



## Children First Action Fund General 2022 Survey Results

The Children First Action Fund is surveying all candidates for Pennsylvania House and Senate to learn more about their views on issues affecting the lives of children. We invite you to learn more by reviewing their responses below; by contacting their campaigns; and by following them on social media. Let me know your views on the importance of ensuring young children in Pennsylvania get the early education supports they need and deserve.

**Name:** Jennifer O'Mara

**Website:** [www.voteomara.com](http://www.voteomara.com)

**Current Job:** State Legislator

**Social Media:** JennOMara4PA

**Campaign Contact Person:** Robert McGarry

**Campaign Contact Cell Phone:** 484-441-3224

**Campaign Contact Email Address:** [jenniferomara4pa@gmail.com](mailto:jenniferomara4pa@gmail.com)

**You are running for election in which district?** HD-165

**Q: What are your views on the benefits, or drawbacks, of allocating additional state funds for high-quality pre-k education?**

A: I have always strongly supported public education- and that includes increased funding for programs to support our youngest learners. Allocating significant resources to high quality early learning is one of the best investments we can make for the future of our state. Doing so will ensure that all children have access to affordable and high-quality early childhood education, not just those at the top. Programs like PKC and HSSAP have been shown to improve outcomes in grade school and beyond, helping to create a fairer Pennsylvania for everyone.

**Q: How important, or unimportant, are increased public resources to expand access and affordability to high-quality child care to working families in your district?**

A: Very important. Working families in my district rely on high-quality child care to ensure they have the opportunity to make ends meet. The effects of the pandemic only made this more challenging for many members of my community. Balancing caring for an infant or toddler and a full-time job has become challenging or impossible for many parents. My top priority as a legislator has always been to support and expand the programs that working families rely on, and through that, to help those families make ends meet and become part of our state's middle class. Increasing public resources with the goal of expanding access to childcare can help do just that.

**Q: Should the wages for child care workers and preschool teachers be commensurate with those of other educators with similar qualifications and experience?**

A: Yes. As a certified teacher, I know the hard work that goes into educating students of all ages. It's crucial that we pay our childcare workers and preschool teachers fairly in order to retain them, giving our teachers the chance to grow as educators and our children the chance to learn in a stable environment. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when workers in all fields are facing burnout, our childcare and Pre-K teachers are no exception. The least we can do is pay them fairly.

**Q: Will you support the expansion of state investment dollars to serve those in your district who can benefit from home visiting?**

A: Yes. If re-elected, I will continue to advocate for these policies in Harrisburg because I believe that home visitation is a win-win for Pennsylvania, both improving outcomes and reducing the costs of

future public assistance. Home visits give families the tools that they need to thrive. They also serve to level the playing field, giving lower-income Pennsylvanian's services that only wealthier families can typically afford.

**Q: In addition to making child care more accessible and affordable, what other policies would you champion to help businesses facing a workforce shortage?**

A: First, I think it's important to think about shortages in our childcare workforce. While ensuring that we have enough qualified childcare workers may fall under the "making child care more accessible and affordable" half of the equation, shortages here can impact the rest of the workforce. I firmly support raising the state subsidy and increasing the amount of reimbursement that childcare facilities are paid for caring for the children of families utilizing the childcare subsidy. As it is, the amount of reimbursement these facilities receive barely covers the cost of caring for a child. Increasing the amount they are reimbursed would allow these facilities to care for more children, hire more qualified childcare workers, and positively impact the rest of the workforce. But keeping child care affordable and accessible is just one piece of the puzzle. It's also necessary to ensure that people can get to work, which means expanding public transportation and ensuring that working families are able to afford gas for their cars. It's also necessary to continue making informed decisions about the ongoing COVID pandemic so that workers feel comfortable secure taking in person jobs despite the possibility of additional surges.

**Q: What other government resources or policies would you consider for families that are struggling with keeping costs, especially child care, under control?**

A: First, I believe it's necessary to raise the state childcare subsidy—and to lower the income threshold for families to qualify. Too many families who need help affording childcare are ineligible for assistance, and increasing the subsidy can only help families who are struggling to make ends meet afford better, more consistent childcare—which will in turn lead to better developmental outcomes for their children. Additionally, while I have always supported raising the minimum wage, the current inflation rate has made it more important than ever to ensure that the wages our workers are earning can keep up with the cost of living in our state. Raising the minimum wage, and tying it to inflation, is one way to do this. I will also be sure to always advocate for a state budget that allocates sufficient funding for public schools and child care, medical assistance programs, and other programs that help working families afford their necessities.

**Q: Which mental health supports are needed most in your district and how will you work to increase access to families that need them?**

A: Mental health has always been a top priority of mine. Having lost my father to suicide at a young age, I know firsthand how important it is for mental health care to be able to reach the people who need it. In my own district, I've heard from students who say that stress at school is on the rise and they don't know how to handle it, and from teachers who are struggling to meet the mental health needs of their classrooms on their limited budgets. None of these issues began with the COVID-19 pandemic, but the anxiety and uncertainty that it provoked have exacerbated these problems. From my position in the state house, I've already been working to address these issues by serving as a member of both the Mental Health Caucus and Statewide Suicide Prevention Task Force, as well as by pushing for budgets that get our teachers the funds they need to help their students. I've also always advocated for expanded access to mental health care, and ensuring that all Pennsylvanians are able to afford the care that they need, when they need it. If I am re-elected, I will be proud to continue this fight.

**Q: Would you support the creation of a refundable State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)?**

**Why/why not?**

A: Yes. A State EITC would provide tangible benefits to working families across the Commonwealth, and providing that kind of immediate assistance is always a goal of mine as a legislator. The positive impact such a policy would have on our state's children and its larger economy far offsets any administrative costs. I am particularly excited about the projection suggesting that a state EITC would help boost educational attainment. We know that the first five years of a child's life are the most pivotal for development, and by helping low income families and families of color access high quality education early in their children's lives a statewide EITC could go a long way to making educational outcomes in our state more equitable. Access to high quality education during a child's earliest years will also help save the state money on social services down the line—another reason to support such a policy. The positive effects an EITC could have on mental health and suicide rates in our state also deeply appeal to me, as someone who has always made expanding access to mental health care one of my key priorities as a legislator. In short, the benefits of an EITC are immense, and I would be proud to support one here in Pennsylvania.

**Q: What would you do, if elected, to expand the access to affordable broadband internet?**

A: I'm proud that I've already had the opportunity to vote in favor of expanding access to broadband during this session. The bill successfully passed, and established the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority to oversee the use of federal aid to expand access to broadband in unserved and underserved corners of the state. I hope to continue building upon that expansion, especially now that we have successfully established a statewide authority to address this problem. As part of that effort, I will advocate for including funding for broadband expansion projects in our state budget and in any relevant infrastructure bills under consideration by the House.