

Our Mission

To ensure the well-being of **Alabama's children** through research, public awareness, and advocacy.

POLICY COUNTS: 2018 LEGISLATIVE REPORT



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OUR MISSION

To ensure the well-being of **Alabama's children** through research, public awareness, and advocacy.

ABOUT VOICES FOR ALABAMA'S CHILDREN

VOICES for Alabama's Children, founded in 1992, is a 501(c)(3) statewide nonpartisan organization whose mission is to ensure the well-being of Alabama's children through research, public awareness, and advocacy.

VOICES for Alabama's Children serves as the voice for children at the State Legislature each year, working on policy that benefits all children, birth to graduation. In 1994, VOICES for Alabama's Children published the state's first Alabama Kids Count Data Book, and has continued to annually publish and distribute this important information on child well-being to help shape policy and to help others identify and address issues in their communities.

Graphic Design and art direction by Errol Hylton, Art Director, Typiconica, LLC

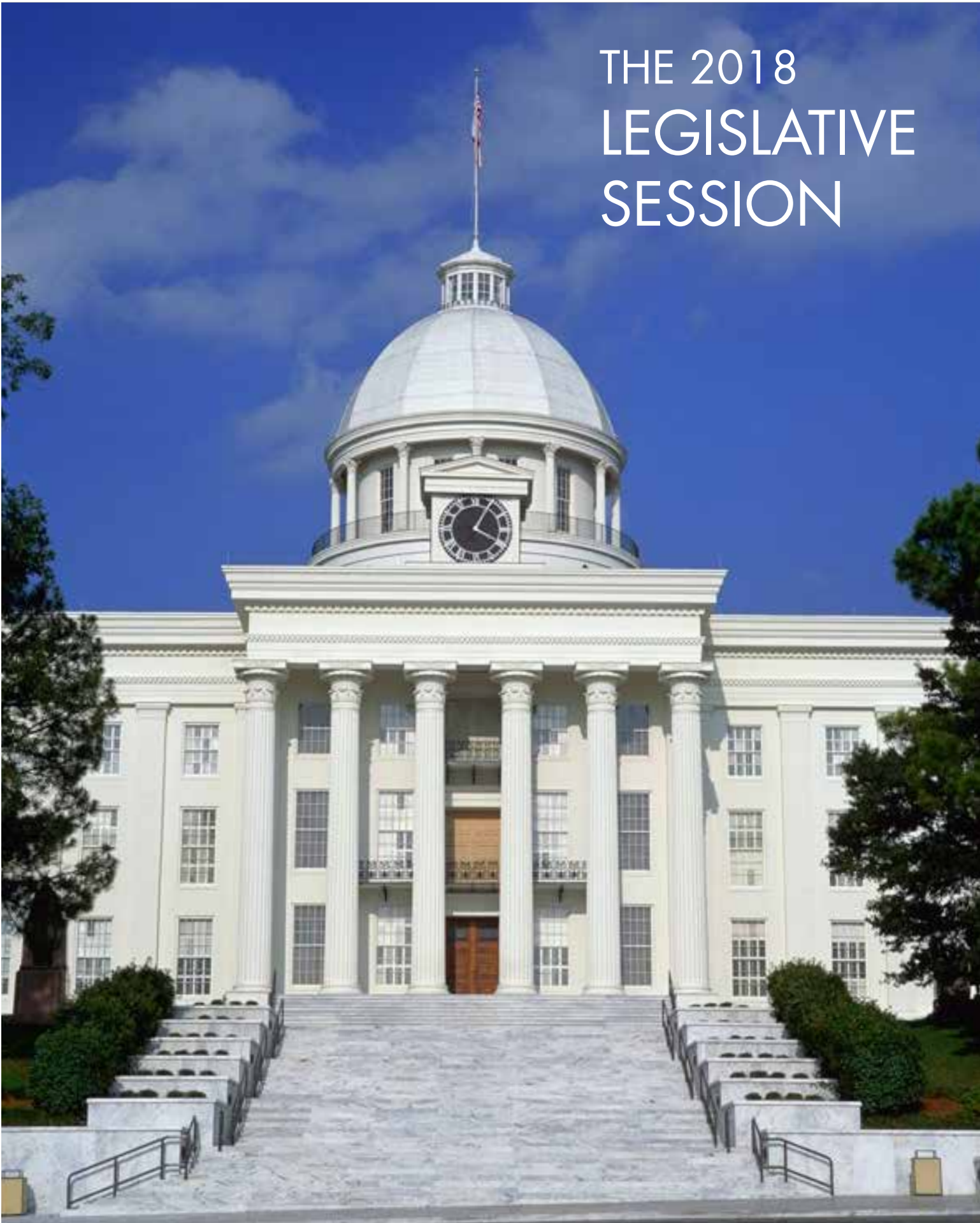
Prepared and published by Rhonda Mann, Interim Executive Director, VOICES for Alabama's Children

POLICY COUNTS: 2018 LEGISLATIVE REPORT



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THE 2018 LEGISLATIVE SESSION





Rhonda Mann, Interim Executive Director,
VOICES for Alabama's Children

A LETTER FROM VOICES...

