



## 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:** Judith Higgins

**Website:** [judithhiggins.com](http://judithhiggins.com)

**Current Job:** Small business owner, retired educator

**Social Media:** Dr. Judith Higgins

**Campaign Contact Person:** Shane Coolbaugh

**Campaign Contact Cell Phone:** 717-819-5887

**Campaign Contact Email Address:** [JHiggins369@comcast.net](mailto:JHiggins369@comcast.net)

**You are running for election in which district?** Senate District 28

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

A: There are many benefits to allocating additional state funds for high quality Pre-K. Children will have a better chance at the beginning of their academic development by being successful in literacy and numeracy. Having this early success will continue to benefit them for life. This opportunity for a level playing field in education also benefits current, and future, families through the peace of mind that early Pre-K programs, in addition to the establishment of educational development, offer their children are safe and in a healthy social environment.

**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: It would be wonderful if families of newborns had paid maternity leave, but the US is one of two countries in the world that do not have a national policy to support new mothers/families. I believe increased public resources are important and could be very beneficial to working families in so many areas, whether medical, mental, or financial. We "want" families to be self supporting, and to work, but there has to be acknowledgement of the stress of being a new parent, and the support that is needed to keep working. Medically, ensuring that new families have support for caring for new babies is important. This could be incorporated into high quality child care as support for sleeping, nursing and knowing that good resources that could be available. Mental health, for families, is important as stress, sleeplessness, and anxiety are very common. Good quality child care can be a respite and support for new families. Affordability is critical because people need to be able to afford these services and the providers need to be able to support their own families, at the same time.

**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, wages should be commensurate and further education/training should be encouraged and supported. Additionally, wages should also include benefits such as discounted child care, health and wellness benefits, similar to other full time jobs. The third point is that, much like trades training, this needs to be valued in our society. COVID forced a realization that early child care, pre-K education, and teaching are highly important! Not only for working parents, but for society.

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

A: Yes, I will. I believe that there could be a decrease in violence against children and families if these services were more widely available to all parts of the district.

**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: One policy would be to encourage "no fault" paid leave to care for ill children or parents. Employees, if they have paid sick leave, it is a minimal number of days, and, typically, restricted to their own illness. The employer forces the employee to lie, then fires them for taking care of their own child, because child care is not available when the child is ill! Providing a tax credit to employers who are supportive of parents and caretakers will position that employer to be a great place to work and will also potentially help Pennsylvania to be seen as "Family friendly", and a location for new businesses to consider.

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

A: Three big, high cost areas are child care, transportation and healthcare. Expanding child care opportunities through subsidizing on site child care options would help parents. Partner with business to offer employees child care options closer to where people work. This was a benefit offered in Northern VA in the 1990's, and was found to be very beneficial. Also to encourage sick child care services to be available, by employing certified nurses, for example. There are many small employers in Pennsylvania. If there are plans put in place to develop technology centers, or cluster employers, there could be child care opportunities, as well as centralizing transportation hubs, that would be supportive of struggling families. This would address transportation costs and Rabbittransit, in York, has been very proactive in working with employers to get employees to work. The healthcare issue continues to be a legislative quagmire, even though COVID proved that healthcare for all is very doable, and if business and industry redirected the health care monies they are currently spending, this could be reality, and a boon for working families, as well as the retired community.

**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: This is a huge issue, and very complex; COVID just increased the stress level because of the level of death, unknown future, and constant challenges to "facts". There are not enough certified therapists in the area, or probably anywhere, so change needs to occur via action, rather than therapy. When you fail to address the economics of families, there is resulting stress. By creating good paying jobs, there is less stress. When families do not have to worry about food insecurity, there is less stress. When children live in all the tension created by the unknown of COVID, fear of hunger and homelessness, the removal of adults who cannot provide the consistency and stability that makes their life "okay", children suffer. Addressing these issues will help tremendously. Helping students find resiliency, and coping mechanisms will help. Bringing back physical education and other community child oriented, more physical activities, including for teens, that are predictable and consistent, will also help. These are funding needs that are no longer addressed, but I believe truly need to be reinstated.

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

A: Yes, I would support an EITC, but it does not address month to month income issues for families. We saw, during the pandemic, that putting monthly money in the pockets of people, particularly those with children, benefitted many different groups. First, to have poverty as an ongoing problem in the

# children first

## ACTION FUND

wealthiest country in the world is disgraceful. Secondly, the minimum wage of \$7.25 is so insulting to the people of PA; it sends a message of devaluing work, of not even being equitable to the states around us! We need to address the issue of poverty and pay equity in a more aggressive way, in order to address so many issues.

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

A: My opponent is the chair of the Broadband and Technology committee in the Senate. She has not had a meeting since December of 2021. The rural broadband meeting was November of 2021. There are none scheduled for 2022, so far. It is clear to me that this is NOT a priority to the incumbent in the 28th. If we learned nothing else from COVID, the need for universal access to Broadband is critical for education, communications, and the economy. She is not interested in moving our area, or the Commonwealth, into the 21st century. I am already beginning to explore opportunities for addressing this issue and will make this a priority.