



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

Champions for Children

July 2017

Champions for Children are state lawmakers recognized by the Children's Alliance for their outstanding service on behalf of children. Each of the following legislators provided significant leadership during the 2017 legislative session in protecting or advancing state policies or investments that will improve the well-being of children in Washington. These lawmakers distinguished themselves by joining with the Children's Alliance to make children a priority.

Together with many partners, Children's Alliance achieved two significant objectives on our 2017 Legislative Agenda.

First, lawmakers made new investments in quality early learning. Starting this year, the parents of an additional 1,800 3- and 4-year-olds will be able to enroll their children in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). Quality preschool via ECEAP is a proven strategy to close the opportunity gap that faces many children of color and children in low-income households. A recent KIDS COUNT in Washington analysis showed that the state could make [substantial progress in academic achievement](#) for children of color if lawmakers increased access to ECEAP.

Second, by passing [House Bill 1661](#), lawmakers created the Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). The department lays a new foundation for services to children, grounded in prevention, early learning, accountability to child outcomes, and multiple principles of racial equity.

Children's Alliance worked with allies and advocates across the state to advocate to and support legislators in realizing these achievements. In 2017, we recognize the following five Champions for Children:



Senator Andy Billig (D-Spokane): As a member of the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education and Ways and Means committees, Senator Billig took the lead on early learning issues in the Senate Democratic caucus, championing the expansion of the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, and speaking up for early learning as a critical part of the education continuum.



Senator Jeanne Darneille (D-Tacoma): As a member of Governor Jay Inslee’s Blue Ribbon Commission that recommended the creation of the Department of Children, Youth and Families, Senator Darneille helped to shape the new department in the idea’s early stages. She was an influential voice in favor of integrating racial equity and child outcomes into House Bill 1661, leading the Senate Democratic Caucus in its unanimous support of the bill.



Senator Steve O’Ban (R-Pierce County): As Chair of the Human Services, Mental Health & Housing Committee, Senator O’Ban demonstrated his support for the creation of the new Department of Children, Youth and Families as prime sponsor of House Bill 1661’s companion bill in the Senate. Senator O’Ban integrated new accountability measures into the bill, including accountability to improving child outcomes and reducing racial disparities.



Representative Tom Dent (R-Moses Lake): As ranking Republican member of the House Early Learning & Human Services Committee, Representative Dent led his caucus on the creation of the Department of Children, Youth and Families. Representative Dent ensured that House Bill 1661 responded to the unique needs of foster parents and early learning providers in rural Washington.



Representative Ruth Kagi (D-Seattle): As the prime sponsor of House Bill 1661, creating the Department of Children, Youth and Families, Representative Kagi set the new department’s purpose toward promoting prevention and equity and improving child outcomes. As she led the effort for its creation, she also ensured that early learning would remain a priority within the new Department of Children, Youth and Families. Alongside these accomplishments, she led her fellow lawmakers in making new investments in ECEAP.