

Messaging Briefs

Economic Security



Introduction

ZERO TO THREE and the National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers have created the following message brief to help advocates communicate with policymakers about the need and opportunities for enacting policies that support families' economic security. This brief is meant to serve as a source of research-tested messaging and broad policy guidance to help you craft messages and materials as you speak with policymakers and other stakeholders.

Making the Case for Prenatal to Three Policies

The following language can serve as a way to introduce economic security within the frame of prenatal-to-three policies.

Every child deserves a strong start in life. The foundation we provide for them shapes their future and the future of our communities. We have to get it right.

During the first three years of life, the brains and bodies of infants and toddlers make huge gains in development. Babies' brains develop faster from birth to age three than at any later point in life. Their early experiences—both positive and negative—build the foundation for brain and body architecture that will support their ability to learn and their overall social, emotional, and physical health.

We can ensure that families have the resources to provide safe housing, nutritious foods, adequate clothing and diapers, and regular access to medical care so their young children have the stability they need during this critical time of rapid growth and development.

We must act now to ensure that each infant grows into socially, emotionally, and physically healthy children who are confident, empathetic, and ready for school and life.



The Need for Policies that Support Families' Economic Security

Use these suggested message points and proof points to demonstrate why families need support to improve their economic security.

Families with young children face unique economic burdens. Parents of infants and toddlers have lower household incomes than their peers without children or those whose children are 5 years or older.ⁱ They are earning the least at a time when their caregiving responsibilities—and related costs—are the most demanding. For example, the cost of child care for families with infants is approximately 21% of the U.S. median income for a family of three, but it also comes at a time when families can least afford it.ⁱⁱ

More than 80% of children in families with low-incomes live in a household where at least one person is employed.ⁱⁱⁱ This work is often in low-wage jobs that will not support a family and lack employer-sponsored benefits such as health insurance and paid time off.

Nearly one in five infants and toddlers live in families experiencing poverty. Due to longstanding inequities in public policy, we see higher percentages of babies experiencing poverty among American Indian/Native and Black infants and toddlers, at nearly double the national average.^{iv}

Poverty experienced in the earliest years of children's lives literally gets under the skin, undermining strong brain development as well as other physiological systems. Research shows poverty and income are related to smaller brain growth in key areas associated with self-regulation, learning, memory, language, and emotional control.^v

The negative impacts of early childhood poverty can persist well into adulthood, impacting educational attainment, later earnings, adult health, and reliance on public benefits.^{vi}

The Opportunity to Improve Families' Economic Security

These message points provide recommendations to improve the economic security of families in your communities.

We put our nation's present and future at risk when high poverty rates and low incomes persist for families with infants and toddlers, who are the most vulnerable to its impacts.

Targeted interventions during the first three years can mitigate or even eliminate negative outcomes and change the course for young children. These interventions should ensure that families with young children have a safe place to live, enough food to eat, and a stable income.

Today's children represent our nation's most racially and ethnically diverse generation. One-half of babies in the US are children of color. We have an opportunity to ensure that policies, programs, and services meet the needs of our community's increasingly diverse families.

When families with young children have equitable access to opportunities that help them build economic security, it not only lifts the whole economy, but guarantees stronger, healthier, and more resilient communities for generations to come.

Calls to Action

Consider using these message-tested calls to action to drive policy change for economic security.

- Infants and toddlers must be our highest priority. We need to ensure equitable opportunities for their family's economic security because they only get one chance at a strong start.
- Ensuring families have adequate income is basic to creating an environment in which young children thrive. Families need a range of equitable policies that ensure they can support their young children and access safe and stable housing, health and mental health care, healthy food, and high-quality early care and education for their young children.

Starting a Conversation on Equity

Successful conversations about equity and prenatal-to-three policies start with finding common ground. Research that evaluated how convincing equity arguments were to policy influencers when making the case to prioritize prenatal-to-three policies showed that it's important to consider your audience's background, perspective, and familiarity when discussing equity.

Strong equity messaging that directly calls out our country's history of systemic racism is more likely to resonate with audiences who recognize these inequities are embedded into our society's structures and systems. For audiences less familiar with equity concepts, consider messages on brain development, physical health, and maternal health support, which were found to be most persuasive in making the case for prenatal-to-three policies and can help establish common ground. Start your conversations with what we know works best and then look for ways to educate on equity once you have established common ground.

Find more message guidance in [Building Momentum for Prenatal-to-Three Policies](#).

About *Think Babies*™

ZERO TO THREE created *Think Babies*, a call to action for federal and state policymakers to prioritize the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families and invest in our future. We advocate for policies that ensure all babies and their families have good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences. Sign up to join the team that's fighting for our future at www.thinkbabies.org.

About The National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT)

NCIT brings together early childhood leaders and advocates, philanthropy, policymakers, and practitioners working inside and outside government at the federal, state, and local levels to create and strengthen promising policies and programs, share what works, and encourage greater attention to, and investment in, the healthy development of our youngest children. Learn more at www.theNCIT.org.

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- Washington State Parent Ambassadors
- Children's Alliance (Washington)
- Maryland Family Network
- Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
- Start Early (Illinois)
- Texans Care for Children
- Children at Risk (Texas)
- North Carolina Early Education Coalition
- Groundwork Ohio
- Michigan League for Public Policy
- Michigan's Children
- Early Childhood Investment Corporation (Michigan)
- South Carolina Infant Mental Health Association
- Institute for Child Success (South Carolina)
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- Zero To Five (Montana)
- Bloom Consulting (Montana)
- Kids Win Missouri
- Idaho Voices for Children
- Children's Action Alliance (Arizona)
- Southwest Human Development (Arizona)
- Alabama Partnership for Children
- Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students



Endnotes

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