

It's an election year! That means we have a huge opportunity to tell candidates that affordable access to high-quality child care is critical for Vermont's future. How? It starts with letting our candidates know this is a priority issue for their constituents (**that's you!**).

The pandemic has laid bare a stark reality that has plagued our state for decades: child care is inaccessible to over half of Vermont's youngest children. It has exposed the inequities in this fragile system and exacerbated the child care crisis Vermonters were already facing. We **MUST** rebuild Vermont's early care and education system to be stronger than it was before COVID-19 if we want to create an equitable and sustainable system that supports Vermont's children, families, and our economy.

The more that candidates hear from Vermonters about our child care crisis—and what a better future could look like—the more they'll realize that representing their district effectively means understanding the specific change that is needed. This toolkit will help you become a strong advocate for children with tips on how and where to engage with your candidates, how to encourage them to go on the record in support of affordable access to high-quality child care, and resources to help you do so.

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Voting in this Election:

Vermonters have more options to vote safely this year. Every voter in the general election will be mailed a ballot in case you don't want to go to the polls in person and early voting starts on September 18. It will be important to make sure you follow the instructions carefully to ensure your vote is counted. For more information on voting, visit the Vermont Secretary of State's website at <https://sos.vermont.gov/elections/>.



Candidate Engagement Fact Sheet

Why Does LGK Care about Elections?

Our mission is to ensure that every Vermont family has affordable access to high-quality child care by 2025. This will require a big change in policy that increases the level of state investment in early care and education in Vermont. In order to create this policy change, we need legislators to understand Vermont's child care challenges and the urgent need to address them. One of the best ways to do this is by talking to legislators and public officials all around the state. **That's where you come in!** The more constituents who tell their candidates how deeply they care about affordable access to high-quality child care, the more our legislators will realize this is an issue they need to address when they come to work in the Legislature.

Does Let's Grow Kids Support Any Specific Candidates?

No! LGK is a non-partisan, non-profit organization. This means that we can't support or oppose any particular political party or perspective, and we can't support or endorse any particular candidate (there are strict federal and state rules governing this). However, we can ask candidates where they stand on our issue, ask them to support our issue, and educate them on our issue.

So What Does This Mean for You as a Volunteer?

When you are acting as a representative of LGK, it's necessary to adhere to our non-partisan standards. This means:

- If you're talking to a candidate about issues that are important to you, you can say that you really care about making sure that all Vermont children have access to high-quality early care and learning opportunities, but you can't say that the Let's Grow Kids campaign will support any candidate who also cares about high-quality, affordable early care and learning.
- When to wear or not wear your LGK volunteer t-shirt:
 - **It's okay** to wear your LGK t-shirt to a candidate forum where you're planning to ask a question about child care.
 - **It is NOT okay** to wear your LGK t-shirt if you volunteer for a particular candidate and you are out campaigning for that person.

Let's Make Child Care a Top Election Issue!

Here are five key ways you can help to make sure that every candidate who's elected is well-versed in Vermont's child care crisis and how to solve it:

1. Candidate Statements:

In September, we will ask every candidate for House, Senate, and statewide office in Vermont to answer a questionnaire about their vision for solving some of Vermont's most pressing issues, including child care. Every response we receive will be posted on our Candidate Dashboard at: letsgrowkids.org/candidate-dashboard. You can go to the dashboard, enter your address to find the candidates in your district, and see if they've responded. If they haven't, you can send them an email right from the dashboard asking them to submit their answers.

2. Candidate Forums:

Are you planning to attend virtual candidates' forums, town halls and debates? You can ask a question or two about early care and education to help raise awareness of this important issue. Never been to a candidate event before? Your LGK field manager can schedule a time to talk to fill you in on what usually happens at these events and what to expect. They can also help you craft a question and practice asking it. Learn more about candidate forums on page 5!



Let's Grow Kids will be working with partners to host a virtual forum for the candidates for governor and lieutenant governor in September. Stay tuned for more information!

3. Candidate Meetings:

You can ask to set up a one-on-one or group virtual meeting or phone call with all candidates for office in your area and include the issue of high-quality, affordable child care in your conversation. This is a great opportunity to share your own story and perspectives and make sure that candidates know how important it is to solve Vermont's child care crisis.