2018 Key & Educational Policy Priorities:

- *Require Uniform Regulation and Inspection of Child Care*
- *Fully Fund and Operationalize Alabama's Healthy Food Financing Program*
- *Promote Healthy Early Care & Education (ECE) Settings*
- *Expand Funding for Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program*
- *Defend Adequate State Funding for Child-Serving Programs and Services*
- *Eliminate Predatory Lending Practices*

Dear Advocate, The 2018 legislative session, the final year of the current quadrennium, came in on the heels of the New Year beginning January 9, 2018 – the second Tuesday of the year. Rumors told us the Session would be a short one and not to expect much to get accomplished as lawmakers running for re-election would be anxious to hit the campaign trail. Those rumors in some ways proved to be true. However, while we didn't get everything we wanted, children in Alabama still benefitted from the work completed during the 2018 Session.

The debate over child care was once again at the forefront of VOICES for Alabama's Children's 2018 Policy Priorities. Support from media resulted in 70 articles on this issue and urged lawmakers to do the right thing – protect our children. The passage of HB 76 – The Child Care Safety Act, was a first step in bringing more child care providers under industry oversight to ensure the health and safety of our children while in a child care setting.

The 2018 Session included the largest increase in the history of Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program of \$18.5 million bringing the total state investment to \$96 million for the 2018-2019 school year. The Healthy Food Financing Initiative benefitted from an additional \$200,000 for this revolving loan fund that incentivizes food retailers to expand in areas of the state with limited access to healthy food options.

The work on policy priorities is not limited to the length of the legislative session. The work to ensure Alabama's children are a priority happens 365 days a year. Lawmaker and voter education is ongoing and visits within lawmaker's Districts are necessary to form a relationship with elected officials to help you – child advocates – connect with them through meetings, ribbon cuttings and other events.

In 2018, child advocates have an opportunity to take a more active role in lifting up children's issues during this election year. Some thirty candidates are not seeking re-election paving the way for new faces and fresh ideas to enter the race for state office. As child advocates, we will have a great opportunity and responsibility to educate all candidates and voters on why children must be a priority and why investing in our children matters. VOICES' 2018 Voters' Guide provides talking points on some of these issues and questions that can be used at candidate forums. We hope you will use it to turn up the volume as you speak for our children.

On behalf of our Board and staff, thank you for allowing us to be the trusted voice on policy and data research for children since 1992. Doing so alongside warriors like you makes it even more meaningful and possible to not just dream of a better future for our children but to make it a reality.

Yours in advocacy,

Rhonda Mann
Interim Executive Director



Our work on HB 76 is in response to the many children who have been harmed in unregulated child care. **We dedicate the 2018 Legislative Report in memory of Kamden Johnson.**



LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW

VOICES Governmental Affairs Director, Tara Preyer, shares 2017 Alabama Kids Count Data Book with Representative Laura Hall.

On Thursday, April 26, the legislature adjourned sine die after giving final approval to the Education Trust Fund budget. Though many would agree that the 2018 regular legislative session was quite eventful, depending on whom you ask, the question of productivity is hit or miss.

Budgets

The General Fund Budget (GFB) was passed by lawmakers and signed by Governor Kay Ivey allocating \$2.03 billion for the fiscal year that starts October 1, 2018, an increase of \$167 million over the current year's budget. In the GFB, the Department of Corrections will receive \$472 million, an increase of \$56 million. Lawmakers also passed a companion bill that gives prisons a \$30 million supplement to expand mental health services and hire additional correctional officers. The GF Budget includes a 3% cost of living raise to state employees (the first in 10 years). The Department of Mental Health was allocated \$9 million; the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency was given a \$3.2 million increase to hire additional state troopers and Medicaid received the largest portion in the GF, \$755 million, up from \$701 million this year.

The Education Trust Fund Budget (ETF) also passed (on the last day of session) and signed by Governor Ivey allocating \$6.4 billion for the fiscal year that begins October 1, 2018, an increase of \$90 million over the current year's budget. This is the second largest amount the ETF has received in recent years. The ETF Budgets for K-12 schools increased by \$146 million, Universities increased by \$42 million, and Community Colleges increased by \$18 million. First Class Pre-K will receive \$18.5 million, the largest increase in the history of this program which will allow for expansion of the number of classrooms across the state. The ETF will also allocate a 2.5% pay raise to education employees in K-12 and community colleges.

