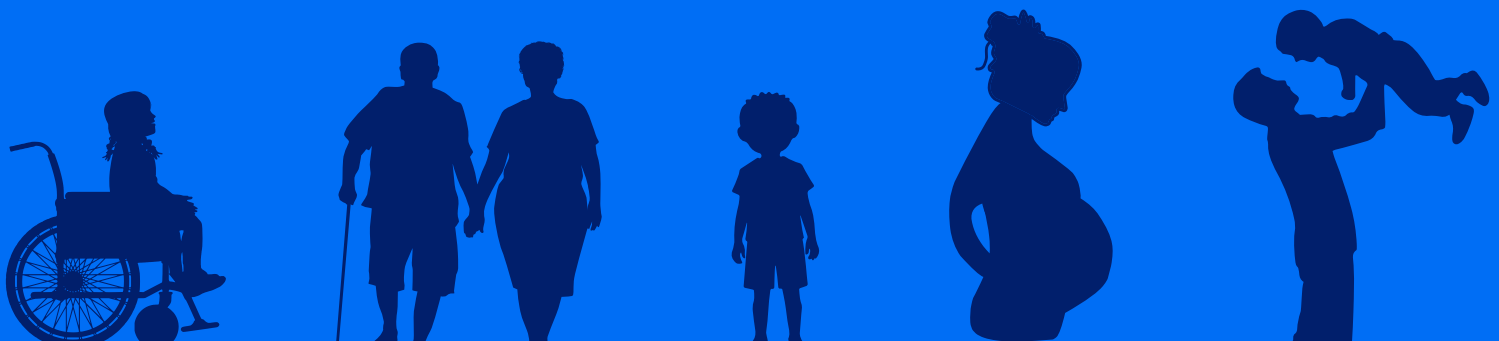


# FEDERAL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



# About this Toolkit

This non-partisan toolkit is intended to **help parents and caregivers** to take their first steps, alongside their child(ren), to engage in federal advocacy in the United States, on issues that matter to them and their families.

It does not focus on a specific law or policy.

Policy and politics can sometimes feel complex and intimidating, and successfully advocating for changes in laws or funding can take a long time. For example, Medicaid is now a crucial part of America's healthcare system, serving millions of children and families; however, it took persistent awareness-raising and advocacy before it became law in 1965.

We believe that your story and your voice matter. You are an expert on your own experiences and your family's needs. Your voice can influence policy makers and bring attention to issues that are having a real impact on your family and community. Every action, no matter how small, can help contribute to important, lasting change. The more parents, caregivers, and families are involved in the policy process, the more collective impact we can have on policy outcomes, and the more we can do to build a world that centers and supports children and families. With this in mind, we invite you to take some time to think about what issues matter to you and your family, and get involved in ways that feel right and manageable to you.

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**Please note:** (1) The information provided in this toolkit does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice; instead, all information, content, and materials are for general informational purposes only; (2) If you are going to be advocating about specific legislation as part of a tax exempt organization or group, it is important to know whether and what lobbying regulations and rules may apply. The organization may offer guidance. For organizations that want information on lobbying rules, Bolder Advocacy has attorney-trainers who are available every weekday to offer free technical assistance via email at [advocacy@afj.org](mailto:advocacy@afj.org) or via phone at 866-NP-LOBBY (866-675-6229).

# Prioritizing your Safety and Well-Being

**Advocacy isn't one-size-fits-all.** Everyone comes into advocacy with different backgrounds, experiences, concerns, comfort levels, and life circumstances. The following are some considerations as you decide what advocacy opportunities are right for you.

## Safety

When engaging in advocacy, always prioritize your safety. For example, if attending an in-person event or protest does not feel safe for you — physically or emotionally — consider other ways of sharing your voice. For example, you could create posters or flyers for others to use, or email your representatives.

## Well-Being & Self Care

Advocacy is a marathon, not a sprint. It can take a long time and a lot of coordinated effort to create meaningful change. The issues you choose to advocate for may carry personal significance for you, which can make them emotionally heavy topics to carry. This means that an important part of effective advocacy is taking care of your own well-being. There are many strategies and practices you can implement to ensure that you are taking care of yourself, while advocating for others.

## Resources

We put together a list of resources that can be helpful as you start your advocacy journey. On the next page you will find links to trusted websites and instagram posts that provide more information on topics like prioritizing your safety and well-being and how to talk to children in age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate ways when the world feels uncertain.

# Safety and Well-Being Resources

## Taking Care of Yourself While Advocating For Others

(Mental Health America)

- This website explains the impact that advocacy has on mental health and shares self-care tips and resources.

[www.mhanational.org/resources/taking-care-of-yourself-while-advocating-for-others/](http://www.mhanational.org/resources/taking-care-of-yourself-while-advocating-for-others/)

## Preparing for Safe Advocacy

(Brave Movement)

- This website provides a free downloadable PDF to help you create an individualized safety plan.

