



## **2023 Children’s Legislative Agenda**

In keeping with the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy’s (OICA) stated mission of “Creating awareness, taking action, and supporting policy to improve the health, safety, and well-being of Oklahoma’s children,” the Children’s Legislative Agenda for 2023 is respectfully submitted. This document highlights the deliberations held during the 2022 Fall Forum with assembled advocates from across Oklahoma, and with review by the 2022 OICA Board of Directors regarding policy solutions deemed essential to help young Oklahomans thrive and succeed as they grow older. These recommendations are presented to our state legislators and other policymakers as recommendations to pursue over 2023 and in the 2nd Session of the 59th Oklahoma Legislature.

### **Tax Reform & Fiscal Policy**

In the area of Tax Reform and Fiscal Policy, OICA continues advocating to ensure tax and fiscal policies benefit Oklahoma’s families. Policies ranging from tax credits for families and housing developers will be among the initiatives pursued, along with the following recommendations. To improve families’ fiscal well-being, the attendees of the 2022 Fall Forum and OICA Board suggest the following pathways.

- Support policies that expand the Sales Tax Relief Credit, which is an income tax credit that provides a rebate of \$40 per household member to households based on income, age, ability, and family structure.
- Reform the state's tax system to be less regressive to ensure fairness for taxpayers at all income levels, which can be done by: adjusting income tax rates; including additional expansions to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the Child Care Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit; and repealing the state's grocery sales tax in a way that does not create fiscal problems for cities and towns.
- Create more affordable housing opportunities for low-income families, such as expanding tax credits to housing developers and incentivize property owners to accept housing vouchers.

### **Child Well-Being**

In the area of Child Well-Being, OICA continues advocating policies that ensure all the state's children have prospects to be as healthy as possible. OICA supports access to assistance programs for children, along with interventions to help justice-involved youth. To improve children's overall well-being, the attendees of the 2022 Fall Forum and OICA Board suggest the following pathways.

- Increase the number of judges participating in the Court Improvement Program to enhance the court's role in achieving stable, permanent homes for children in foster care.
- Seek policies that reduce barriers to children receiving mental health services.
- Support policies that utilize risk assessment screening tools approved by the Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA).
- Increase the number of Community Intervention Centers in order to connect children and families to services.
- Improve access to wraparound services, such as an increase in funding for home visitation programs.

- Increase statewide access to Handle with Care.
- Support policies that increase access to high quality, affordable child care across the state.
- Improve the safety of schools with appropriately trained personnel, which includes proper mental health resources, and seek policies that reduce arrests among students.
- Seek policies that expand resources for diversion programs for youth and families.
- Improve the safety of children while in motor vehicles by: prohibiting youth drivers from operating electronic devices while the vehicle is moving; requiring minors to wear seat belts; and providing parental waivers for students who are in a student driver's education vehicle.

### **Economy (Workforce & Labor Issues)**

OICA will further promote advocacy to better Economy, Workforce, and Labor Issues for Oklahoma Families. Policies ranging from ensuring parents have job opportunities to access to quality, affordable child care will be among the initiatives pursued, along with the following recommendations.

- Establish relationships between municipalities, career technology centers, and child care centers to support students and employees with children.
- Provide incentives for child care centers to extend their hours and days of operation for nontraditional working hours.
- Support policies that revise the bail system to ensure low risk, low income individuals are not incarcerated while waiting for their court date and allow reforms for non-violent, no-victim crimes.
- Invest in workforce development, such as providing incentives for jobs within child welfare, education, medical care areas, and career readiness.

- Maximize resources provided by the federal and state government to allow for wage increases to keep up with the rising cost of inflation.
- Support policies that protect children while supporting a fair criminal justice system and reduce reliance on fees and fines to pay for government services.
- Allow people who are incarcerated improved access to quality educational opportunities to provide greater opportunities for jobs once released, and increase counseling resources to help reduce recidivism.
- Reduce the number of licensure requirements for child care and elder care workers so long as safety is not lessened.
- Invest in career readiness programs, like career technology centers, in order to reduce long waiting lists to access these programs.
- Support policies that improve feeder programs, such as Certified Nursing Assistant to Licensed Practical Nurse, along with skilled labor training programs across the state.
- Raise the salaries of teachers, nurses and other careers facing shortages who are paid through state funding mechanisms.
- Seek policies to reduce regulatory barriers presently impeding job creation without harming delivery of service.
- Create incentives for Oklahoma college graduates in education who elect to remain and teach in Oklahoma classrooms.
- Review low-income grant systems which the state can match with federal funds.
- Increase government transparency on how the state should conduct business.
- Seek policies that support funding for SQ 781.

## **Health & Medicaid**

In the area of Health and Medicaid, OICA continues advocating for health policies that benefit Oklahoma's families. Issues ranging from affordable, accessible healthcare to addressing social determinants of health of diverse communities, along with the

following recommendations. To improve the health of Oklahoma's children and families, the attendees of the 2022 Fall Forum and OICA Board suggest the following pathways.

- Improve the quality of health for rural, urban, minority, and diverse communities by making health insurance and resources more affordable and accessible.
- Increase the number of qualified healthcare staff in needed areas.
- Remove unnecessary barriers to health care and make basic services mobile in order to serve hard to reach communities.
- Support policies and investments that encourage preventive services for children and families.
- Seek policies that best serve children with developmental disabilities in a timely manner.
- Support policies that improve quality of life needs for at-risk youth, such as affordable extracurricular activities, school meals, job training incentives, and the Double Up Oklahoma program.
- Improve social determinants of health, such as improving access to public transportation systems within cities and towns, so people can access healthcare resources.