



2024

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Our agenda is a living document, and we expect to add to and revise portions of it as the legislative session progresses and new information comes to light. More information about our agenda can be found at childrensalliance.org/blog/2024-legislative-agenda

The Building Blocks of Our Agenda

At Children's Alliance, we see a future in which all of Washington's children have an abundance of what they need to grow up to be the people they dream of becoming. To make this vision a reality and combat harms created by systemic racism, we work with those most negatively impacted by current laws to ensure that our state prioritizes certain key policy changes, including:

- ✓ Equitable access to affordable, high-quality **early learning** opportunities;
- ✓ Equitable access to affordable, high-quality **health care**; and
- ✓ An equitable tax system and cash assistance for working families to address wealth inequality and further racial justice—keys to **economic justice**.

The sections that follow highlight our priorities for the 2024 legislative session and outline three main points:

- The **current status** of major issues we face as a community when it comes to early learning, health care, and economic justice;
- **Proposals** to address those problems; and
- **Our plans** to advocate for change through full support efforts, monitoring, or signing on to endorse an initiative.

Our Advocacy in Action

We work to advance legislation that aligns with our policy priorities, to ensure that legislation is implemented as intended, and to combat efforts to reverse progress that has already been made. To do this, our advocacy involves a combination of the following actions:

- **Leading:** We work directly with a legislative sponsor to craft and draft proposed legislation and function as the lead stakeholder for the issue.
- **Tier 1 support:** We activate every available tool of advocacy we have to support and help move policy through the legislative process. This includes grassroots organizing, engaging in public testimony, and working with stakeholders to educate lawmakers about the issue and our proposed solutions.
- **Tier 2 support:** We support the efforts of other advocacy groups by endorsing policy initiatives or bills by signing in at bill hearings and signing on to letters of support directed to elected officials and other key decision-makers.
- **Monitoring:** We monitor initiatives or bills throughout the legislative process and once they have been enacted into law and are in the administrative/implementation phase. Monitoring generally involves attending committee hearings, tracking the progress of bills, and assuring that implementation follows the Legislature's original intent.



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STATE POLICY INITIATIVES

Advocacy related to current legislation



Early Learning and Child Care: Improving Access for Children and Families

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC): Tier 1 support

Current Status

Funding for the state’s Infant and IECMHC program, Holding Hope, lacks sufficient funding to meet current needs. At present, there is a waitlist of 100 programs seeking consultation.

Proposal

Invest \$1.75 million annually to expand access to the IECMHC and address current needs.

Resources:

Learn about Holding Hope: childcareawarewa.org/holding-hope
Learn about Child Care Aware: childcareawarewa.org

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) Subsidies: Tier 1 support

Current Status

People who care for our children may be unable to afford care for their own children because they are ineligible for the WCCC subsidy when they work in child care centers that their children attend or work in Washington-based centers but reside in neighboring states.

Proposal

Expand WCCC eligibility and provide the subsidy to all child care center staff regardless of whether they work around their own children or reside in a border state.

Resources:

Learn about current WCCC eligibility: dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/getting-help/wccc
Learn about the Washington Childcare Centers Association: wachild.org



Early Learning and Child Care: Stabilizing the Workforce and Supporting Providers

Early Childhood Education and Assistance (ECEAP) Rates: Tier 1 support

Current Status

Slot rates for ECEAP are not sustainable and have contributed to the ongoing workforce crisis.

Proposal

Increase ECEAP rates as outlined in the DCYF decision package (19% increase in School Day ECEAP slot rates; 28% increase in Working Day ECEAP slot rates), which is based on findings from a recent cost study by Western Washington University.

Resources:

Learn about the DCYF decision package: bit.ly/ca-dcyf-package-2
Learn about the Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP: wsaheadstarteceap.com

Licensing Fees: Tier 1 support

Current Status

Current licensing fees for child care providers create barriers that contribute to provider shortages.

Proposal

Eliminate licensing fees for child care center providers.

