



# ACNJ's Summer Advocacy Institute

## Advocacy Toolkit

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## Share Your Story: Some Examples

One of the most effective ways of advocating is to share your story! Stories put a face to the problem and help make the issue personal. Your story can be shared in emails and phone calls to your representatives and on social media.

You can practice sharing your story by writing it out below. Here are some tips for sharing your story:

- Start out by saying your relation to infants and toddlers. Are you a parent, provider, or advocate?
- Describe a challenge you have experienced or have seen others experience.
- Suggest a solution to the problem you have identified.
- Develop different versions of your story. You can create both a short and longer story to use depending on your advocacy strategy.

Below are some examples of personal stories:

### Child Care Subsidies

Long version:

I am a parent of a one-year old and I have struggled to afford child care. My husband and I both work and we qualify for child care subsidies. Even though we receive a child care subsidy, it's still not enough to cover the cost of infant care so we have to make payments every week to the center. Most of my paychecks are going towards paying for child care and my husband and I are struggling to make ends meet. Recently, we have discussed if I should quit my job. When we worked out the numbers, we realized that it would be cheaper for me to stay at home with the baby than to keep working and paying for child care. But, I really love my job and I'm worried it will be hard to find a job again once our son starts elementary school. The child care subsidy reimbursement rate needs to be raised for infant care so that families like mine can work and afford child care.

Short version:

I am a parent of a one-year old and I have struggled to afford child care. My husband and I both work and we receive child care subsidies but it is not enough to cover the whole cost of infant care because the current subsidy reimbursement rate does not cover the full cost of infant care so we have to pay the difference. Most of my paycheck is going to child care and I may have to quit my job and stay home with the baby because we can no longer afford to pay the additional fees. The child care subsidy reimbursement rate needs to be raised for infant care so that families like mine can continue to work.

### Quality Child Care

Long version:

I am a parent of an 8 month-old and I have struggled to find quality child care for my baby. While there are seven child care centers in the town where I live, only three of them serve babies. I visited all three centers when I was deciding where to send my baby. One of the centers I visited did not seem like a safe place for my baby. When the director was showing me around, we walked into a room and I noticed a

baby strapped to a high chair in the corner with no one watching him. I decided not to send my baby there. The second center I visited was in an area that has a high crime rate and drug dealers on the corner. While the center was nice, I didn't feel comfortable sending my baby there. The last center I visited was great and I really loved it. But when I asked about their hours, they told me they're only open from 8:30am to 6pm. My husband and I both work long hours and we need to be able to drop our baby off at 8 am and pick her up at 6:30 pm. We thought about hiring a babysitter but we just can't afford another expense right now. We ended up sending her to the center in the unsafe neighborhood because their hours worked better for us. Every day I'm worried that something will happen to my baby. I wish we had more options, and good options, to choose from so that we could feel safe sending our baby to child care every day.

Short version:

I am the parent of an 8 month old and have struggled to find quality child care for my baby. Only three out of seven centers in my town serve babies. I visited all of them but only one I felt was safe for my baby but they did not offer the hours we needed since my husband and I both work long hours. We chose to send our daughter to the center in an unsafe neighborhood and I worry about her every day. We need more high quality centers that meet families' needs so that more families can feel their babies are safe.

### **Lack of Child Care**

Long version:

I am the parent of a 5 week-old and have struggled to find child care for my baby. I am a single mother and I was able to take six weeks of maternity leave after having my baby. When my baby was just a week old I started looking for a child care center for when I go back to work. There's only one child care center in my town that will provide care for infants but they said they do not have any available spaces and that I should have reserved a spot months ago! I have been looking in other areas near my home but the centers are all too far away. I have thought about getting a babysitter but I would feel more comfortable sending my baby to a licensed child care center. I am supposed to go back to work in a week and I still have not found a child care center for my baby. There needs to be more child care centers that serve infants so that parents can work.

Short version:

I am the parent of a 5 week-old and have struggled to find child care for my baby. I am a single mother and I have taken maternity leave after giving birth. I have been looking for child care but have not been able to find a child care center that will take my baby and I have to go back to work in one week! There needs to be more child care centers that serve infants so that parents can work.