2018 Policy Priorities

VOICES for Alabama's Children kicked off the 2018 Alabama Legislative Session with the release of our 2018 Agenda for Children, detailing our top policy priorities for the year (see page 14). This year our targeted priorities include:

- Require uniform licensing and inspection for all child care programs in Alabama
- Fully fund and operationalize Alabama's Healthy Food Financing program
- Expand state investments in Alabama's First Class Pre-K program
- Ensure adequate state funding for child serving programs and services

We would like to commend the Alabama Legislature for moving the needle on VOICES for Alabama's Children's top priority issues, including:

- ✓ Passage of HB 76 — The Child Care Safety Act, a first step in requiring all child care come under industry oversight of Alabama Department of Human Resources
- ✓ Increase funding by \$18.5 million for Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program
- ✓ \$200,000 in funding for Alabama's Healthy Food Financing Initiative

VOICES thanks members of the Alabama legislature for taking this first step in ensuring a minimum floor of health and safety standards for children in a child care setting, however, this bill falls short of curbing the growth of licensed exempt care. The bill – HB 76 - The Child Care Safety Act – passed the House by a vote of 86-5 with 10 Pass, 1 Abstain; passed the Senate by a vote of 23-4 with 7 Pass. The new law requires child care receiving state or federal funds must be licensed by August 1, 2019. VOICES will continue to educate about the need to remove the exemption from licensure and bring all child care in our state under industry regulations and oversight by the Alabama Department of Human Resources.

AL lawmakers vote to give oversight over faith based daycares

By WSFA 12 News Staff [CONNECT](#)



Alabama has long exempted

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA/AP) - Alabama lawmakers have voted to give the state limited oversight over faith based daycares. The Alabama Senate voted 22-4 on Thursday for the compromise legislation.

Gov. Kay Ivey's press office said she will review the bill before making a decision on signing it into law.

Day care licensing bill passes Alabama House

Updated April 20, 2017 at 6:27 PM; Posted April 20, 2017 at 6:25 PM



Child Care Safety Act passes through State House

By Amalia Kortright
Email the author

Published 5:17 pm Monday, February 5, 2018

On Thursday, Feb. 1, the Alabama House of Representatives passed House Bill 76, which will require religious and nonprofit day care facilities to undergo regular inspections by the state. The bill passed almost unanimously, with 86 votes in its favor, five votes against it and one representative abstaining.

Ivey signs day care bill in ceremonial signing

Published 2 month ago on Feb. 22, 2018
By Brandon Mowbray



Latest [POPULAR](#)

Gov. Kay Ivey signs new Alabama day care bill

Posted Mar 22, 2018 6:40 AM EDT
Updated Mar 22, 2018 10:10 AM EDT
By WMLA Webstaff

MONTGOMERY, AL (WALA) - On January 1, 2008, new rules for the construction, operation and maintenance of child day care centers that were adopted by the Mobile County Board of Health went into effect. This made Mobile County the first county in Alabama with such rules.

All child day care centers in Mobile County that keep more than 12 children for more than four hours a day had to comply with the rules. Dr. Bernard H. Eichols II, Health Officer for Mobile County, said at the time that the results would help all child care centers provide a safe environment for children.

According to Brad Philips, who oversees Inspection Services for MCHC, all church-exempt day care in Mobile County had to be inspected. Up until recently, Mobile County was only one of two counties in the state that looked at these exempt day cares.

That has recently changed. House Bill 76 known, as the "Child Care Safety Act," has been passed by the state Legislature and was signed by Gov. Kay Ivey.

The new law will license more of the currently unregulated religious day care facilities in Alabama. This follows the deaths and illnesses of several children at unregulated day care sites, including one in Mobile.



The Child Care Safety Act has been passed by state legislators and will be signed by Governor Kay Ivey. Photo: ©2018 News

HB 76 - The Child Care Safety Act:

- 1) Maintains & Protects Religious Freedoms: Explicitly states that nothing in this bill infringes on the religious teachings or practices of faith-based providers.
- 2) Requires all child care programs that receive state/federal funds or operating for profit be licensed by August 1, 2019.
- 3) Maintains option for licensed exempt status for faith-based child care facilities and requires DHR to inspect all exempt faith-based child care facilities IF there is reasonable cause that child's safety is at risk or the facility is not in compliance with reporting requirements. DHR shall inspect all new faith-based exempt facilities prior to operation.
- 4) Extends additional health and safety requirements for licensed exempt faith-based facilities to:
 - Undergo annual fire and health inspections by appropriate fire/health department.
 - Mandatory criminal background checks pursuant to 38-13-3 on all employees.
 - Post in plain view in public area a statement that facility is NOT LICENSED by DHR.
 - Provide DHR the following, annually, and when changes occur:
 - Fire and health inspection reports indicating compliance.
 - Employee names and criminal background check information.
 - Proof of liability, casualty, and property insurance.
 - Upon request, certify to DHR immunizations and medical history.
 - Provide affidavit to DHR, annually, certifying the following:
 - Parents/guardians have been notified facility is not licensed.