Resources:

Learn about the Washington Childcare Centers Association: wachild.org

We also broadly support the following progressive proposals:

- Funding stipends to retain and support experts with lived experience who serve in advisory bodies
- Addressing the 1% levy growth limit
- Paying providers for full months of Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) services
- Banning isolation and mechanical and chemical restraints on children
- Increasing dedicated funding for rural communities
- Supporting health & safety of agency staff
- Supporting WCCC eligibility for all providers
- Increasing non-standard hour bonuses to \$500
- Increasing the infant rate enhancement to \$500
- Increasing coordination between health and early childhood systems
- Increasing support and access to care in child care deserts
- Closing loopholes in the capital gains tax
- Expanding the definition of “family” under the paid sick leave law to align with the Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) definition
- Aligning eligibility criteria across key programs to exclude non-taxed income from income eligibility decisions
- Allowing eligibility for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program / Basic Food to mean automatic eligibility for ECEAP and Early ECEAP
- Improving compensation and benefits packages for providers and their families



Behavioral Health: Tier 1 support

Current Status

Washington still ranks 40th in the U.S. for youth behavioral health care. What this means is that four out of five Washington teens cannot find or afford care. This is even more acute for access to and affordability of therapeutic care for teens who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) or LGBTQ+.

Proposal

Follow the 12 recommendations from the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Work Group (CYBHWG). These recommendations were made by experts and those most affected by the absence of care, and they will effect positive change in key policy areas, including:

- Behavioral health care coordination
- Reducing administrative burden for behavioral health services
- Expanding early childhood services for children from birth to age three
- Providing direct funding to school districts to develop behavioral health plans
- Providing funding for clinical supervised hours for mental health providers

Resources:

Read our 2023 report proposing solutions to the youth behavioral health crisis: bit.ly/bh-report23

Learn about the CYBHWG recommendations: bit.ly/cybhgw-recs-24

Learn about the CYBHWG: bit.ly/about-cybhgw

Universal Free School Meals: Tier 1 support

Current Status

A free school meals bill passed in 2023, but it targeted specific schools and included provisions that left out many schools. This means there are many students who would benefit from free meals but still don't have access to them.

Proposal

Expand current state law to provide free school breakfast and lunch to all students across all public schools.

Resources:

Learn about universal free school meals: bit.ly/ca-free-school-meals

Learn about the coalition leading on this initiative: Washington State Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition: wsahnc.org

Eliminate Child Marriage: Tier 1 support

Current Status

In the last 20 years over 5,000 minors were married in Washington. Minors do not have access to the resources necessary to navigate the legal contract of marriage, therefore the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights considers all marriages involving minors to be forced marriages.

Proposal

Eliminate child marriage in Washington by removing current statutory language that allows marriages involving minors if certain conditions are met.

We will also advocate for an education component that includes outreach and education in communities where the practice is prevalent.

Resources:

Learn about the bill (House Bill 1455/Senate Bill 5695): bit.ly/bill-1455

Learn about the organization leading on this initiative, Unchained At Last: unchainedatlast.org



Progressive Revenue and Economic Justice

Wealth Tax: Tier 1 support

Current Status

Billions of dollars of financial properties are currently going untaxed, allowing some to accumulate incredible amounts of wealth off the backs of working Washingtonians and avoid paying their fair share.

Proposal

Create a modernized, fairer tax system that charges a tax of 1% on household wealth over \$250 million resulting solely from ownership of stocks, bonds, and other financial intangible property. One of the key recipients of this revenue will be education.

Resources:

Learn about the WA State Wealth Tax (House Bill 1473/Senate Bill 5486): bit.ly/ca-bill-1473

Learn about the Economic Opportunity Institute: opportunityinstitute.org

Guaranteed Basic Income: Tier 1 support

Current Status

Many families experiencing financial hardship have difficulty accessing support resources due to barriers or gaps in coverage. Direct cash benefits have been shown to help families avoid many of these issues and provide immediate relief while reducing stress and uncertainty for recipients.

Proposal

Create a statewide pilot program to determine whether guaranteed basic income for adult Washingtonians experiencing certain major life transitions or high economic instability will narrow the gap between the top few earners and families with low incomes and address persistent wealth disparities that negatively impact communities of color.

Resources:

Learn about the Evergreen Basic Income Pilot Program (House Bill 1045): bit.ly/bill-1045

Learn about the Washington State Budget and Policy Center: budgetandpolicy.org

Baby Bonds: Monitor

Current Status

Years of regressive tax laws, racist housing laws, and other injustices have led to systemic and systematic inequities that have made it harder for many Washingtonians, particularly those living in communities of color, to accumulate wealth.

