



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

Champions for Children

2015 Legislative Session

Champions for Early Learning

To improve educational outcomes for all kids, state legislators adopted historic new investments in early learning in 2015. These include passage of the bipartisan Early Start Act, which will increase access to high quality care for tens of thousands of children across the state.



Representative Ruth Kagi (D-Seattle): Rep. Kagi used the full force of her roles as Chair of the House Early Learning and Human Services committee and member of the House Appropriations committee to further early learning policy. Rep. Kagi was the prime sponsor of the Early Start Act in the House and worked closely with advocates, legislators and staff in the Governor's office to craft the content of the bill and to get it passed and funded.



Representative Maureen Walsh (R-Walla Walla): As the Ranking Minority member of the House Early Learning and Human Services committee and a sponsor of the Early Start Act in the House, Rep. Walsh—a fierce advocate for kids—played a key role in making the bill a broadly supported priority among House Republicans and Democrats.



Senator Steve Litzow (R-Mercer Island): As the Chair of the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education committee and the prime sponsor of the Early Start Act in the Senate, Sen. Litzow worked closely with advocates and other legislators in both the House and Senate to ensure the bill passed. In the months before session began, Sen. Litzow made passage of the Early Start Act a priority for him and the Senate Majority Coalition caucus.



Senator Andy Billig (D-Spokane): As a member of the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education and Ways and Means committees and a sponsor of the Early Start Act, Sen. Billig was a leader in efforts to get the bill passed and funded. Sen. Billig made sure that continuity of care provisions in the bill remained a high priority throughout the legislative process.



Representative Ross Hunter (D-Medina): As chair of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Hunter championed early learning by including historic investments for early learning in the House budget. He prioritized passage and funding of the Early Start Act and played a key role in securing the early learning investments included in the final budget.



Senator Pramila Jayapal (D-Seattle): Sen. Jayapal worked with advocates and other legislators to ensure that key provisions promoting racial equity and access to care were included in the Early Start Act. Sen. Jayapal recognized that our state's most diverse, youngest generation needs a variety of quality early learning opportunities.



Governor Jay Inslee: Highlighting the role of early learning in the state's cradle-to-career education continuum, Governor Inslee included historic increases for early learning in his budget proposal in December 2014. His proposed investments aligned to the core content of the Early Start Act. He played an active role in ensuring that the Act was adequately funded in the budget.

Champions for Ending Childhood Hunger

A 2011 cut to State Food Assistance had unfairly burdened immigrant families—primarily in communities of color—with hunger. In the 2015-17 budget, legislators brought State Food Assistance benefits to the same level as food benefits from the federal Basic Food or SNAP Program. Lawmakers have restored equity to our state's largest anti-hunger assistance program.



Representative Pat Sullivan (D-Covington): As Majority Leader of the House and member of the House Appropriations committee, Rep. Sullivan ensured that another year would not pass with unequal food benefits for recipients of State Food assistance. Rep. Sullivan met frequently with advocates and constituents directly affected by the cut in State Food Assistance benefits. His strong support resulted in benefit restoration in the initial and subsequent House operating budget proposals, as well as in the final budget adopted by the Legislature.



Senator Joe Fain (R-Auburn): Sen. Fain advocated for full State Food Assistance benefit restoration within the Senate Ways and Means Committee and with Senate Leadership. Sen. Fain welcomed constituents to his office who outlined the hardships their families experienced due to lower State Food Assistance benefits. Sen. Fain followed through on his 2013 efforts to equalize program benefits.



Senator Sharon Nelson (D-Maury Island): Senate Democratic Caucus chair Sharon Nelson made restoring State Food Assistance one of her budget priorities for the 2015 legislative session. She introduced an amendment on the Senate floor to fully restore State Food Assistance benefits during the debate on the initial Senate budget. Her impassioned speech signaled her strong support for the food assistance program, which she described as critically important to her district and to the state.