- Facility does not receive state or federal funds; and does not have a child that receives a child care subsidy from DHR, in order to maintain license exempt status.
 - Facility is in compliance with building, fire, and health codes.
- 5) Requires existing exempt providers who opt for licensing to be compliant with DHR Minimum Standards within 90 days, with the exception of "physical building design, size, and fixtures for existing construction."
 - 6) Continues to authorize the district attorney of the county (upon presentment of charges) to investigate any allegations against a faith-based child care facility under the laws of the state.

"We thank our lawmakers for taking a first step towards fixing the child care system in our state and appreciate the efforts of our advocates and partners who have worked tirelessly on this issue. We will continue to fight to make all child care safe care for the children of Alabama," said Rhonda Mann, Interim Executive Director for VOICES for Alabama's Children.

Collective efforts of advocates from around the state got us to this point and it will take those same voices and force to get us completely over the finish line with policy that requires all facilities to be licensed.

Alabama's First Class Pre-K

The Alabama Legislature inched a step closer to providing high-quality pre-k to every family in the state that wants to voluntarily enroll their four-year-old. The legislature gave final approval to HB 175, the FY 2019 Education Trust Fund Budget. The bill appropriates a total of \$96 million to the state's pre-kindergarten program; \$18.5 million more than the program's current funding level. The \$18.5 million expansion, along with funding from the final year of the state's four-year federal Preschool Development Grant, will enable the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, which manages the



First Class Pre-K program, to add at least 100 new classrooms and increase access to 1,800 additional four-year-olds to enroll in the state's high-quality, voluntary First Class Pre-K program in the 2018-2019 school year.

The Healthy Food Financing Initiative

The Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) is now a reality in Alabama as funds for the program have been dispersed to the inaugural seven community recipients paving the way for better access to fresh, healthy food for thousands of Alabamians. From Mobile to Cherokee, grant recipients will use funds in both urban and rural settings to bring better access to healthy food to people in their communities.

VOICES drove this endeavor from the beginning, putting together a strong coalition of partners from across the state to address the critical need for fresh food access in Alabama communities. VOICES helped host the Alabama Grocery Summit in 2015 which brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including grocers, farmers and the health community, to talk about food access challenges in underserved communities. The summit was the platform to talk about healthy food financing as a tool to eliminate the food deserts in all 67 counties in Alabama.

VOICES and the Food Trust, issued a report, "Food for Every Child: The Need for Healthy Food Financing in Alabama," which mapped the issue of food access across the state and laid out the healthy food financing policy recommendations that resulted from the summit.

VOICES continued to advocate for healthy food financing by working with legislators to secure passage of enabling legislation in 2015 to establish a statewide revolving loan program that would incentivize development, renovation and expansion of grocery stores and other fresh food retailers in communities with limited access to fresh, healthy food.

In 2016, VOICES led efforts to create the Alabama Healthy Food Financing Initiative Study Commission. Three successful meetings of the Study

Commission held and facilitated by Melanie Bridgeforth, Co-Chair of the Commission and former Executive Director of VOICES for Alabama's Children. The goal of the Commission was to determine best practices for Alabama's Healthy Food Financing program, consult with retailers and other experts to identify potential grocery store and food retail projects, develop a pipeline of projects and to report the findings and recommendations to the Alabama Legislature. In 2017, a commitment was made for an initial state investment of \$300,000. In 2018, the legislature allocated an additional \$200,000 to the HFFI which will be used to fund additional projects across the state.

Governor Ivey awarded seven grants to help businesses and non-profit organizations establish the means by which neighborhoods and communities with limited access to grocery stores can more easily obtain fresh fruits and vegetables and other grocery items. The governor presented the grants in a ceremony at the State Capitol.

Grant Recipients

- Africatown Community Development Corp. in Mobile
- Children of the Village Network Inc. in Sumter County
- City of Birmingham
- Jones Valley Teaching Farm in Birmingham
- Peoples Piggly Wiggly in the town of Cherokee
- West Alabama Food Bank Inc. of Northport
- Wright's Markets Inc. of Opelika

In addition to our policy priorities, VOICES for Alabama's Children tracked multiple pieces of legislation that could impact the lives of Alabama's children and families. For a detailed account of some of those bills and their statuses see the Legislative Billboard on page 10.



ISSUE IN FOCUS CHILD CARE

Signing of HB 76 is a first step towards making all child care, safe care.

Child advocates worked tirelessly in the final days and hours, not only to protect funding for high-quality pre-K and healthy food access, but also to implement common sense protections for children in child care facilities. Check out how your elected officials voted on HB 76, and see who's for kids and who's just kidding.

