

BABIES & THE BUDGET: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION



Babies & the Budget: Opportunities for Action is a ZERO TO THREE advocacy tool about the federal budget process: why it's important, how it works and where to seize opportunities to be involved. As early childhood professionals, we work to improve the lives of infants and toddlers every day. What happens in Washington, D.C. can seem very far away and out of touch with what is happening at home. Why should infant-toddler professionals care about the federal budget process? There is a lot at stake for the programs and services that support families with very young children. If we do not get involved in the federal budget process, significant decisions about funding services for infants and toddlers will be made without your input. Your elected officials in Washington need to hear from you about how funding birth to three services will prevent more costly interventions later on. We can make a difference in the lives of infants and toddlers by being a voice for babies in the budget process!

This advocacy tool (based on a model by the Center for Community Change) provides a timeline and opportunities for action throughout the budget process. In addition, the ZERO TO THREE Policy Center launched a [Federal Policy Baby Blog](#), which will feature analyses of the budget at various points during the process. You can also watch [video messages about the budget process](#) from a member of the ZERO TO THREE Policy Network that include interactive graphics describing the budget process. And we will send you action alerts at critical junctures to show you how to act.

The federal budget process can be complicated and seem redundant at times. But with ZERO TO THREE's budget tools you will know when and how to act on behalf of babies, toddlers & their families.

FEDERAL BUDGET PROCESS: YEAR AT-A-GLANCE (TYPICAL TIMELINE)

- February: First Monday in February President's budget proposal for the following year is released. House and Senate Budget Committees hold hearings and draft their versions of the Budget Resolution for the following year.
- March: House and Senate Budget Committees vote on their respective Budget Resolutions. Full House and Senate vote on their respective Budget Resolutions.
- April: Conference committee iron out differences between the House & Senate versions. Conference report sent back to House and Senate floors for final vote.
April 15 – Budget Resolution complete.
- May & Onward: If Congress has completed action on schedule, House & Senate Appropriations Committees assign funds 12 subcommittees in each

chamber, and those subcommittees assign funds to particular program areas. The full House and Senate Appropriations Committees vote on all the bills, and then send them to the full House and Senate for a vote. Differences are ironed out by conference committees. Final bills are sent to the President for signature or veto.

Separately, if certain cuts and changes in permanent programs must be made, the work of the authorizing committees of the House and Senate can be packaged together in a Reconciliation Bill that must be voted on separately by the House & Senate.

To help you understand the budget process even more, refer to the [*Glossary of Policy & Advocacy Terms: A Guide to the ABCs and Acronyms of the Infant-Toddler Policy Process*](#).

JANUARY

The United States Senate and House of Representatives reconvene. The President will give a major speech (either an inaugural address or a State of the Union Address, or both) that lays out the President's program and budgetary priorities for the following year.

FEBRUARY

By law, the President submits a budget request to Congress on the first Monday in February, which sets forth his or her overall fiscal policy for the following year.

House and Senate committees hold hearings on the President's budget and gather testimony from Administration officials, program stakeholders, House and Senate committees and other experts.

Opportunities for Action:

Read the ZERO TO THREE analysis of the President's budget to understand the budget choices and their impact on infants and toddlers. ZERO TO THREE Policy Network members can work to shape how the media and policymakers understand the potential impact of the President's budget proposal on babies & toddlers.

- ✓ **Call or meet with your members of Congress.**
- ✓ **Write letters to the editor of local newspapers.**
- ✓ **Meet with local reporters who cover children's issues or tax & budget issues.**

MARCH

In Committee

The House and Senate Budget Committees each draft their versions of the Budget Resolution, which is Congress' own fiscal blueprint for the next year. The budget resolution guides spending and revenues decisions for the fiscal year ahead and does not require the President's signature to take effect. Then they "mark-up" (review and revise) and vote on their respective budget resolutions. After the Budget Resolutions are voted out of the House and Senate Budget Committees, they are sent for a full vote on the House and Senate floors.

Reconciliation instructions may be included in the Budget Resolution. These instructions direct certain committees to make cuts to entitlement programs or change permanent tax laws to reach spending and revenue goals.

BABY BUDGET TIP: While the President’s budget proposes funding levels for every program, the Congressional Budget Resolution sets overall amounts for discretionary and mandatory spending. These amounts are sometimes called “caps” on spending. Advocacy efforts must focus on the importance of overall funding levels and statements of priorities in the budget that allow for adequate support for children’s programs.

Opportunities for Action:

Make the case for programs and services important to infants, toddlers and their families. Focus your attention on policymakers in leadership roles in Congress: the chairs and members of the House and Senate Budget Committees and the House and Senate Party Leaders.

State governors and locally elected officials also have a great deal of influence at this point in the process, so make the case to them as well and ask them to Be a Big Voice for Little Kids™ from their state!

