How to be successful advocating for state level change for kids.

2023 Advocacy Toolkit
Welcome

Did you know that 85% of brain development occurs by age 5?

Too many young children with special needs and developmental delays are waiting for the services and therapies that will help them thrive and grow. When children wait, they are losing out on opportunities to develop to their full potential.

Your voice is part of the solution. We’re glad you are interested in advocating for young children with special needs, which is why we have created this advocacy toolkit.

This toolkit includes resources that you can use and share with your friends, family and anyone else who might be interested in supporting young children with developmental delays and disabilities. This toolkit is designed for state level advocacy to spark action by New York’s Governor, state legislators and other policymakers.

About the Kids Can't Wait Campaign

The Kids Can’t Wait Campaign is a group of early childhood advocates, parents, and providers working to change NYS policy and funding to ensure that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with developmental delays and disabilities receive the Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education services they need as quickly as possible.

Defining Advocacy

Advocacy is a way you can make your voice heard and take action that helps children with special needs. Legislative advocacy involves communicating with elected officials to persuade them to make a policy change– usually a law, public funding or regulation that will benefit children with developmental delays and disabilities.
What's in the Toolkit?

Ready to advocate for kids this legislative season? Here are a few tools and resources to jumpstart your efforts! This toolkit is designed for advocating with New York’s Governor, state legislators and policymakers. It includes the following:

- Kids Can’t Wait 2023 Priority Proposals
- How Legislative Change Happens
- How to Identify **Targets**
- Connecting In-Person with Legislators
- Connecting with Legislators in Writing
- Connecting with Legislators Digitally
- Take Action

**DEFINITION**

A target is an individual who holds the power to make change happen for your issue. It is always a specific person or people, never an institution or whole elected body.

What else can I do to advocate for kids?

- Join the Kids Can’t Wait Campaign by signing up on The Children’s Agenda website.
- Join The Children’s Agenda Action Network and take action when you receive an e-mail alert.
The Kids Can't Wait campaign has already made a difference. The New York State 2019–20 budget increased payment rates by 5% for physical, occupational and speech therapists in the Early Intervention system. The State enacted a whole new revenue stream for Early Intervention through a Covered Lives Assessment in 2021, although they have yet to allocate that funding to raise reimbursements. Also in that legislation, the provider billing process was simplified for Early Intervention providers! In 2021 the Governor approved an 11% payment rate increase for Preschool Special Education programs. There’s much more work to be done, though. Thank you for concern – we look forward to advocating with you!

**Kids Can't Wait Campaign**

**NYS 2023–24 Budget & Legislative Priorities**

1. Increase Early Intervention rates by 11% across the board.

2. Institute higher rates or rate add-ons to cover the higher costs of in-person service delivery to ensure all children who need in-person services have access to them.

3. Ensure sufficient resources for preschool special education long-term with a new, more accurate tuition rate-setting methodology to cover the costs of providing PSE services and instruction.

4. Require the Bureau of Early Intervention to publish an annual report about the receipt of services, including data on the timeliness of services delivered in Individualized Family Service Plans, disaggregated by county and race/ethnicity.
How Legislative Change Happens

Understanding the legislative and budget cycles are important when coordinating your advocacy efforts to maximize impact.
NYS Budget Cycle

1. The Call for Agency Budget Requests
   - August–October
   - The formal budget cycle begins when the Budget Director issues a “call letter” to agency heads (like the Departments of Health or Education).

2. The Executive Budget
   - November–January
   - Based on priorities, recommendations and economic climate, the Governor and staff prepare an Executive Budget typically released in January.

3. Advocacy Day
   - January–March
   - Advocates visit the Capitol!
   - Schedule meetings with legislators to share budget priorities and recommendations.
   - Plan rallies and recruit constituents to support your issue.
   - Share petitions, participate in advocacy alerts, and make phone calls to your targets.

4. Legislature Input
   - February–March
   - Each house of the legislature issues a proposed budget based on separate deliberations.
   - Legislative leaders and Governor begin negotiating.
   - Share petitions, participate in advocacy alerts, and make phone calls to your targets.

5. Back to the Governor
   - April–December
   - Governor signs or vetos the budget based on the agreement that they come to with legislators.
   - Division of Budget then issues a comprehensive Enacted Budget—the final version of the budget.
   - Share petitions, participate in advocacy alerts, and make phone calls to your targets.