4. Candidate Outreach:

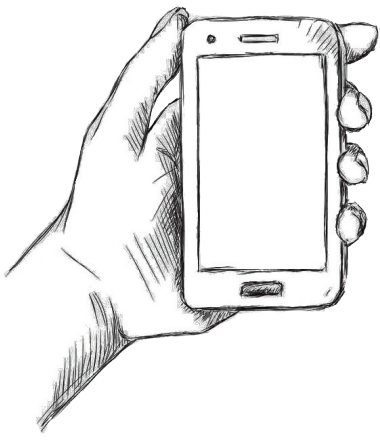
Sometimes, local candidates or volunteers helping with their campaign may get in touch with you, either by phone, email, or text. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the candidate and bring up the topic of high-quality, affordable child care. Learn more about how to handle outreach from a candidate on the next page!

5. Get Out the Vote (GOTV):

In addition to making sure that candidates are informed, it's important to make sure that Vermonters cast their ballots. LGK will be working to help all Vermonters understand how and where to vote this November.

Important Things to Remember

- If you're talking to a candidate and the candidate asks you a specific question about child care and you don't know the answer, it's okay to say, "I don't know. I can look into that and get back to you." You can send the question to your regional field manager to get help finding the answer. It also means you have a great opportunity to follow up with the candidate and continue your conversation about child care in Vermont!
- If you want to set up a meeting with either a candidate or a legislator, feel free to reach out to your regional field manager for support. They are happy to help you prepare for a meeting, or even participate if you'd like a familiar face!



So You're Getting a Call, Text, or Email from a Candidate ...

It's election season! That means candidates are working hard to virtually engage with as many voters in their communities as possible.

They want to hear what you care about and share information about their platform. If a candidate or their campaign volunteer emails, texts, or calls you, DON'T send them to voicemail or leave them unread ...

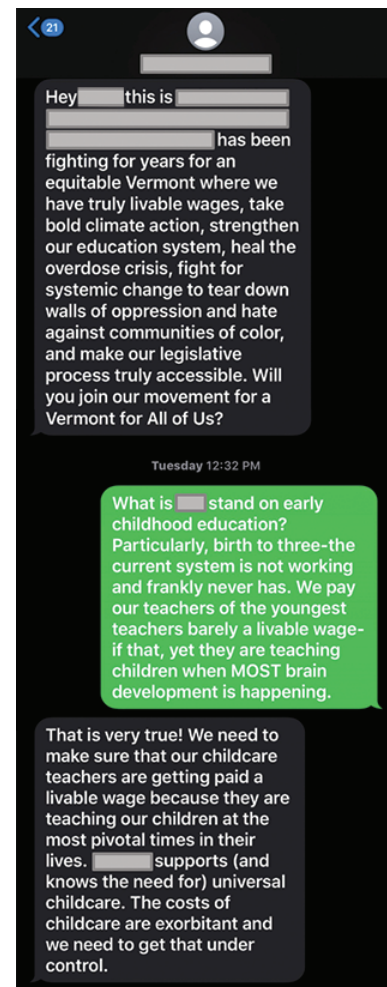
*** This is a GREAT opportunity to tell them how important affordable access to high-quality child care is to you!**

But What Do I Say?!

> Good question. Here are some simple steps to guide the conversation:

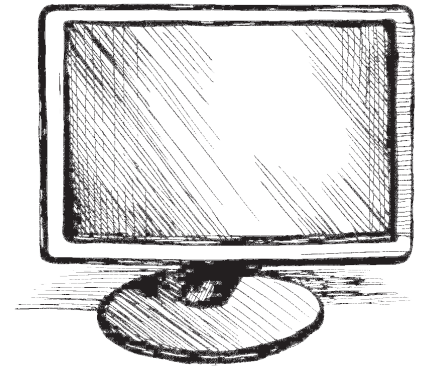
- 1.** If the candidate or campaign volunteer hasn't mentioned child care, you can bring it up:
 - It's great to hear that you care about so many important issues that impact our community. An issue I really care about is high-quality, affordable child care.
 - I'm glad you brought up wanting to make VT more affordable. That makes me think of child care.
- 2.** Then share your personal story related to child care. How have you struggled?
- 3.** Talk about how this isn't only a problem for you—it negatively affects Vermont
- 4.** Finally, ask the candidate or campaign volunteer about the candidate's position:
 - If elected, what would you do to address Vermont's child care challenges?
 - Do you support or oppose efforts to expand high-quality, affordable child care in Vermont? If you support it, how do you suggest Vermont fund a system of high-quality and affordable early care and learning for all Vermont families?
 - If elected, what would you do to ensure that more Vermont families with young children can find and afford child care?

