

USING THE CHILD CARE MESSAGING WHEEL

USING A MESSAGE WHEEL TO KEEP CONVERSATIONS ON POINT

A message wheel is a powerful tool for communicating key messages about child care. At the center of the wheel is our key message—the essential idea we always want to reinforce. Surrounding it, like spokes, are supporting messages that explain the issue, highlight solutions, and provide compelling reasons for action.

WHY THIS? WHY NOW?

When we speak with one voice, our advocacy becomes more effective. Policymakers, business leaders, and community members are more likely to take notice and engage with us when we present a consistent, compelling message. The message wheel helps ensure that every conversation, whether it's with a legislator, a business owner, or a parent, reinforces our core priorities: affordable, accessible, quality child care for all Mississippi families.

HOW TO USE THE MESSAGE WHEEL

Every time we communicate about child care—whether in a legislative meeting, a media interview, or a community forum—we should lead with our core message and use the supporting statements to strengthen and expand upon it. For example:

- **No matter who you are talking to, begin with the KEY MESSAGE in the Center.** This is the MOST important thing that we ALL want to hammer home.
- **Then, based on what the person you are talking to says, choose the SUPPORTING POINT that aligns to their comment or question.**
 - For instance, if they say something like, *“If parents are working, then they should be able to afford child care. Why does the government need to be involved?”* use SUPPORTING POINT B-- and if you need additional data or info, use the bullets below it!
 - Or if they say *“I get that child care is important for babies and their education, but child care doesn't have anything to do with the economy or Mississippi Businesses”* Then you'll want to use SUPPORTING POINT A and go from there to explain how child care is definitely related to the economy.
- **Make sure you end with THE ASK--** at the very bottom.

NOTE: You don't have to use every supporting message in every conversation. Instead, choose the points that will resonate most with your audience and add real-life examples and stories to bring the message to life.

MAKING THE MESSAGE EVEN MORE IMPACTFUL:

To maximize the effectiveness of this tool:

- Personalize the message with stories from parents, child care providers, and businesses affected by the child care crisis.
- Anticipate counterarguments and prepare responses that connect back to the key message.
- Practice using the message wheel in different scenarios.
- By using the message wheel effectively, we can ensure that every conversation about child care moves the issue forward—building momentum for policies that increase access to affordable child care for families and strengthen Mississippi's economy.

CHILD CARE MESSAGING WHEEL

SUPPORTING POINT A: **Child Care isn't just a family issue. It's a critical piece of economic infrastructure with economic implications.**

- Mississippi's governor and legislature have done great work bringing in new corporations offering high paying jobs. Now we need to ensure that Mississippi parents have access to stable and reliable child care during all working hours so that we can fill those jobs.
- Mississippi has a critical labor force participation issue. 7% of the current labor force are parents who are underemployed or not employed because of family caregiving responsibilities.
- If 7% of Mississippi's parent population currently not working- entered the workforce Mississippi stands to make an estimated \$1.2 billion dollars a year.
- Unlike many other goods or services, however, child care is not a luxury that families can choose not to buy. When child care is unaffordable, parents lose reskilling and upskilling opportunities, or choose to leave the workforce entirely or find ways to cut costs through inconsistent care.

KEY MESSAGE

**Mississippi's
economic growth
depends on
parents' access to
child care
that supports
children's health,
education, and
development.**

SUPPORTING POINT B: **Child care is necessary and yet too expensive for most families.**

- While there may be a preference for mothers to remain at home with their young children to educate and care for them, many moms in Mississippi have to work.
- As single parents they have to support their families. In fact, 44% of children in Mississippi live in single-parent homes, and a lot of these homes are led by women. To be able to work and provide for their families, these moms need affordable and accessible child care for their kids. They must have child care to remain working to support their families, but often struggle to cover basic expenses because the price for child care is so high. This puts them in a difficult situation of trying to keep their jobs, care for their children, and make ends meet.
- For families with two children living in Mississippi, child care is often the most expensive item in their budget—nearly the same cost as housing.
- There is an affordability issue. Child care annual tuition for an infant is higher than that of many community colleges in Mississippi.

SUPPORTING POINT C: **There is a shortage of care that meets families' needs, especially for babies and toddlers.**

- There is a licensed child care supply issue. Mississippi only has enough licensed child care seats for 2/3 of children.
- Not all centers offer infant/toddler care, so even if a county has an adequate number of slots based on the under-age-5 child population, that does not mean it has availability for all children who need care.
- According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, 89% child care options in Mississippi are small businesses, and most are also center-based care options.
- As small business owners, licensed child care programs have to make hard decisions about what services to offer their customers in order to stay solvent. They may have to make the difficult choice to close infant and toddler classrooms because they typically lose money due to high staffing needs. Because babies and toddlers need the attention of focused and nurturing staff, there are state mandated staff-to-child ratios, 1:5 for infants in Mississippi and 1:9 for toddlers. The ratio ensures that each child receives adequate attention and care, but also means that infant and toddler care costs more to run than preschool care. As a result, child care programs tend to reduce offerings for infant and toddler care, making care difficult to access for parents of the very young.
- Another difficult decision child care programs make is what business hours to choose. Often, in order to stay solvent, they cater to the market majority (parents working traditional hours, 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM or 6:00 PM). This makes child care difficult to access for parents working nontraditional hours (evenings, shift work, and weekends).

Support Mississippi's economy and businesses with affordable, accessible child care for their workers.