6. Budget Year Starts
   - NYS fiscal year begins April 1st
   - The Division of Budget provides quarterly updates to the legislature.
   - Budgets are rebalanced mid-year, as needed, to address shortfalls.
How a Bill Becomes Law

1. **A New Idea**
   A new idea is the starting point for all new bills, laws, and legislation. New ideas can come from legislators directly but often times also include input from their staff, constituents, and even organizations.

2. **A Bill is Drafted**
   Once the new idea is finalized, a bill is drafted so it can be considered. Bill drafting is usually carried out by the New York State Legislative Bill Drafting Commission due to the specialized legal training required.

3. **Bill goes through Committee**
   - **Introduction**—First the bill is introduced by a legislator in the Assembly or Senate. This is where the bill is assigned a number and sent to the appropriate committee.
   - **Committee Action**—The standing committee evaluating the bill decides whether or not to send it to the floor for final decision-making.

4. **Senate/Assembly Pass the Bill**
   In order to become law, a bill must be introduced and passed in both the Assembly and Senate. It also must be signed by the Governor.

5. **Bill is Signed by Governor**
   After a bill passes in both the Assembly and Senate it is sent to the Governor. The Governor has the option to either sign or veto the bill.
How to Identify Targets

A target is always a person, never an institution or elected body. When thinking about who your target is, consider who holds the power to make change happen for your issue.

Kids Can't Wait
Campaign Targets

Governor Kathy Hochul
@GovKathyHochul
518-474-8390 | Contact the Governor

Senator Gustavo Rivera (Senate Health Committee)
@NYSenatorRivera
518-455-3395 | grivera@nysenate.gov

Assemblymember Amy Paulin (Assembly Health Committee)
@AmyPaulin
518-455-5585 | paulina@nyassembly.gov

Assemblymember Michael Benedetto (Assembly Education Committee)
@mikebenedetto82
518-455-5296 | benedettom@nyassembly.gov

Senator Shelley Mayer (Senate Education Committee)
@ShelleyBMayer
518-455-2031 | smayer@nysenate.gov

Your own state legislators can be targets too!
Find who they are here!

Need help finding who represents you in Albany? Use the tool on our website here!
Connecting
In-Person with
Legislators

Connecting with legislators is one of the best advocacy tools available to constituents. From in-person meetings and speaking at public forums to emails and social media, there are a bunch of ways to engage your state representatives in your work!
In-Person Meetings with Legislators

Before the Visit

1. Call or email the legislator’s office and speak with the scheduler. Introduce yourself and briefly explain why you’re reaching out to request a meeting.

2. Be prepared with the times/dates you and/or your team is available in case they’re ready to schedule on the spot! Remember even if you can’t meet directly with the legislator, meeting with a member of their staff is a win as well!

3. Prepare for the meeting. Here’s a few things we usually do to prep for a meeting—and a few things to consider before your next meeting!

Meeting Prep

- Determine the goal of the meeting: What do we want to gain from/ask of the legislator?
  - What do they need to know or hear from us to commit their support?
  - What’s our second ask if they won’t commit to our first? (e.g. meeting with us again before taking a position, visiting with us in their district, or sharing their support on social media)

- About a week before the meeting, follow up with the legislators office. Confirm the meeting, let them know who will be there, exchange zoom links/confirm location and share any pre-meeting materials you want to be reviewed in advance
  - Ex. An Issue-based fact sheet, priorities, information about a bill/petition, etc.

- Research the legislator
  - What committees are they on?
  - Do we have any key partners in this legislators district or constituents that might be useful to add to this meeting?
In-Person Meetings with Legislators

During the Visit

- Arrive 5-10 minutes before the meeting
- Kick-start the meeting by sharing introductions and giving a brief overview of the issue.
- Explain the issue, cite and share your evidence (data, research, people served, share a personal story related to the issue)
  - Remember those materials you shared in advance? Reference them! Don't forget to bring, and leave, your issue-based fact sheet
- Be brief! Meetings with legislators typically last 20-30 minutes.
- Invite the legislator to ask questions and then directly make your request for support
- Close the meeting by thanking the legislator and staff for their time, confirming commitments, and offering to provide additional support if needed

After the Visit

- Follow up with an email directly to the legislator and cc their staff that were in attendance—be sure to include a thank you for the meeting and review any commitments that were made.
- Continue to build a relationship with the legislator and their staff by inviting them to issue-specific events, programs, and sharing new resources regularly.

REMINDER

There's nothing wrong with meeting with a member of the legislator’s team if they’re not available. Often times, staff have a lot of influence over what legislators support and are important powerbrokers!

