



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: Maria Collett

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You are running for election in which district? Senate District 12

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

A: I strongly support the allocation of additional funds for high-quality pre-k education. Studies have consistently proven that investing in early childhood education has significant and long-lasting positive impacts for children, families and communities. With every budget, I have been a vocal proponent for expanded funding for early childhood education programs. I have also lobbied the administration to protect funding for programs such as the "Education and Retention Awards" and prolong the use of pre-COVID enrollment numbers for purposes of subsidy payments to struggling child care facilities.

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: Increased public resources to expand access to and affordability of high-quality child care are of paramount importance in the 12th District and across our Commonwealth. The widespread lack of access to affordable, quality childcare is a major barrier that keeps countless parents of young children from saving for the future, finding and keeping family-sustaining jobs, and pursuing and completing their education. The COVID crisis has had a disproportionate effect on women. I've been very outspoken in arguing that to fix our economy, we need policies that support women and families, and we need to invest in the infrastructure of care.

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

A: Raising their wage is critical to recruiting and retaining child care workers and preschool teachers. It's shameful that the people who care for our youngest and oldest loved ones are not being fairly compensated for their work. I've been outspoken in calling for our state and federal governments to step up and tackle the systemic problems facing our care infrastructure through policies and investments that recognize its critical importance.

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

A: In-home services and other early interventions have consistently been shown to improve maternal and child health, improve school readiness, promote economic self-sufficiency and reduce abuse and neglect. I saw this firsthand as a Deputy Attorney General in Camden County, NJ, representing the interests of children victimized by abuse and neglect and later as a nurse working in pediatric home health. When families have the supports they need in the home, everyone wins. That's why I am proud to be a co-sponsor of SB 200, legislation that would expand early intervention services for infants and mothers and add postpartum depression to the other at-risk categories that qualify for tracking and care.

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: Our Commonwealth has to prioritize policies that are good for workers and businesses alike, particularly small businesses. As complex as this problem is, there are steps we can take now to bring almost immediate improvements. Improving access to affordable, quality child care is a major one, particularly as women continue to return to work post-COVID at a much slower rate than men. Closing loopholes that offer tax breaks to big corporations while small businesses buckle under one of the highest tax rates in the country is one such step. Passing Sen. Laughlin's and my Paid Family Care Act (SB 580), which would protect employees without costing their employers anything, is another. We must also invest in workforce development, recruitment and retention. My Nursing Workforce Initiative is one model for that and I'm hopeful it will be expanded into other business sectors.

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

A: Most social safety net programs (such as SNAP) are only available to the poorest of poor Pennsylvanians. They fail to reach the majority of the 27 percent of Pennsylvanians the United Way calls "ALICE" (asset-limited, income-constrained, employed) families. To reach these and other financially-insecure families, I strongly support the 2021-2022 policy roadmap laid out by United Way of Pennsylvania: <https://www.uwp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021-2022-Policy-Roadmap-Final.pdf>. In addition to affordable, quality pre-k, its multipronged approach emphasizes direct tax relief, access to healthcare, expanded food programs, and investments in workforce development, affordable housing and broadband.

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: Pennsylvanians need access to more mental health supports. Period. There are many reasons for the need, and even more for why treatment is so lacking and hard to access. Pennsylvania needs to invest more in mental health care across the board. We need to do more to attract, educate, and retain mental health professionals, and offer incentives (such as student loan forgiveness) to work in underserved regions and in the places they are most needed, like schools and residential treatment facilities. The demand for residential treatment beds for adults and children in Pennsylvania is high and growing. I am a proud co-sponsor of SB 1128, which seeks to develop a statewide system to inform providers where available mental health beds are at any given time. I've also been working with local mental health care providers to identify grant opportunities to help them expand their reach. Additionally, we must address the role of insurance providers by enforcing and implementing policies, like the federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, to require them to cover treatment for mental health care.

Q: Would you support the creation of a refundable State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)? Why/why not?

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A: I support the creation of a state EITC. This targeted tax relief will help low- and middle-income families take steps toward long-term financial security. At a time when many Pennsylvanians are grappling with low wages and slow wage growth, coupled with the rising costs of housing, childcare, food, gas, and just about every other basic household expense, a tax credit program to help folks offset expenses could be a game-changer.

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

A: The pandemic clearly highlighted the growing digital divide and the need for access to reliable broadband throughout every corner of our Commonwealth. I was pleased to support HB 2071 (now Act 96) which created a Broadband Development Authority to provide grants for broadband deployment projects to underserved areas. I was (and am) also a strong proponent of President Biden's Infrastructure Innovation & Jobs Act, and am doing my part to make sure the Commonwealth takes full advantage of new funding opportunities like the US Department of Commerce's Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment Program and the Federal Commerce Commission's Affordable Connectivity Program. On a smaller level, my office regularly works with local providers to help connect constituents with free and reduced-cost internet services.