HB 76 (Substitute Version)

HOUSE VOTES: 2018

SENATE VOTES: 2018 (HB 76)

Y	Ainsworth
Y	Alexander
Y	Baker
P	Ball
Y	Beckman
Y	Beech
Y	Black
Y	Blackshear
Y	Boothe
Y	Boyd
Y	Bracy
Y	Brown
Y	Buskey
Y	Butler
Y	Carns
Y	Chesteen
Y	Chestnut
Y	Clarke
Y	Clouse
Y	Coleman
Y	Collins
Y	Crawford
Y	Daniels

Y	Davis
Y	Drake
Y	Drummond
Y	Ellis
Y	England
Y	Farley
Y	Faulkner
Y	Faust
Y	Fincher
Y	Ford
Y	Forte
Y	Fridy
Y	Garrett
Y	Gaston
Y	Givan
Y	Greer
Y	Grimsley
Y	Hall
P	Hanes
P	Harbison
Y	Harper
P	Henry
Y	Hill

Y	Hollis
Y	Holmes (A)
N	Holmes (M)
Y	Howard
Y	Hurst
P	Ingram
Y	Jackson
Y	Johnson (K)
Y	Johnson (R)
Y	Jones
Y	Knight
Y	Lawrence
Y	Ledbetter
Y	Lee
Y	Lindsey
Y	Lowvorn
Y	Martin
Y	McC Campbell
Y	McClammy
Y	McCutcheon
P	McMillan
Y	Millican
P	Mooney

N	Moore (B)
Y	Moore (M)
Y	Morrow
Y	Nordgren
N	Pettus
Y	Polizos
Y	Poole
Y	Pringle
Y	Rich
Y	Rogers
Y	Rowe
Y	Sanderford
Y	Scott
P	Sells
Y	Sessions
P	Shedd
A	Shiver
Y	South
Y	Standridge
Y	Todd
Y	Treadaway
Y	Tuggle
Y	Wadsworth

Y	Warren
Y	Weaver
Y	Whorton (I)
N	Whorton (R)
Y	Wilcox
Y	Williams (JD)
Y	Williams (JW)
P	Williams (P)
Y	Wingo
N	Wood

(86) YES
(5) NO
(10) PASS**
(1) ABSTAIN

* Rep. Nordgren intended to vote "YES"
** PASS = Not Voting or Not Present

N	Albritton
Y	Allen
Y	Beasley
P	Blackwell
Y	Brewbaker
Y	Bussman
Y	Chambliss
P	Coleman-Madison
Y	Dial
Y	Dunn
Y	Figures
Y	Glover
Y	Hightower
Y	Holley
Y	Holtzclaw
Y	Livingston
Y	Marsh
Y	McClendon
N	Melson
N	Orr
P	Pittman
P	Reed

Y	Sanders
P	Sanford
Y	Scofield
N	Shelnutt
Y	Singleton
Y	Smith
Y	Smitherman
P	Stutts
Y	Waggoner
P	Ward
Y	Whatley
Y	Williams

(23) YES
(4) NO
(7) PASS**

** PASS = Not Voting or Not Present



Stephanie Wallace shares her story with media at the 2018 Child Advocacy Day Event.

REVIEW OF THE 2018 BILLBOARD HIGHLIGHTS

VOICES for Alabama’s Children routinely monitors and takes action on issues and legislation that does not appear on the organizational Policy Agenda. This is a list of important bills (but not a complete listing) the organization monitored throughout the 2018 regular session.

Health

HB 9 – Representative JD Williams (R-Birmingham) – PASSED

Requires any unpaid or volunteer coach or trainer associated with your athletics association of the state to complete a youth injury mitigation course annually.

HB 20 – Representative McMillan (R-Bay Minette) – FAILED

Provide scholarships for certain medical students who commit to practice family medicine in underserved areas of Alabama.

HB 26 – Representative Hollis (D-Birmingham) – FAILED

Prohibit smoking tobacco products in a motor vehicle when a minor is also riding in the vehicle.

SB 45 – Senator Beasley (D-Clayton) – PASSED

Require day care centers to provide parents with information about influenza disease and influenza vaccine.

Education

HB 13 – Representative Fincher (R-Woodland) – FAILED

Would provide that the law applies to all K-12 teachers and would increase the time frame required for a teacher to give notice before terminating his or her employment at any other time of the year from five to 30 days.

HB 71 – Representative Collins (R-Decatur) – PASSED

The Secretary of Early Childhood Education shall be appointed by and shall hold office at the pleasure of the Governor. To be eligible for appointment to the office of secretary, a person shall provide proof of qualifications.

HB 114 – Representative Greer (R-Rogersville) – FAILED

To permit the use of the Bible and other scripture as educational material in public K-12 schools.

