - Leave your one page “Leave Behind”.

## After the Visit

1. Write a personal thank you note to the legislator & any staff with whom you met. Briefly restate your position & include any additional information that may have been requested. Provide a summary of your understanding of the outcome of the meeting.

2. Maintain contact with the legislator as the issue progresses. Continue to provide feedback or input to remind the legislator or staff person of your ongoing interest in the issue.
## WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR & OP-ED PIECES

Letters to your newspaper’s editor and op-ed pieces are excellent ways to advocate. Remember that a letter to the editor is generally written in response to a published article about early childhood developmental services, and should be sent promptly following publication. Whereas, op-eds can be sent at any time because they do not have to be written in response to published articles. Keep in mind that most submissions to newspapers are edited for clarity, accuracy, punctuation, and spelling. Most opinion pieces are short and to the point – they’re rarely over 300 words total. Typically the newspaper requires that the letter to the editor or op-ed piece be signed, but in some cases they will withhold the name of the writer if requested. The newspaper may also ask for your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.

| 1. | Begin your letter by stating the topic or reason for writing. If you are writing a letter to the editor, cite the specific article to which you are responding. Some newspapers also need to know the date and section in which the article you’re responding to appeared. |
| 2. | After you’ve stated the topic, then clearly state the reasons for your interest, the position you’re taking on the issue and why. If you have experience with the issue at hand, then clearly state this as well. Take this opportunity to show why the issue is relevant and important, but remember to be brief. |
| 3. | Now that you’ve stated your position on an issue, you need to back it up with some facts. Provide local facts, data, statistics, survey results, and anecdotes to support your point of view. Personal stories about the issue are particularly effective. Using current events in politics or quoting local authorities on the issue can also lend stronger support to your message. |
| 4. | Once you’ve provided evidence for your point of view, you should propose logical ways to address the issue. Perhaps just raising awareness in the community is enough, but there may be other things that people can do. You can direct the readers to a website or organization that can further their goals, provide ways for readers find more information on the issue, or tell readers to directly do something such as writing their local legislator, voting, or becoming a Kids Can’t Wait Campaign Champion. |
| 5. | To close, have one sentence that summarizes your point of view on the issue so your readers have a clear reminder of your main message. Then, sign off with your name and you city and state of residence. If you were using your authority to support an issue or if your title and position is relevant, then you can state this between your name and residence. |
2019 Kids Can’t Wait social media sample posts

HASHTAGS:
#ROCkidscantwait
#NYkidscantwait
#Monroekidscantwait

TWEETS

*Early Intervention:*
There are 200 – 300 referrals per month to Monroe County’s Early Intervention program. In June 2019 there were 200 children waiting for EI services. #Monroekidscantwait

*Preschool Special Education*
There are 2,700 kids in Monroe County who need preschool special education services and therapies. Don’t let them down. Invest in higher rates for preschool OT, PT, Speech and other therapists. #Monroekidscantwait

*Both Preschool Special Education and Early Intervention:*
Many OT, PT and Speech Therapists can’t afford to work with poorly -reimbursed programs serving young children when they can make significantly more working with adults. #NYkidscantwait