### **Child Care Providers**

Long version:

I am the Director of Playtime Nursery School in Newark. We used to serve babies as young as 6 weeks old but had to stop last year because of the costs. Infants are more expensive to care for because of the lower teacher-to-child ratio. While we accept subsidies, they don't cover the full cost of caring for babies so we had to ask parents to contribute money. Many of our families couldn't afford to pay and so we

had to stop serving babies because our center could not afford to provide the quality care they deserve without charging an additional fee. Now we only serve children 18 months and older. Many parents who send their older children to us struggle because they have a baby and can't send them to the same center. We would like to serve babies but just can't afford to. The subsidy rate needs to be increased so that I, and centers like mine, can provide quality care for babies.

Short version:

I am the Director of Playtime Nursery School in Newark. We used to serve babies but had to stop because it became too costly for us and our families. Babies are more expensive to care for because of the lower teach-to-child ratio, but the child care subsidy rate does not fully cover the high cost of care. The subsidy rate needs to be increased so that I, and centers like mine, can provide quality care for babies.

**Now it's your turn! Let's start with the basics:**

Are you a parent, provider, or other? \_\_\_\_\_

How old is your child/the children you serve? \_\_\_\_\_

What is a challenge you've experienced? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is a solution to the problem? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now write out the long version of your story:

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Now write out the short version of your story. Take what you wrote, and sum it up in a few sentences:

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### Letter/Email To Increase State Subsidy Rate

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I live in \_\_\_\_\_TOWN\_\_\_\_\_ and am a single parent of a 2-year-old little girl. I work full-time and am eligible for a child care subsidy but have nowhere to use it as there are no child care centers in my community that accept subsidy payments for a child my daughter's age. After speaking to several child care center directors, they explained that the subsidy rate for infants is very low and it became too costly for them to provide care to infants, leaving many families, like mine, in a very difficult situation.

I want to provide for my daughter but making sure that she is in a safe, nurturing environment is very important. The current subsidy rate makes it very difficult for me to find such an environment for her. I urge you to make children and families a higher state priority and support an increase to the infant child care subsidy rate. Please tell Senator/Assemblyman XXX that I urge him to make children and families a higher state priority and support an increase to the infant child care subsidy rate.

Sincerely,

NAME  
ADDRESS  
PHONE  
EMAIL

### Letter/Email for Increased Federal Funds

Dear Congressman XX:

I live in \_\_\_\_\_TOWN\_\_\_\_\_ and am a single parent of a 2-year-old little girl. I work full-time and am eligible for a child care subsidy.

As the House of Representatives considers its funding priorities, I urge you to support maintaining recent funding levels to the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). My daughter and thousands of other children benefit from these federal dollars so that I, and parents like me, can go to work knowing that their children are in safe and nurturing environments. For working parents, we consider using these federal dollars to help us care for our children, as money well-spent.

Thank you for your continued leadership and should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

NAME  
ADDRESS  
PHONE  
EMAIL

### **Telephone Call to State Legislator**

Good morning,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I live in \_\_\_\_\_TOWN\_\_\_\_\_. I am a single parent of a 2-year-old little girl. I work full-time and am eligible for a child care subsidy. Because so few child care providers accept subsidies for children my daughter's age because the state rate is so low, I have very few options for child care. I urge you to make children and families a higher state priority and support an increase to the infant child care subsidy rate. Please tell Senator/Assemblyman XXX that I urge him to make children and families a higher state priority and support an increase to the infant child care subsidy rate.

### **Telephone Call to Member of Congress**

Good morning,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I live in \_\_\_\_\_TOWN\_\_\_\_\_. I am a single parent of a 2-year-old little girl. I work full-time and am eligible for a child care subsidy.

As the House of Representatives considers its funding priorities, I urge Congressman XXX to support maintaining recent funding levels to the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). My daughter and thousands of other children benefit from these federal dollars so that I, and parents like me, can go to work knowing that their children are in safe and nurturing environments. For working parents, we consider using these federal dollars to help us care for our children, as money well-spent.

Thank you.

## Letter to the Editor

### SAMPLE- PARENT

Throughout New Jersey, thousands of parents rely on center-based child care to care for their young children so that they can go to work or school. I am one of those parents. But finding and paying for child care—particularly for infants-- is often beyond a parent’s reach. If you are a low-income working parent eligible for child care assistance, that reach is even harder.