HB 396 – Representative Ford (D-Gadsden) – FAILED

Require local board of education to establish a local school calendar providing 180 instructional days and require each local board of education to establish a local school calendar providing 1050 instructional hours beginning with the 2018-2019 school year, and would require that teacher salaries remain at existing levels.

SB 101 – Senator Orr (R-Decatur) – PASSED

Authorize the State Department of Education, pending available funds, to offer certain grants to public schools for the purpose of developing new advanced educational and specialized programs for gifted or talented children.

SB 269 – Senator Whatley (R-Auburn) – FAILED

Revise the focus of the content, course materials, and instruction provided to public school students in any program or curriculum that includes sex education or the human reproductive process.

HB 194 – Representative Weaver (R-Alabaster) – PASSED

Palliative and end of life individual health plans, authorized to provide health care and other directives to health care providers, schools, etc. for terminally ill minors, to create the Alex Hoover Act.

Safety

HB 27 – Representative Baker (R-Brewton)/ SB 28 – Senator Pittman (R-Daphne) – FAILED

Repeal an earlier provision of the Students First Act law that provides confliction procedures for school employees charged with certain sexual crimes against students.

HB 38 – Representative JD Williams (R-Birmingham) – FAILED

Provide for termination of the parental rights of any person who commits the crime of rape in the first degree if the rape results in the conception of the child.

HB 57 – Representative Pettus (R-Killen) – PASSED

Domestic violence, capital offense expanded to include murder of a parent or guardian in the presence of a child.

HB 59 – Representative Harbison (R-Cullman) – PASSED

Domestic violence, increased incarceration periods and enhanced penalties for convictions of fist, second, or third degree domestic violence if committed in the presence of a minor.

HB 76 – Representative Warren (D-Tuskegee) – PASSED

Establish the Child Care Safety Act, to remove the exemption from licensure by DHR of certain child care facilities that are part of a church or nonprofit religious school.

HB 366 – Representative Knight (D-Montgomery) – PASSED

Student Harassment Prevention Act, name changed to Jamari Terrell Williams Act, expand act to include student against student harassment, intimidation, violence, cyberbullying and threats of violence off of school property.

HB 435 – Representative Ainsworth (R-Guntersville) – FAILED

Authorize administrative personnel or teachers with certain qualification to carry pistols on school property.

HB 442 – Representative Farley (R-McCalla) – FAILED

Prohibit the carrying or possession of a firearm on school premises regardless of whether the person has intent to do bodily harm.

HB 452 – Representative Farley (R-McCalla) – FAILED

Would allow a juvenile probation officer to share certain information and records relating to a child, excluding mental health and medical records, with school personnel for the limited purpose of promoting safety and enhancing education and rehabilitation services provided to the child.

HB 501 – Representative Crawford (R-Limestone) – FAILED

Provide enhanced punishment of indecent exposure where victim is a child and include indecent exposure as offense under enticing a child for immoral purposes.

SB 26 – Senator Chambliss (R-Montgomery) – FAILED

Require local law enforcement to notify the local superintendent of education when a low-risk juvenile sex offender is planning to establish or has established a fixed residence within jurisdiction of the board and require juvenile sex offenders to notify local law enforcement of any change in school attendance.



Economic Security

HB 6 – Representative Hanes (R-Scottsboro) – FAILED

Require all able-bodied adults without dependents who are applicants or recipients of SNAP benefits to participate in minimum work requirements, provide documentation of engaging in work training, or participate in volunteer community service and would provide limited exemptions from these work requirements.

SB 139 – Senator Orr (R-Decatur) – FAILED

Provide for procedures and limitations for various public assistance programs administered by the Department of Human Resources.

SB 140 – Senator Orr (R-Decatur) – FAILED

Require the Alabama Medicaid Agency to use certain eligibility verification measures to eliminate the duplication of assistance, and deter waste, fraud, and abuse of benefits and would allow the agency to contract with a third-party vendor under certain conditions.

Budgets

SB 178 – Senator Pittman (R-Daphne) – PASSED

The General Fund Budget of \$2.03 billion makes appropriations for the ordinary expenses of the executive, legislative, and judicial agencies of the State, for other functions of government, for debt service, and for capital outlay for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019. The 2019 General Budget includes a 3 percent pay raise for state employees. Increased funding for prisons and \$755 million to Medicaid.