Proposal

Allow the state to invest money into a savings and investment account each year on behalf of kids who receive Apple Health services before their first birthday. When they reach adulthood, these kids would be able to use the money in their accounts for postsecondary education, homeownership, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Resources:

Learn about the Washington Future Fund program (House Bill 1094/Senate Bill 5125): bit.ly/bill-1094

Gift Cards: Tier 2 support

Current Status

A loophole in the current law allows corporations to reclaim unspent money on gift cards and engage in predatory business practices that take advantage of consumers.

Proposal

Enhance protections for consumers, particularly those with low incomes, against corporate practices that allow companies to profit from unused money on gift cards or corporate rewards apps.

Resources:

Learn about the gift card legislation and the Washington Consumer Protection Coalition: waconsumerprotection.org



STATE POLICY INITIATIVES

Advocacy related to administrative implementation



Early Learning and Child Care

Addressing Inequities in Education Requirements for Providers: Monitor

Current Status

In 2020, the Legislature passed House Bill 2556, which directed DCYF to consult with stakeholders and develop a community-based training pathway for providers to meet professional education requirements.

Proposal

Direct DCYF to work with providers in connection to House Bill 2556 to address inequities in existing education requirements and educational equivalents and to extend deadlines for completion.

Resources:

Learn about House Bill 2556: bit.ly/ca-bill-2556

Learn about the Washington Childcare Centers Association: wachild.org

Transition to Kindergarten : Monitor

Current Status

In 2023, the Legislature passed House Bill 1550 to create the Transition to Kindergarten (TK) program, which replaced the Transitional Kindergarten program.

Proposal

Safeguard the TK program by ensuring that rulemaking underway by the Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI) follows legislative intent.

Resources:

Learn about the TK program and House Bill 1550: bit.ly/ca-tk-24

Dental Therapy: Monitor

Current Status

In 2023, the Legislature passed a law expanding the role of dental therapists. We want to ensure that the new law is implemented in a way that reflects the original intent.

Proposal

Ensure that implementation of the 2023 law expanding the role of dental therapists in Washington follows the legislative intent and increases access to oral health.

Resources:

Learn about the dental therapy expansion: bit.ly/dt-expansion

Learn about the Washington Dental Access Campaign: wadentalaccess.com

Female Genital Cutting (FGC): Monitor

Current Status

In 2023, the Legislature passed a law criminalizing FGC on minors, providing for community education on the subject, punishing health care practitioners who perform FGC, and allowing survivors to seek a civil remedy. We want to ensure that the new law is implemented in a way that reflects the original intent.

Proposal

Ensure that implementation of the 2023 law is effective and follows the legislative intent.

Resources:

Learn about how we followed survivors' lead to ban FGC: bit.ly/ca-blog-fgc

Learn about the Washington Coalition to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: bit.ly/wacefgc



Progressive Revenue and Economic Justice

Defense of the Capital Gains Tax: Tier 1 support

Current Status

Earlier this year, the Washington Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the 2021 capital gains tax (a 7% tax on sales of stocks and bonds over \$250,000). However, greedy bad actors guided by self-interest are continuing their work to keep the wealthiest few from paying their fair share, and we want to help stop them.

Proposal

Combat all efforts to claw back progress attained through the capital gains excise tax.

Resources:

Learn about the capital gains tax: bit.ly/ca-cap-gains
Learn about Invest in Washington Now: investwanow.org

Working Families Tax Credit: Monitor

Current Status

The Legislature approved the Working Families Tax Credit in 2021 to address the reality that many families in Washington do not earn enough to keep pace with increased costs for essentials like health care, child care, and housing. Applications for the tax credit were made available in February 2023, and we want to ensure the continued success of this program.

Proposal

Ensure that implementation provides for ongoing success of the program, building on the nearly 200,000 applications received and \$112.2 million refunded to Washingtonians since February 2023.

Resources:

Learn about the Working Families Tax Credit: workingfamiliescredit.wa.gov
Learn about the Working Families Tax Credit Coalition: wataxcredit.org

Connect with us



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