

# Virginia Parent Voices Matter!!

## Creating a Parent Network



In too many communities, child care is hard to find, hard to afford, and too often – of questionable quality. Parents, as the primary consumer of child care, are the most important voice to be heard.

### Parents as Advocates

The reality of today's economy is that parents are busy juggling work and family. Parents of young children (as well as elementary school-age children) need child care in order to work. In Virginia about 400,000 children under age 6 have working parents. Another 490,000 children ages 6-12 have working parents.

The affordability and quality of child care vary by state. For example, state legislatures enact child care licensing legislation which guides the licensing process. And, state legislatures enact budgets that include funding for child care subsidies – funding that helps low wage families afford the cost of child care.

Because parents are the chief consumers of child care, policymakers need to hear from parents about the challenges they face and the expectations they have of licensed care (e.g., that licensed care requires a background check and training for child care providers and that child care settings will promote the healthy development of children while parents work).



### Starting a Parent Network

Together, parents can make a difference. Come up with a list of ways that parents can carry a message to policymakers – easy activities that do not take much time!

**Activity List.** For example, sending letters, postcards, emails, signing an on-line petition, posting on Facebook, sending out tweets about the importance of quality, affordable child care, or sending a letter to the editor, meeting with a state legislator, participating in a rally or Capitol Day, inviting a policymaker to a child care program, etc.).

**Form a Steering Committee.** Being part of a network means participating in a group with people who feel strongly about an issue like you do. Share the list of activities with a small steering group and see if they have additional suggestions for the network (e.g., handing out flyers at Back-to-School night, engaging the PTA in supporting quality child care, etc.).

**Collect Parent Stories.** Policymakers look to data to help inform their decisions. But, they also are informed by stories that help paint a picture that illustrates why an issue needs to be addressed. Match the stories with policy recommendations (i.e., don't just complain, offer constructive ways to address the challenge). For example,

- **Affordability:** If child care affordability is a challenge in your community, collect stories that help illustrate the challenge and then recommend ways that policymakers can address the challenge.
- **Accessibility:** If child care is hard to find in your community (or a type of child care is hard to find such as licensed care or infant & toddler care), collect stories that help

illustrate the challenge and then recommend ways that policymakers can address the challenge.

- **Quality:** If quality child care is hard to find in your community, collect stories that help illustrate the challenges families face.
- **Health & Safety:** All parents want their children to be safe in child care while they work. If a tragedy has occurred in your community, let your policymakers know about it – particularly if the tragedy could have been prevented with child care provider training or licensing oversight.

## Growing the Network

Once you have a list of activities and a steering committee, it's time to enlist parents to become part of the network. As Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, you interact with parents daily. Tell parents about the network. Ask them if they want to join – no cost, but a chance to make a difference for all children!

Find parents by posting on Facebook, sending tweets, create a parent blog, send out emails, create a parent e-newsletter, etc.

Invite child care program directors to join with you and to ask their parents to join the network. Work with the PTA at your local elementary school.

The bottom line is that there are many ways to attract parents to your network, brainstorm with your steering committee and see what ideas you can develop.

## Media Attention

Once you have a steering group, a list of activities, and start your network, let your local media sources know what you are doing.

Explain the goal and invite the media to meet with a parent group. Outline the challenges you want to address and let the media know what recommendations you have to address the child care challenges in your community.

Keep your media sources in the loop when you plan a meeting with a state policymaker, invite a state policymaker to a child care program, or plan a Capitol Day to advocate for stronger quality child care and more funding for child care assistance.

## Handouts and Flyers

Don't leave the guesswork about the goals of your parent network to chance. Work with parents to develop a one pager that highlights each parent's story. Or, if you have several stories under one category (e.g., affordability), write a short introductory paragraph about the issue, highlight 3 parent stories on the same page, and then list policy recommendations.

Limit your parent handout to one page that is easily understandable.

## Take Action!

Make sure all your parents know about your [online action center](#). And, ask your parents to share a link to the action center, <http://bit.ly/WbLcjF>, with all of their friends. If every parent can get several friends to take action, and those friends can get friends to take action, your network will grow and raise visibility throughout your community or state!



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