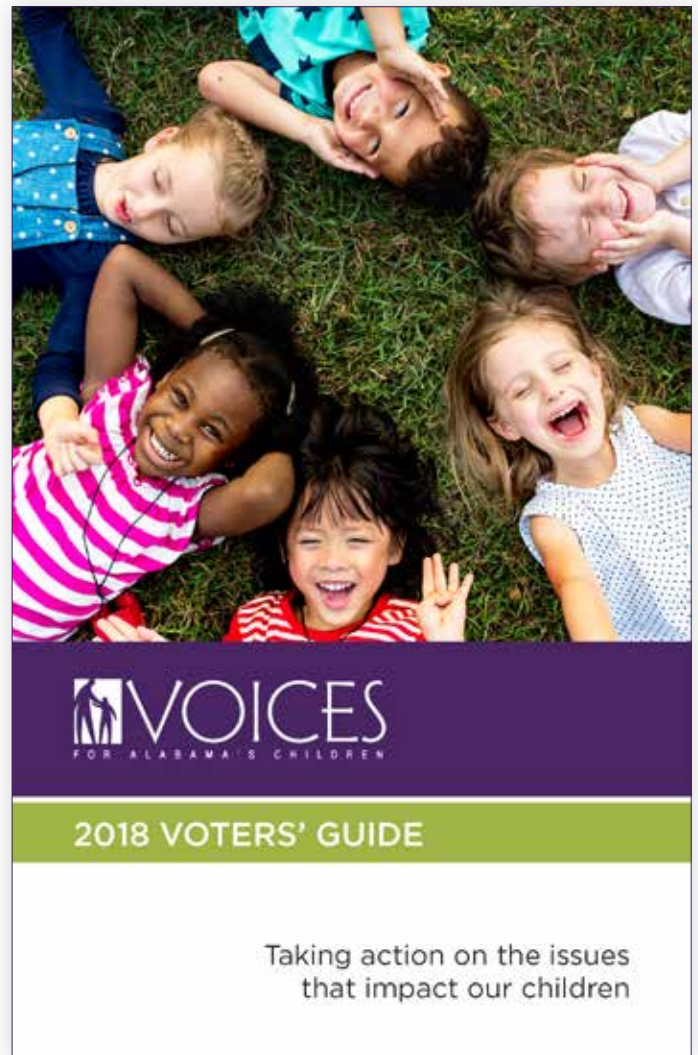
HB 175 – Representative Poole (R-Tuscaloosa) – PASSED

The Education Trust Fund Budget of \$6.4 billion makes appropriations for the support, maintenance and development of public education in Alabama, for debt service, and for capital outlay for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019. The ETF will allocate a 2.5 % pay raise to education employees in K-12 and community colleges. First Class Pre-K will receive \$18.5 million allowing expansion of the number of classrooms across the state.

VOICES WANTS YOU TO STAY INFORMED

It's time to make children Alabama's top priority. As advocates for children, it is up to us to make sure their voices are heard. It is up to us to make sure voters and candidates are informed of the issues important to their well-being. And it is up to us to make sure these issues are addressed after the elections are over.

We offer the 2018 Voters' Guide in this spirit. We hope voters and candidates across the political spectrum will read this guide and be informed of the issues important to our children. Use this Voters' Guide to ask questions of the candidates as you attend local forums.



To view please visit <https://alavoices.org/publications-2018-voters-guide>



Former Executive Director, Melanie Bridgeforth speaks to media regarding Child Advocacy Day.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Thank you advocates! Your hard work and advocacy efforts paid off during the 2018 legislative session. VOICES advocates from across the state united together to inspire positive change in their local communities by engaging in state-based advocacy.



Child advocates have a chance to network over breakfast.

5th Annual Child Advocacy Day

Sponsored by: Alabama Power | Co-sponsored by: Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

On February 13, we held our Fifth Annual Child Advocacy Day event. With nearly 200 people in attendance, we had great dialogue about the children of our state and we enjoyed seeing advocates meet with lawmakers!

This day would not have been possible without YOU!



Dr. Marsha Raulerson asks questions during Q&A session.



State agency heads share concerns on children's issues.

2018 POLICY PRIORITIES FOR ALABAMA'S CHILDREN

Require uniform licensing & inspection for all child care programs in Alabama.

Roughly 60,000 children are born in Alabama each year, the majority of whom will experience nonparental care before entering kindergarten. An estimated two-thirds of Alabama children have all parents in the workforce, greatly underscoring the need for healthy and safe environments for young children.¹ Following child care licensing standards and commonly adhered to best practices is a critical step to providing safe and quality early care and education.

Unfortunately, Alabama currently operates a dual system of child care as one of seven states that do not require all child care programs to be licensed and inspected — threatening the health, safety and optimum development of young children every day.² More than one-third of total child care and nearly half of center-based child care in Alabama operate unregulated and with no legal requirement to conduct criminal background checks on all staff, meet appropriate staff-to-child ratios, or receive First Aid and CPR training. According to projections in the *2017 Alabama Kids Count Data Book* by 2027 63.7% of all child care could be unregulated.³ **In 2018, VOICES for Alabama's Children advocates uniform licensing and inspection by the Alabama Department of Human Resources of all child care programs in the state of Alabama.**

Fully fund and operationalize Alabama's Healthy Food Financing program.