- ✓ **Call, write or meet with state and local policymakers and educate them about the importance of speaking up to support babies and toddlers in the federal budget.**
- ✓ **Call, write or meet with Budget Committee members and other influential policymakers to remind them of the importance of programs for infants and toddlers.**
- ✓ **Sponsor an editorial board call with local newspapers and/or news staff of local radio & television stations. Include researchers, direct service providers, and parents to demonstrate the scope of the need.**

On the Floor

The House and Senate debate and vote on their Budget Resolutions respectively.

Limited to 20 hours of debate, Representatives and Senators have the opportunity to offer amendments to their resolutions, including amendments to change or delete reconciliation instructions.

A simple majority vote is necessary to pass the Budget Resolution in both the House (218 votes) and Senate (51 votes). No filibusters (unlimited discussion and debate) or other delaying tactics are allowed.

Opportunities for Action:

Every Senator and Representative plays a role at this point in the process.

- ✓ **Call, write or meet with policymakers and educate them about the importance of speaking up to support babies and toddlers in the federal budget.**
- ✓ **Call, write or email Budget Committee members and other influential policymakers to remind them of the importance of programs for infants and toddlers.**

- ✓ **Keep track of developments in the process by logging onto the [ZERO TO THREE Federal Policy Baby Blog](#).**

APRIL

In Conference

The House and Senate leaders appoint members (conferees) to serve on the conference committee, which will hash out differences between the House and Senate versions of the Budget Resolution. Conferees compromise on elements of their bills until they create a single version of the Budget Resolution, also known as a “conference report.” Most of this takes place outside of public hearings.

The conference committee then votes on a conference report that will be sent back to the House and Senate for final approval. Only a simple majority vote of House and Senate conferees is needed to pass the report out of the conference committee.

Opportunities for Action:

While all Representatives and Senators can try to weigh in, the most influential policymakers at this point are the House and Senate conferees (typically these are high-ranking members of the House and Senate leadership, Budget Committees and other committees most directly impacted by a Budget Resolution).

- ✓ **Keep track of differences between the House and Senate budget resolutions by visiting the [ZERO TO THREE Federal Policy Baby Blog](#), and educate your Representative and Senators on the aspects that may help to improve the lives of babies and toddlers in your state.**
- ✓ **Call, write and email the conferees and other influential policymakers, reminding them of the importance of programs for infants and toddlers.**
- ✓ **Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper, providing stories about the real impact budget decisions may have on infants and toddlers in your program and/or community.**

Back on the Floor

The final compromise version worked out between the House and Senate in conference committee (the conference report) is sent back to the floor in both the House and Senate for a final vote.

Once the conference report goes to the House and Senate floors, it is no longer possible to offer amendments or make changes.

Opportunities for Action:

At this point in the process, Senators and Representatives can only vote yes or no. ZERO TO THREE Policy Network members should look for opportunities to inform people about what the final budget resolution could mean for babies, toddlers and families in their community.

- ✓ **Educate your Representative and Senators about the impact of the final budget conference report on babies in their district.**

- ✓ **Use local media outlets to educate the larger community about the impact the budget decisions will have on local infants and toddlers.**

MAY & ONWARD

If Congress has completed action on the Budget Resolution on schedule, House and Senate Appropriations Committees begin to assign funds to particular program areas based on decisions laid out by the budget resolution. These spending or appropriations bills may be signed into law individually or Congress may roll two or more appropriations measures into a single omnibus appropriations bill. Ideally, all 12 appropriations bills will have been signed into law by October 1st when the government begins its new fiscal year. If the budget process does not meet this deadline, funding for programs covered by any appropriations bill that is not yet final is extended through a continuing resolution.

Opportunities for Action:

- ✓ **Contact your Representatives and Senators to educate them about the importance of individual programs affecting infants, toddlers, and families.**
- ✓ **Invite them to visit your program when they are at home during recesses over the spring and summer, so they can see first hand how infants and toddlers benefit.**
- ✓ **Help them understand the impacts of these services on child development and families' ability to work in their state or district.**

If reconciliation instructions are included in the Budget Resolution, then affected House and Senate committees must propose cuts and program changes in tax and entitlement programs (such as Medicaid). If the committees fail to recommend the level of cuts or changes required, the Budget Committee has the authority to propose those changes for them. These cuts and program changes are packaged together as a reconciliation bill that the House and Senate must then vote on under special rules of debate (simple majority vote, no filibusters allowed in the Senate, limited time for debate and restricted opportunity for amendment).

Opportunities for Action:

If a budget reconciliation bill is drafted, there will be additional opportunities to educate your Representative, Senators and the larger community about how the reconciliation program cuts could impact babies, toddlers and their families.

- ✓ **In late May, Members of Congress are home in their districts while Congress is in recess. Invite them to visit your program, so they can see the importance of funding services for babies firsthand.**
- ✓ **Educate your Representative and Senators about the impact of the budget reconciliation bill on babies in their district.**
- ✓ **Use local media outlets to educate the larger community about the impact the budget decisions will have on local infants and toddlers.**

For more information about how to **Be a Big Voice for Little Kids™**, go to:
<http://www.zerotothree.org/policy>.

Source:

Center for Community Change. (2005). *Congressional Budget Process: A Timeline & Opportunities for Action*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Community Change.