



Centering the Voices of Families and Communities for Better Policy in Colorado

Introduction

The Raise Colorado Coalition formed in 2018 with support from the ZERO TO THREE Think Babies Campaign. It is convened by the Colorado Children's Campaign, Clayton Early Learning, and a diverse Steering Committee, that includes Black Child Development Institute – Denver Affiliate, Early Childhood Council of Larimer County, Families Forward Resource Center, Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance, The Original Milk Mentor, Parent Possible, Roots Family Center, and grassroots community members working to help expecting families, pregnant people, infants, and toddlers in Colorado thrive. Raise works to advance equitable policies in the following focus areas:

- Paid family leave
- Affordable, quality child care, with a specific focus on infant and toddler child care
- Home visiting programs
- Access to screenings, treatment, and support
- Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health
- Healthy Nutrition
- Access to basic essentials (diapers, period products)



This brief will focus on the experiences, lessons learned, and results of the Raise Colorado Coalition's efforts to center the perspectives of those most impacted in policy advocacy.



From the beginning, Raise Colorado conveners identified robust engagement of those most impacted by policy as essential for advancing equitable policies for infants, toddlers, and their families. Operationalizing this commitment has been an ongoing process which has evolved over time and continues to evolve as approaches to engagement are refined and informed by those with lived experience. Raise's approaches to engagement to date include:

Setting the table

- Establishing a clear and transparent process for Raise policy decisions, grounded in equity.
- Building equity training into every coalition meeting to foster continuous learning and growth.
- Contracting with outside facilitators for Raise Coalition meetings to promote a neutral environment where power can be more easily shared.
- Designing Raise coalition structures to prioritize centering lived experience, such as the creation of the Community Advisory Committee.
- Promoting the value of inclusive spaces within other groups and processes that Raise members participate in.



Building trust and reciprocal relationships

- Stipends that compensate people for their expertise and contributions while being sensitive to the need to consider implications for how compensation could impact eligibility for needed public benefits.
- Traveling to meet with existing early childhood coalitions across the state to build relationships and invite partners to help craft the mission and goals for Raise from the beginning.
- Developing relationships with community groups already doing this work and intentionally stepping back to follow their lead, such as:
 - Partnering with the Colorado Association for Family Child Care to understand family home providers' needs and barriers and supporting the advocacy capacity of Association members.
 - Partnering with birth equity leaders in CO such as Elephant Circle to convene listening sessions with partners, community members, local leaders, and parents to inform policy priorities and collaboratively advocate for solutions.

- Providing strategic in kind and financial support for local community groups to engage in policy work.

- Establishing clearly designated roles and responsibilities for coalition members within Raise to promote transparency and shared accountability.

Breaking down barriers to participation

- Providing stipends to address individual barriers such as child care, transportation, technology, etc.
- Convening meetings with a hybrid option for remote participation even before Covid to encourage participation from across the state.
- Holding meetings at times that work for participants, such as in the evening for the Community Advisory Committee.
- Incorporating an intentional commitment to language justice in meetings and communication
- Establishing coalition membership criteria that allows anyone to participate that wants to and providing members with clear information about opportunities for action and engagement.



“Raise Colorado is a powerful coalition that bombards barriers with change for children and families through their commitment to advocate for equality in early childhood.”

Jalen Taylor, Black Child Development Institute Denver, Raise Colorado Steering Committee member

Creating structured opportunities for engagement beyond the coalition through listening sessions and incorporating that information into Raise policy positions and tactics

- Held listening sessions in the Denver metro area and created a toolkit and training for partners across the state to hold sessions to inform the development of the CO Infant and Family Child Care Action Plan.
- Co-convened maternal health listening sessions with families and providers, informing the creation of the [Diverse Voices Colorado Report](#).

- Supported listening sessions for the CO Universal Pre-K Policy Development Process with an intentional emphasis on surfacing potential impacts on birth to three services.

Supporting the direct participation of families in the policy process

- Annual Strolling Thunder events connecting families with their policymakers
- Partnership with the Clayton Parent Ambassador program to support the direct participation of families in Raise CO activities and in other coalitions and government workgroups, committees, and task forces.

Results

Raise has established itself as a credible voice for infants, toddlers, and families in Colorado that contributes not only deep expertise on policy issues but a commitment to inclusive processes that center equity. Reaching this point has required Raise conveners and coalition members to dedicate the time necessary to build meaningful relationships with community partners, to navigate push back and tensions with institutional partners, and to be willing to admit mistakes and engage in relationship repair when necessary. Raise has built capacity that has already contributed to significant policy change for infants and toddlers in Colorado and stands poised to increase its leadership role in infant toddler policy in the state.



Elevating the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families in Colorado

2021 ←

Winter 2021

- Raise engages the Community Language Co-op to provide Coalition facilitation with an explicit focus on language justice

2021 Legislative Session

- HB 1222 requires family child care homes be classified as residences for zoning purposes.
- SB 101 extends and improves direct entry for midwives program
- SB 193 establishes protections for pregnant people in the prenatal period
- SB 194 makes improvements to laws regarding requirements of maternal health providers and establishes 12-month post-partum Medicaid extension.
- SB 199 removes barriers for undocumented Coloradans including ability to obtain commercial licenses (including child care)

2019 ←

2019 Legislative Session

- SB 63 requires the development of an Infant and Family Child Care Action Plan to address care shortages in Colorado.
- SB 188 requires study to explore implementation of a CO PFML program
- HB 1122 strengthens existing maternal mortality review board

Summer 2019

- Listening sessions to inform Infant and Family Child Care Action Plan

→ 2022

Winter 2022

- Raise Community Advisory Committee launches

2022 legislative session

- SB 213 allocates federal child care relief and economic recovery relief funds to child care grants, facilities, and early childhood workforce investments including child care, home visiting, IECMH consultants, and early intervention providers.
- SB 1133 allocates funding to stand up new state PFML program
- HB 1295 establishes the Department of Early Childhood which will streamline services and provide families a single point of entry.
- HB 1259 makes improvements to CO TANF program, including extension beyond 60 month lifetime benefit for households demonstrating good cause and requires TANF recipients be included in future decision making for changes to the program.
- HB 1010 creates a refundable income tax credit for early childhood educators.
- HB 1289 provides health insurance coverage for children who would be eligible for Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program as well as pregnant people if not for their immigration status and continues that coverage for 12 months postpartum.

→ 2020

2020 Legislative session

- HB 1053 expands IECMH consultation
- SB 205 requires employers to provide paid sick leave
- Allocation of Covid relief funds includes expansion of infant-toddler care as an explicit goal and sets aside funding for IECMH

Fall 2020

- Maternal health listening sessions
- Proposition 118 passes, establishing one of the most robust PFML programs in the U.S.

→ 2018

- Colorado Children's Campaign and Clayton Early Learning partner with ZERO TO THREE's Think Babies campaign and launch the Raise Colorado Coalition