Here's what this looks like



Want more talking points and statistics to support your conversation? Visit letsgrowkids.org! If you get to talk to a candidate, email your regional field manager and tell us how it went!

So You're at a Virtual Candidate Forum ...



Great! This is your chance to make sure that all candidates know about the importance of high-quality, affordable child care! How to do that depends on the type of forum.

Town Hall-Style Forums

Any event that allows constituents to interact directly with a politician may be called a town hall. Town halls are public meetings, typically in person, but now held over the phone or via the internet at which constituents ask legislators/candidates questions about their positions on various issues.

If you plan to attend a town hall-style forum:

- 1. Do Your Homework.** Check out the LGK Candidate Dashboard [letsgrowkids.org/candidate-dashboard] to see if the candidates participating in the event have provided statements about their position on high-quality, affordable child care. If they have, you'll be able to ask a more specific question.
- 2. Prepare Your Question in Advance.** Write it out and practice saying it out smoothly before the event so you can ask your question clearly and succinctly. It's perfectly acceptable to read the question from a piece of paper if you don't have it memorized. Ask the same question of all the candidates so they all have a chance to respond.
- 3. Follow Up.** If the candidates try to skip over your question or don't answer it directly, make a note to follow up with them through a one-on-one virtual meeting, email, phone call, or letter after the event.

Moderated Forums

Sometimes the audience only plays a listening role at a candidate forum because the questions have been collected/prepared in advance and are asked by a moderator. There may still be an opportunity to insert child care into the conversation! Some moderated forums ask for questions from constituents in advance of the event, at which point you can contribute. In virtual forums, there are often opportunities to ask questions using the "chat" feature. If you prepare your question in advance, you can easily cut and paste it into the chat function. The moderator will then read some of the questions that have been submitted and ask candidates to answer. Your LGK field manager will keep you aware of opportunities to submit questions to moderated candidate forums. And if you see forums advertised in your community, let us know!

So What Should I Ask?!



Here are some sample questions to get you started:

- Research shows that half of Vermont's youngest children don't have access to the child care they need. If elected, what will you do to ensure there is sufficient capacity to meet the needs of Vermont families with young children?
- Vermont's Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care found that ensuring every family that needs child care in Vermont has affordable access to high-quality care would require an increased investment of at least \$205 million a year into the system. What's your recommendation on how to fund a high-quality, affordable system in our state?
- Vermont's early childhood educators are among the lowest-paid employees in the state, but they're doing some of the most important work during a crucial time in children's brain development. How would you ensure that people working in child care programs are valued and well-paid?



Let Us Know How it Goes!

After the event, let us know how it went! Email your regional field manager with a quick summary.

And please note: While we can help you stay informed about engaging with candidates and we can make sure that ALL candidates know the importance of solving Vermont's child care crisis, as a 501(c)(3) organization, Let's Grow Kids **does not** support or oppose any political candidate or party. Thanks for helping us put child care on the campaign map!

Meet the LGK Field Team!

Did you know that the Let's Grow Kids staff includes a group of dedicated people who are here specifically to support your advocacy for young children? They're the LGK field team, and they can help you prepare for candidate calls, forums, and meetings; figure out the best way to talk about the importance of high-quality, affordable child care; and help you make a plan to organize your community to support this issue. Each member of the field team supports a specific area of the state. LGK also offers free training workshops to help advocates sharpen various advocacy skills, such as storytelling. See the list below to find the contact for your area:

Anna Gebhardt, Field Director
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**Rex Butt, Regional Field Manager for
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**Stephanie Mackevich, Regional Field Manager for
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**Emily Wagner, Community and Program Support Specialist for
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emilyw@letsgrowkids.org | (978) 431-2696

**Shayla Zammuto, Regional Field Manager for
Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, and Lamoille counties**
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Find More Volunteer Resources at letsgrowkids.org/mobilize