

❖ **Ensure the Passage of Historic Quality Child Care Funding - PASSED**

Alabama's children from birth to three and their families are dependent on a safe, accessible, and affordable child care system, and COVID-19 has created tremendous challenges for that system of care. VOICES will advocate at the state level for policies and funding that will support a safe, high quality, and accessible child care system for all Alabama families. VOICES will advocate for the \$17.8 million increase in the Governor's recommended budget for day care which would greatly assist in building a quality child care and education program for children from birth to three, *before* Pre-K and Kindergarten. This investment would not only assist in the education and care of infants and toddlers before Pre-K and Kindergarten, but it would also help Alabama's workforce have access to more affordable, quality child care. Lack of available day care programs was listed as the second reason for fluctuations in the GDP and Labor Market in the Governor's recommended budget.

VOICES is also convening a child care coalition of child care providers, parents, business leaders, philanthropists, advocates, and allied advocacy organizations to focus on the needs of families of young children and the child care system they need. Alabama has built a sustainable, high-quality Pre-K program for four-year-old children that now leads the nation. However, a quality system of care and education is needed for children ages birth to three with working parents.

❖ **Continue Expansion of First Class Pre-K Classrooms - PASSED**

Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program continues lead the nation in four-year-old education and preparation. VOICES supports the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education's request of \$22 million for the next fiscal year. The goal of the First Class Pre-K Program is to provide pre-k to every child who is eligible and elects to attend. A fully supported program would serve 70% of Alabama's four year olds. VOICES looks forward to supporting this pre-k funding and continuing to advocate for funding increases until all of Alabama's four year olds have the option to attend a First Class Pre-K. VOICES also advocates for continued expansion of the home visiting programs that provide critical early learning support for families of young children. Parents serve as the first teachers for children, and these essential programs need continued support to expand their reach.

❖ **Increase Children's Mental Health Services and Training - PASSED**

The Surgeon General has issued an advisory on a youth mental health crisis after COVID-19 created and exacerbated the unprecedented mental health challenges for children and youth in recent history. VOICES supports student mental health services, training, and supports, and serves as a resource to lawmakers to better understand children's brain development and mental health. VOICES supports the initiatives of the Department of Mental Health that specifically address the mental health of Alabama's children and youth. These initiatives include funding to expand the school-based mental health collaborative with the Department of Education, to support the federally funded infant and early childhood mental health collaboration with DECE, to increase for children and adolescent mental health units, and increased funding for regional autisms networks.