Nearly half a million Alabama children live in areas with limited access to fresh, healthy food placing them at increased risk for diet-related illness.⁴ Healthy Food Financing is an effective, viable and economically sustainable policy solution to addressing food access. Such initiatives, structured as public-private partnerships, attract grocery stores, farmers' markets and other vendors of healthy, affordable foods to underserved communities. In 2015, VOICES for Alabama's Children led a 100-plus member coalition in a successful legislative campaign resulting in the creation of a statewide Healthy Food Financing Initiative housed at the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA). **In 2018, VOICES for Alabama's Children advocates \$3 million in state investments and matching private seed dollars to fully operationalize Alabama's Healthy Food Financing program. We endorse recommendations of the Healthy Food Financing Study Commission (established in 2016 by the Alabama Legislature) which if fully implemented will bring fresh food retailers to communities where they are needed most.**

Expand state investment in Alabama's First Class Pre-K program.

High quality pre-k improves educational achievement, closes the achievement gap among children entering kindergarten and helps build a skilled workforce for Alabama. A study by the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama analyzed student achievement through the 6th grade and found that Alabama's First Class Pre-K alumni consistently outperformed their peers in reading and math. In that same study, researchers found that First Class Pre-K closed the achievement gap for participating low-income students by 25 percent.⁵ Alabama's First Class Pre-K program has ranked No. 1 in the nation for quality for eleven consecutive years, yet only one in four Alabama four-year-olds have access.⁶ **In 2018, VOICES for Alabama's Children, as a founding partner of the Alabama School Readiness Alliance, advocates a \$23 million increase in state investments for First Class Pre-K as part of a ten-year strategy to fully fund pre-k by the 2022-2023 school year or before based on recommendations from Alabama's Pre-K Task Force.**

Establish statewide nutrition, physical activity and screen time standards for all early care and education (ECE) settings throughout Alabama.

Currently about 1 in 4 young children in the U.S. ages 2 to 5 years are overweight or have obesity.⁷ In Alabama, the only available data show that 16.3 percent of children ages 2-to 4-years-old from low-income families are at unhealthy weights.⁸ Combine those two statistics and the fact that two-thirds of young Alabama children have all parents in the workforce, and there is a clear illustration in the value of early care and education programs-- such as Head Start, Pre-K, child care centers and family child care homes-- as ideal settings and opportunities for obesity prevention in young children. Starting early can help young children build a solid foundation of healthy lifestyle habits that will follow them into adulthood. Currently regulations and standards around physical activity, nutrition, and screen time may vary among child care settings by type. **In 2018, VOICES for Alabama's Children advocates improved and standardized statewide nutrition, physical activity, and screen time standards for early care and education settings in Alabama.**

Ensure adequate state funding for child-serving programs and services.

Fiscal policy is a children's issue and a permanent priority on VOICES' policy agenda. Each year, we advocate for protection of state appropriations to child-serving programs, services and state agencies that will impact the health, safety, education, and economic security of children birth to 18. We support certain measures that increase revenue to the state and oppose measures that in our assertion further erode services to children and other vulnerable populations. **In 2018, VOICES for Alabama's Children specifically advocates for sustainable and permanent revenue solutions that provide working parents the critical work support of child care assistance and improve health care for children through CHIP and Medicaid.**

Endnotes

- 1 Administration for Children & Families Office of Child Care - Alabama, October 2016. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ>
- 2 Child Care Aware® of America, <http://childcareaware.org/families/types-of-child-care/>
- 3 VOICES for Alabama's Children, *2017 Alabama Kids Count Data Book*, <https://alavoices.org/research/2017alabama-kids-count/>
- 4 The Food Trust, Food for Every Child: The Need for Healthy Food Financing in Alabama https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/alavoices/pages/27/attachments/original/1428409463/2015_AL_HFA_Mapping_Report_FINAL.pdf?1428409463
- 5 Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama. Birmingham, AL, Adams, Joe. (2012). Analysis of ARMT Scores for Recipients of First Class/OSR Pre-K, <http://parca.samford.edu/education/Analysis%20of%20ARMT%20Scores%20for%20Recipients%20of%20First%20Class%20OSR%20Pre-K.pdf>
- 6 Department of Education, A Matter of Equity: Preschool in America,, April 2015, <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/early-learning/matter-equity-preschool-america.pdf>
- 7 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Early Care and Education State Indicator Report, 2016, <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/strategies/ece-state-indicator-report.html>
- 8 Robert Wood Johnson, The State of Obesity, The State of Obesity in Alabama, <https://stateofobesity.org/states/al/>

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Page 4: Alabama State Capitol. <https://www.cntraveler.com/galleries/2013-07-05/photos-celebrate-nation-50-state-capitol-buildings>

Page 10: Alabama State Capitol. <https://atlasalabama.gov/alabama-house-approves-state-income-tax-credit-for-small-businesses/>

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