A Guide for Wyoming’s Early Childhood Stakeholders
Introduction to Advocacy

At Wyoming Kids First, we know that it is imperative for young children to receive quality early childhood experiences in order to succeed in school and in life. But it isn’t enough to know and believe this truth: we all must raise our voices on behalf of young children and families so that policy and practice provide the best for them. This guide will help you speak out as an effective advocate for early childhood issues so that you can help in the effort to inform key audiences and encourage elected officials to support initiatives for young children and families.

What is advocacy?

For many, advocacy is an intimidating concept—a pursuit for the politically active and professional leaders. Wyoming Kids First wants you to know that—whether you are a parent, an early child care and education professional, a health provider, or another community figure who cares about children—you are likely already an early childhood advocate. This guide is designed to demystify advocacy and to help everyone—experts and novices alike—become a more effective early childhood advocate.

Advocacy gives people the opportunity to share information and to express their concerns and priorities in public policy. Though some of the more common examples of advocacy include contacting elected officials or attending a political rally, advocacy takes many forms, including:

- helping children and families receive services;
- sharing information and educating audiences about early childhood issues; and
- telling illustrative stories to build support for young children and families.

Advocacy, then, is any action designed to raise awareness and support for an issue among the general public, elected officials, and other relevant entities.
Introduction to Advocacy

Why should you get involved?
Some people think that they can’t be good advocates because they aren’t experts or leaders in their field or because they are not skilled in politics. Others believe advocacy is futile—that their voice and opinions do not matter either because no one is listening or because other people are already sending the message or doing the work. We are here to debunk these misconceptions!

Wyoming Kids First wants you to know that your voice is important. Each advocate has the ability to share information with others about early childhood issues: the more people advocating for early childhood, the more informed our communities are, and the more likely we, as a society, will implement policies and practices that support children and families. That is, the larger the group, the louder the message, and the bigger the impact!

History is full of ordinary people like you who advocated for new laws that improved the lives of thousands of people. Every person can make an impact. We live in a democracy where everyone has the right to advocate to public officials and encourage them to make laws and set policies that support a given cause. Policymakers listen to their constituents, but first we have to share our opinions with them!

Speaking and acting on behalf of a cause is crucial to moving the cause forward. And in Wyoming—the country’s least populous state—we have a unique opportunity to have our voice be heard louder and clearer than in other places. Nationally, Wyoming has the highest “vote power” or the fewest people per electoral vote: one Wyoming voter has roughly the same vote power as four New York voters on national issues. On a state level as well, each person’s opinion and voice carries greater weight than more populated areas. For example, a Wyoming legislator who receives ten messages from constituents on a particular issue is more likely to heed the matter than a New York legislator to whom ten emails would not signal a trend in the same manner. So, speak and act on behalf of children knowing that everything you do is important and will further the cause!
Contacting Elected Officials

**General Tips**

- Communicate regularly with elected officials about early childhood issues. These communications should be a part of an ongoing relationship.
- Elected officials care about issues that affect those who live in the areas they represent. Immediately identify yourself as a constituent in communications.
- Encourage colleagues and friends to communicate with elected officials. Several communications on a specific topic will draw attention to that issue.
- Always thank your legislator for their time and especially if they support your issue.
- Explain your connection(s) to young children (i.e., family member, provider, K-12 professional, community member, etc.) and how the issue impacts your capacity to support children.
- You know more about early childhood issues than many elected officials. Do your homework so that you can share relevant information and position yourself as an information resource.
- Share local stories about children and families that demonstrate early childhood needs and/or successes. Describe gaps in your community’s early childhood system and how new policies could improve outcomes. Share how your community is taking collective action for its children and families and how policy could further support this work.
- You can disagree without being disagreeable! Your role is to inform. Use kindness, powerful anecdotes, and facts to promote your position.
- Formulate a concise, persuasive argument that can be easily communicated with a busy official. Include a call to action: specify what action or voting behavior you hope to see.

**Phone Calls**

- Keep phone calls to five minutes
- Practice your message so that you feel comfortable delivering your message when it counts.

