



Contact: Charlotte Linton, Communications Manager | [charlotte@childrensalliance.org](mailto:charlotte@childrensalliance.org) | (206) 324-0340

## State lawmakers honored for their crucial leadership in enhancing the well-being of Washington's children

*Children's Alliance announces eleven recipients of 2023 Champions for Children awards*

Seattle, WA, August 1, 2023 — Children's Alliance, Washington's statewide, nonpartisan child advocacy organization, has recognized eleven state lawmakers with Champions for Children awards. These awards honor legislators for their service on behalf of children in the 2023 legislative session.

"The lawmakers we've recognized this year have fought for progress on some of the biggest challenges facing Washington's kids and families," said Dr. Stephan Blanford, executive director of Children's Alliance. "They have advanced policies that will help kids access critical mental health support, connect families with affordable child care, and expand access to much-needed oral health care."

The 2023 Champions for Children award recipients are:

**Representative Lisa Callan** (D-5<sup>th</sup> district) championed a great number of behavioral health bills and budget items for kids. She was the lead sponsor for House Bill 1580, which aims to connect children stuck in hospitals with services and living arrangements. She also pushed for a significant reimbursement rate increase for Medicaid behavioral health providers in the state budget.

**Representative Mary Fosse** (D-38<sup>th</sup> district) was the primary sponsor of two bills that addressed families' access to child care. House Bill 1525 offers safe, stable, affordable child care as parents participate in state-registered apprenticeship programs. House Bill 1106 expands eligibility to unemployment insurance for parents who have a consistent 90-day shift history and experience a non-temporary change in their shift by six or more hours without employee request or seniority considerations.

**Representative Marcus Riccelli** (D-3<sup>rd</sup> district), a steadfast champion for oral health care, was primary sponsor of House Bill 1678, authorizing dental therapists to practice in community health settings statewide. Rep. Riccelli also championed House Bill 1238, increasing the supply of free school meals, and persuaded his colleagues to invest capital dollars to expand and upgrade oral health infrastructure in health clinics.

**Representative Tana Senn** (D-41<sup>st</sup> district) met with members of the Early Learning Action Alliance numerous times throughout the 2023 session to exchange information and strategize together to secure passage of key bills and budget investments for babies and children ages 5 and under. Rep. Senn was the primary sponsor of House Bill 1199, which protects child care business operations in common interest communities (such as condominium associations), and House Bill 1188, which creates protections for kids with disabilities using child welfare services.

**Representative My-Linh Thai** (D-41<sup>st</sup> district) led the insertion of a budget item for health coverage for all Washington adults who are income-qualified for Medicaid coverage, regardless of immigration

status. This innovative measure creates a pathway for full-family health care coverage for tens of thousands of immigrant households.

**Senate Majority Leader Andy Billig** (D-3<sup>rd</sup> district) is the Senate's early learning budget champion, responsible for securing hundreds of millions of state budget dollars in affordable child care for working families by raising subsidy payments to child care providers who enroll families that use the state's Working Connections Child Care program.

**Senator Noel Frame** (D-36<sup>th</sup> district) continued her leadership for progressive revenue to fix the state's upside-down tax code. Though House Bill 1473, a tax on extreme wealth, did not move forward this legislative session, Sen. Frame persuaded budget leaders to commission a one-year study of the idea and report back to lawmakers in 2024.

**Senator Karen Keiser** (D-33<sup>rd</sup> district) led her colleagues to ban the practice of female genital mutilation or genital cutting, which is often inflicted on young girls. Sen. Keiser also responded swiftly to protect reproductive health care by countering an out-of-state threat to the supply of abortion medication with Senate Bill 5768, which authorized the Department of Corrections to purchase, sell, deliver, and dispense abortion medications to Washington state health professionals.

**Senator Emily Randall** (D-26<sup>th</sup> district) ensured the passage of Senate Bill 5555, authorizing the employment of peer support specialists to address mental health and substance use needs among kids and adults. Sen. Randall also co-sponsored a number of other oral, behavioral, and reproductive health bills, as well as a measure that seeks to prevent the use of tobacco and vapor products by minors.

**Senator Rebecca Saldaña** (D-37<sup>th</sup> district) championed Senate Bill 5365, which takes a new approach to preventing tobacco use and vaping among minors. Recognizing that punitive measures disproportionately harm children of color, the bill replaces monetary fines with community service and a free, optional smoking cessation program. It also increases penalties on retailers caught selling tobacco or vapor products to anyone under age 21.

**Senator Claire Wilson** (D-30<sup>th</sup> district) introduced bills that advanced families' access to quality child care through the expansion of Working Connections Child Care. She was the primary sponsor of Senate Bill 5225, which extended Working Connections eligibility to immigrant families, child care employees, and parents directed to find care by therapeutic courts. Sen. Wilson also addressed barriers to quality child care with Senate Bill 5316, which eliminated the fees paid by early childhood educators when they submit to routine background checks.

"Our elected representatives are critical allies in our mission to ensure that every child in Washington thrives," continued Dr. Blanford. "The actions of these lawmakers demonstrate that, together, we can change our laws so that instead of upholding racial injustice, they help us build a fair and multiracial future where every child has the opportunity to reach their vast potential."

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## **ABOUT CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE**

[Children's Alliance](#) is Washington's statewide, nonpartisan child advocacy organization. We help people tap into their personal political power so they can advocate for change in their communities. We partner with families, lawmakers, community leaders, service providers and policy experts to develop antiracist policy solutions that improve the lives of Washington kids and build a better shared future for all.

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