



Maine Children's Alliance Policy Priorities for 2021

The Maine Children's Alliance is a nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization that for over 25 years has advocated for sound public policies to improve the lives of Maine's children, youth, and families. As we look toward the new legislative session and a challenging biennial budget, we are committed to elevating the voice of Maine children and families who, perhaps now more than ever, are counting on state leaders and policymakers to take action.

The COVID-19 public health crisis and resulting economic crisis have highlighted the inequities in systems that were not serving the needs of all children and families. This moment provides us with the opportunity to rebuild better systems of health, education, housing, and employment, centered in equity and focused on better serving the children and families who depend on them to thrive.

We urge decisionmakers to view all efforts to legislate or appropriate through a race equity lens, to reduce disparities and provide equal opportunity for all Mainers.

Pandemic impact and the need for relief

While the economy is expected to move to recovery in 2021, many Maine children and families continue to experience immediate hardship from the unprecedented circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic.

We encourage policymakers and administrators to prioritize essential relief for families who are struggling to meet basic needs through this ongoing crisis.

The supportive systems of child care and education must be adequately funded to meet the increased academic, emotional, and mental health needs of children during these challenging times.

Early Care and Education

All families should have the resources, opportunities, and support necessary to provide our youngest children with the nurturing relationships and environments necessary to establish a strong, healthy foundation and meet their full potential. To achieve this goal, lawmakers should prioritize:

- 1) Increasing the number of children in high-quality early care and education settings, by growing early learning community-based partnership models that support the needs of parents, providers, and young children.

- 2) Improving the screening, identification, and coordination of early intervention services for our youngest children, so parents and providers can respond early and effectively when there are developmental concerns for children.

An Act To Create an Early Care and Education Program To Support Children's Healthy Development and School Success, President Troy Jackson

Health, Safety & Well-Being

Setting up a child for a healthy future starts with a foundation of good maternal and infant health, affordable comprehensive child health care coverage, and a safe, stable family and home. To provide this, policymakers should prioritize:

- 1) Increasing the number of Maine children who have health insurance coverage, through improved outreach efforts on low-cost options and expansion of eligibility, to ensure more children can get the care they need.

An Act To Provide Maine Children Access to Affordable Health Care, Senator Anne Carney

- 2) Improving outreach and engagement with families in contact with the child welfare system, with an emphasis on prevention-focused supportive services and resources that give families the best opportunities to prevent crisis and provide a safe home environment for their children.

An Act To Strengthen Supports for Families and Children through the Development and Implementation of a Prevention and Early Intervention Program, Representative Colleen Madigan

Family Economic & Food Security

When families have opportunities to be successful and meet their basic needs, children thrive, and so does our shared economy. Maine should ensure all families have the resources and are supported by essential systems and structures to reduce hardship and provide families with the ability to thrive. To protect family economic security, decisionmakers should prioritize efforts to:

- Expand affordable housing - *An Act To Comprehensively Address Homelessness and Affordable Housing in Maine, Representative Victoria Morales*
- Provide free school meals - *An Act To Address Student Hunger through a Universal Free School Meals Program, President Troy Jackson*
- Ensure paid family leave - *An Act Regarding Paid Family Medical Leave, Senator Matthea Daughtry*

- Improve access to family-centered support programs - *An Act To Protect Children from Extreme Poverty by Preserving Children's Access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Benefits*, Representative Michelle Meyer

Investment in Children

We urge policymakers to invest in a state budget that recognizes and responds to the unique challenges of the moment, prioritizes the important role that children and families play in our state, and acknowledges ongoing racial inequities that must be addressed.

Children live in families, families live in communities, and communities make up our great state – each is dependent on the other to achieve shared success. Together, we can create an economy that reflects our values, provides healthy futures for our children, and offers greater opportunity for all.