**Emails**

- Use the subject to convey the main point of your message. Consider a subject line like “Constituent Urges YES HB81,” or “Constituent Favors HB81.”

**Letters**

- Keep written correspondence to one page
- Personalize your letter: never send a carbon copy or a multiple-produced letter.

**Personal Contact/Meeting**

- Be prompt and respect agreed upon time frame.
- Present yourself professionally in behavior and personal appearance. Remember: you are representing your organization and the entire field.
- Limit your group to not more than three people.

One of the wonderful things about Wyoming is the accessibility of our elected officials: take advantage of this opportunity! Wyoming’s elected officials are known members in our communities who you can run into and with whom you can have face-to-face conversations. Building relationships with elected officials and policymakers through regular informative conversations is a great way to increase their support on children’s issues.
Sample Phone Call

- Hello, I am (your name) from (wherever you live), a constituent in your district.
- I am calling to talk to you about the importance of early childhood and how Wyoming should invest in its most precious resource: young children!
- I ask that you support (identify specific policy, program, or legislation) to coordinate early childhood among state agencies and allocate grant funding to support community-level early childhood work.
- 90% of a child’s brain develops during the first five years. Children who aren’t exposed to quality experiences risk developmental delays and deficiencies: they simply do not get the opportunity to build the foundation they need for later learning and success.
- As a mother and kindergarten teacher, I know from experience that we need to increase opportunities for all young children to engage in quality early experiences so that they are prepared cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally when they enter school. Doing so will help level the playing field between different socioeconomic classes and help position all young children to succeed in school and in life.
- Insert an anecdote that supports your cause.
- I hope that you vote yes for legislation that supports and invests in early childhood.
- Thank you for your hard work.

Sample Letter/Email

For emails, remember to include a subject such as “Constituent Urges YES HB81.”

Dear Legislator ________,

Wyoming must invest early childhood to secure our young children’s and our state’s future success. As a constituent in your district, I ask that you support (identify specific policy, program, or legislation) to coordinate early childhood among state agencies and allocate grant funding to support community-level early childhood work.

Decades of research confirm the importance of a child’s first five years—90% of a child’s brain develops during this early window—in laying the groundwork for future learning. Children who aren’t exposed to quality early experiences risk developmental delays and deficiencies because they simply do not get the opportunity to build a strong foundation. Economists, business leaders, and researchers agree that high-quality early childhood experiences are among the smartest public investments we can make. Yet, less than 10% of the nation’s public spending in education is for young children.

My early learning center (name of center) serves XX children. We collaborate closely with local kindergarten teachers to ensure we are preparing children to succeed when they start school. However, there are approximately XX unserved children in our community that due to lack of funding, information, and opportunity start school already behind each year. I hope that you vote yes for legislation that supports and invests in early childhood so that we can level the playing field for all children.

Thank you for your hard work.
**Wyoming State Legislature**
The Wyoming State Legislature is a bicameral structure (meaning it has two branches) consisting of a 60-member House of Representatives and a 30-member Senate. The Legislature is responsible for enacting, amending, or repealing laws; passing resolutions; adopting appropriation bills; and conducting inquiries on proposed legislation. The Wyoming Senate can confirm or reject gubernatorial appointments to the state cabinet, commissions, boards, or justices to the Wyoming Supreme Court.

**United States Congress**
The United States Congress is also a bicameral structure comprised of senators and representatives from the nation’s 50 states. The Senate has 100 senators: two from each state who are elected for six-year terms. The House of Representatives has 435 members—each elected for two years from districts proportionally representing the population of each state. Wyoming is currently one of seven states with one representative.

**Voting & Elections**
Another important way to ensure initiatives for young children and families are prioritized is to participate in the governmental process by voting on election day. In the months leading up to an election, attend local political events to learn more about candidates’ positions on early childhood issues. Find out which candidates will support initiatives for young children and families and support that candidate.
**How a Bill Becomes a Wyoming Law**

- **Draft**: Bill drafted by Legislative Service Office (LSO), as requested by legislator.