Get in there and build those relationships!
Connecting with Legislators in Writing

Show legislators your issue holds weight by sending formal letters and coordinating postcard campaigns to share stories from Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education families so legislators can hear them firsthand.
Writing letters to Legislators

A formal, traditional letter often times gets more attention than an email. Here’s what to keep in mind for your next one:

- Find the correct address for your target(s).
- Keep your letter simple
  - Share who you are or the campaign you represent and why you’re writing the letter (what’s the issue?).
  - Provide detail on the issue including examples, data, and facts to share how important it is.
  - Make a clear action request (be sure to identify specific bill numbers or legislation if necessary).
- Proofread your letter
- Keep it short--one page max!

Postcard Campaigns

What's a Postcard Campaign?

A postcard campaign is an opportunity to include constituent voices and elevate the visibility of your issue even more! Sending postcards to your legislators with personalized notes from their constituents is a powerful advocacy tool.

Postcard Templates

Scan to download printable postcards for your campaign!
Governor Kathy Hochul  
Executive Chamber, NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224  
November 2022

Dear Governor Hochul,

We are writing to urge you to include an 11% increase in Early Intervention (EI) reimbursement rates in the SFY2024 Executive Budget. We are very concerned about the thousands of infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities who are waiting for the services they need in violation of their legal rights, including a growing concern about young children being offered only telehealth services when in-person services are needed.

All children aged birth through three with developmental delays and disabilities have a right to appropriate interventions that is established in federal law through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – Part C. In FFY2020, one-third (34%) of children in New York eligible for EI went without services longer than the 30-day federal timeline.

While telehealth services played a critical role during the height of the pandemic, we are also hearing growing concerns about children who need in-person services but are being limited to remote, telehealth delivery because no provider is available to travel to their home or child care setting. While telehealth service delivery can be a positive option for families who might otherwise not be served, the decision to provide in-person vs. telehealth visits should be based on the most effective method of service delivery, the individual needs of the child, and parent preference—not based solely on provider availability. We are particularly concerned about the inequities of one- and two-year-old children in low-income communities of color being offered services only over a screen while their peers receive the benefit of in-person physical therapy or speech therapy. The State has a legal obligation to ensure children who need in-person services have access to them, and EI professionals who deliver face-to-face services should be compensated for the extra costs they incur, such as transportation and travel time.

Even with the 5% increase in EI rates paid to select providers that was included in the SFY20 budget, reimbursement rates for providers are lower now than they were in the 1990s. This discourages provider recruitment and retention, leaving families and children waiting for – or being denied – life-changing interventions.

We urge you to:

1. Increase Early Intervention rates by 11% across the board.  
2. Institute higher rates or rate add-ons to cover the higher costs of in-person service delivery to ensure all children who need in-person services have access to them.

New York’s families have waited far too long for the state to fulfill its responsibility to their infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities. The state’s pattern of inadequate compensation has led to a critical shortage of EI providers, which has resulted in delays and denials of effective interventions across the state. We strongly urge you to invest in the healthy development of New York’s residents by increasing all Early Intervention reimbursement rates.

Sincerely,

The Kids Can’t Wait Campaign
Connecting with Legislators Digitally

Get social! Connect with your legislators and advocate for your issue online by using social media and tagging legislators!
Connecting Digitally with Legislators

On Social Media

- Write a compelling post/series of posts that constituents can share and engage with! Fewer words are usually more powerful.
- Include visuals/pictures from meetings or infographics. Photos of kids often get more attention.
- Tie your post to existing conversations or campaigns by using hashtags (#) & handles (@) to tag legislators!
- Be sure to double check spelling before you post!
- Share posts from others or from your legislator’s office and leave thoughtful, engaging comments.

Social Media Tools

Content Corner

- **Share the facts!** What’s the issue & why is it important?
- **Family Spotlights**—connect with families who have experience in Early Intervention/Preschool Special Education and see if they’re interested in sharing their journey.
- **Action Alerts!** Invite folks to take action with you by sharing how they can participate in call-in days, signing petitions, and on social media!

KCW Social Media Toolkit

Scan to download social media graphic templates and sample captions
Take Action

Join the Action Network

- Select Early Intervention/Preschool Special Education as an interest!
- Get Action Alerts first!
- Receive the Kids Can’t Wait newsletter

When you receive an advocacy action alert from The Children’s Agenda, click on it to send an email to your New York State elected official or a policymaker!

Stay Connected

@childrensagenda
Kids Can’t Wait NYS Campaign
thechildrensagenda.org