I am eligible for that assistance for my 1-year-old daughter but in my community, (Name THE COMMUNITY), there are only two centers that currently care for babies and neither accept the state “subsidy.” (THIS WOULD CHANGE DEPENDING ON THE COMMUNITY). Center staff explained that they cannot afford to care for our youngest children because the state subsidy rate is so low, and has barely increased in ten years. This has resulted in “child care deserts” in my community and throughout the state.

Like many families in similar situations, I have cobbled together child care for my daughter by relying on family, friends and neighbors. I know that this is not the best option for my child, but right now, it is the only one available. Unfortunately, I know that my situation is not unique.

Rich or poor, all parents want to have a place to send their children that is safe, reliable and affordable. State supports to help low-income families pay for child care must become a higher state priority. Increasing the infant child care subsidy rate will allow those centers to be able to afford to care for infants and give parents, like me, another option.

Childcare is an essential component to every working family. Without addressing the significant issues around child care access, quality and affordability, all other family-driven supports by the state will come up short.

## Letter to the Editor

### SAMPLE-PROVIDER

Throughout New Jersey, thousands of parents rely on child care centers like mine, to care for their young children so that they can go to work or school. In my XX years as a director of (NAME OF CENTER), I have seen that parents are having increased difficulty in finding and paying for child care—particularly for infants. For many, it has become beyond their reach. If you are a low-income working parent eligible for child care assistance, that reach is even harder.

Parents are not alone in their child care struggle. My center has been committed to nurturing and caring for very young children and equally committed to helping low-income families by accepting those families eligible for the state subsidy. Keeping to those commitments have become extremely difficult because the state “subsidy” rate for infants has remained nearly the same for 10 years. Today, the rate for caring for an infant remains at \$33.44 a day, or slightly more than \$4.00 per hour for a 40-hour work week, and \$3.34 per hour for a 50-hour work week. This low funding can only be stretched so far, particularly with normal increases in the cost-of-doing business. This shortfall has compromised staffing and training, increased staff turnover and begun to undermine our ability to meet basic care and safety standards. As a result, many of my colleagues are opting not to care for babies whose families are eligible for a subsidy, because they cannot afford to any longer.



This has a tremendous impact on working families as they have few options and often must cobble together care for their young children. We know how important the first three years of a child's life are to their healthy growth and development and want to provide babies with the high quality early learning environment they need. Providers, like me, are doing their best to meet the needs of children and their families, but something has to give.

State supports to help low-income families pay for child care, particularly for families with infants, is the key to any state supports for working families. Without addressing it, any of those other family-driven supports will come up short.

## Get Social

Use social media to share your story, spread the word to other parents and providers, and engage your representatives. Use the hashtag #ThinkBabies and tag ACNJ!

Here are some tips for effective social media promotion:

- Use pictures whenever possible.
- Tag ACNJ at @acnjforkids, Governor Phil Murphy at @GovMurphy and your legislator whenever possible.
- Share your story to make the posts more personal!

### Sample Social Media Posts

#### Twitter

#childcare for infants is very costly for working families. It has to become a higher state priority NOW. @GovMurphy and #NJLeg for next year #thinkbabies

Quality #childcare for babies costs a lot and families need help – including mine! @GovMurphy and #NJLeg, it's time to #thinkbabies

When babies get what their growing brains need to thrive, they have the best chance for healthy development. @GovMurphy, that's why it's time to #ThinkBabies.

Why #ThinkBabies? @GovMurphy needs to do more to improve access to affordable, quality #childcare for their young children.

When we #ThinkBabies & help parents support their healthy development, we create a better future for us all—higher graduation rates + employment and healthier lives.

#### Facebook

(SHARE YOUR STORY) If you know how hard it is to find affordable, quality #childcare and want state leaders to do more for very young children, join ACNJ in advocating for young children! Share your story here <https://acnj.org/issues/early-learning/right-from-the-start-campaign/story-bank/> and remind Governor Phil Murphy and state lawmakers to #ThinkBabies.

(SHARE YOUR STORY) If you're a parent with a child under 3 and want state leaders to do more for children right from the start, join ACNJ in advocating for young children! Share your story here <https://acnj.org/issues/early-learning/right-from-the-start-campaign/story-bank/> and encourage Governor Phil Murphy and state lawmakers to #ThinkBabies.