- **Introduction**: Introduced in Senate or House. Title read. Speaker or President assigns bill to Standing Committee.

- **Committee Hearing**: Committee agenda is usually posted in advance, or announced on floor that committee will meet immediately upon adjournment.

- **Re-Referral**: Bill can be referred to a second Committee for action (i.e., bills requiring funding sent to Appropriations Committee).

- **General File (First Reading)**: Committee of the Whole debates and amends. Division called with voice vote or standing vote.

- **Second Reading**: Debate and amendments: voice vote or division called with standing vote.

- **Governor**: The Governor, with legal assistance, reviews the bill and either signs, vetoes, or allows the bill to become law without his signature.

- **Continuing Action**: If the second house passes the bill without amendments, it is signed by the Senate President and House Speaker and sent to the Governor for action.

- **Second House**: Bills which pass are engrossed with amendments and sent to the second house. A bill in the second house follows the same procedure outlined above.

- **Third Reading**: Debate, amendments, and vote.

- **Commentary**: If the second house passes the bill in an amended form, the bill is sent back to the house of origin for a recorded vote. If the house of origin concurs, the bill is signed and sent to the Governor. If the house of origin does not concur, three conferees from each house are appointed. The conference committee report is first voted on in the house of origin. If the house of origin does not concur, both houses appoint a second conference committee, and this process is followed until both houses vote to concur, or the bill dies in conference committee.
How a Bill Becomes a Federal Law

Legislation is introduced by a legislator (a senator or representative) in his or her chamber and given a reference number (i.e., House Bill 24 or HB0024).

The bill is passed to the relevant committee(s) within the chamber of introduction.

The committee(s) hold hearings and may assign the bill to subcommittees.

The committee(s) votes on the bill, and if passed by a majority it then moves to the full chamber.

The bill is heard and debated in the chamber and may be put up for a vote.

Once the bill has passed a majority vote in both chambers, it moves to the executive office to be signed into law by the governor or president.
Early Childhood Statistics

The Importance of the First 5 Years

- More than 85% of children’s brains – their personalities and their intellects – develop before age five.[1]
- Children who live in families with lower income and less parent education begin to score lower on standardized developmental tests as early as 18 months, and the differences typically increase into the school-age years.[2]
- Formal assessments of language development, for example, have shown that young children who grow up in homes with high incomes and high parent education levels have more than twice the expressive vocabulary at age three compared to children raised in homes characterized by low socioeconomic status.[3]
- Toxic stress can lead to difficulties in learning and memory, as well as health-damaging behaviors and later adult lifestyles that undermine well-being over time.[4]
- Science has shown that toxic stress in early childhood can result in a lifetime of greater susceptibility to physical illnesses (such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity, diabetes, and stroke) as well as mental health problems (such as depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse).[5]
- Toxic stress in early childhood is associated with disruptive effects on the nervous system and stress hormone regulatory systems that can damage developing brain architecture and chemistry and lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.[6]

Connecting the dots between a strong start and future success!
Early Childhood Statistics

The Economic Argument

- Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman found that investments in early childhood produce the highest return on the dollar compared to other investments in human capital like higher education and job training.[7]
- If we ensure that every child has quality early learning experiences that prepare them for success in school and in life, we generate short- and long-term returns to taxpayers, including:
  - Savings in public education remedial programs of up to $3,700 per child from kindergarten to graduation; [8]
  - Reductions in special education placements of nearly 50 percent through second grade; [9]
  - Decreases in grade repetition of as much as 33 percent through eighth grade; [10] and
  - Savings from crime-related costs of between $2 and $11 per dollar invested in early childhood. [11]
- Children who experience healthy early childhood growth and development are more likely to graduate from high school and college, and therefore are more likely to have the skills that contribute to a competitive workforce. [9]
- The cost of not graduating from high school is great: non-graduates are not as competitive for jobs and make thousands of dollars less per year than their peers who did graduate. Wyoming’s graduating class of 2009 was almost 2000 students short—and the lost lifetime earnings for this class of dropouts alone totals almost $519 million. [10]
Early Childhood Statistics

Sources