[www.bravemovement.org/resources/preparing-for-safe-advocacy](http://www.bravemovement.org/resources/preparing-for-safe-advocacy)

## Know Your Rights: Resources for Advocates

(Immigrant Legal Resource Center)

- This website has materials to help people know their rights in case of immigration enforcement encounters.

[www.ilrc.org/community-resources/know-your-rights](http://www.ilrc.org/community-resources/know-your-rights)

## How to Talk to Kids About What's Going On

(Instagram post from @luis\_thee\_lmft and @rootsandwings\_org)

- Their collaboration post offers tips from a family therapist on how to talk to kids about what is going on.

Advocacy isn't one-size-fits-all. Everyone comes into advocacy with different backgrounds, experiences, concerns, comfort levels, and life circumstances. The following are some considerations as you decide what advocacy opportunities are right for you.

# What You'll Find in Our Toolkit

## Federal Advocacy Basics

Federal Government Overview

Federal Advocacy: Owning Your Power

Advocacy Actions Overview Checklist

- Advocacy in under 5 Minutes
- Advocacy in under 10 Minutes
- Advocacy in under 30 Minutes

Additional Resources and Information

## Activities with the Kids!

Federal Advocacy Bingo

Kids Coloring Pages

Federal Advocacy Word Search

Fill in the Blanks for Advocacy

## More Tools and Information

Personality and Advocacy Actions

Q&A with a Former D.C. Staffer

Share your Stories of Advocacy and  
Connect With Us.





# What You'll Find in Our Toolkit



**Executive Branch  
(President)**



**Legislative Branch  
(House of Representatives and Senate, i.e. "Congress")**



**Judicial Branch  
(Supreme Court and lower federal courts)**

## Scan the QR Code for a 2 Minute Video

The QR code leads you to clip from our podcast, *A Flourishing Start: the ABCs of Child and Family Well-being*, that explains how our federal government is structured.

## A Flourishing Start Podcast



*Season 3 Episode 4*  
**Federal Advocacy  
101 for Parents &  
Caregivers**



Esmeralda



Klarissa Reynoso



Sonja Tonnesen-Casalegno, Esq.

# Federal Advocacy: Owning Your Power

## 1. What is Federal Advocacy?

- Federal advocacy means speaking up to your elected officials and other leaders to help inform them about what laws and policies can better support families like yours.
- Using your voice can help impact decisions about issues like early childhood education, healthcare, childcare, and more.

## 2. Why Does it Matter?

- Your day-to-day experiences are impacted every day by laws and rules made by the federal government. Your advocacy is important to help make positive changes for your child's future and your own.
- Advocating now can lead to better schools, healthier communities, and more inclusive healthcare settings in the future.

## 3. Easy Ways to Get Involved

- **Call or email your lawmakers:** It takes just a few minutes!
- **Sign a petition online:** Quick and easy!
- **Join a parent group:** Meet others and advocate together!

## 4. Tips for Busy Parents

- Advocacy doesn't have to take long —short messages matter, too.
- Find ways to get involved that you can do together with your kids, and teach them how their voices matter, too — sending art projects can be memorable and impactful!



Watch or listen to our podcast episode:  
*Federal Advocacy 101 for Parents and Caregivers*

# Advocacy Actions Overview Checklist



## Under 5 minutes

Identify your state representative	<input type="radio"/>
Identify your state senator	<input type="radio"/>
Identify your U.S. Representative	<input type="radio"/>
Identify your U.S. Senators	<input type="radio"/>
Call your representatives about an issue you're passionate about	<input type="radio"/>

## Under 10 minutes



Make a list of 3 issues you care about	<input type="radio"/>
Read a book to your child about advocacy or an issue you care about	<input type="radio"/>
Email your representatives about an issue you care about	<input type="radio"/>
Encourage your child to share their experiences or perspective on issues	<input type="radio"/>



## Under 30 minutes

Make a sign or banner	<input type="radio"/>
Sign on to a letter of support from a non-profit organization that aligns with your values	<input type="radio"/>
Talk to your neighbor about an issue you care about	<input type="radio"/>
Post on social media about an issue you're passionate about	<input type="radio"/>

## Under 60 minutes



Write a letter to your representatives	<input type="radio"/>
Register to vote if you are eligible	<input type="radio"/>
Mail your child's art piece to your representative	<input type="radio"/>



## 60 minutes+

Write a blog post or op-ed about an issue you care about	<input type="radio"/>
Attend a protest or demonstration	<input type="radio"/>
Attend a local council or school board meeting	<input type="radio"/>

### HOW TO USE:

Identify how much time you have to advocate and choose one from that category. Once complete, check off the circle.

### Reminder:

All types of advocacy actions can help make change.



# Advocacy Actions In Under 5 min



**Under 5 minutes**

Identify your state representative	<input type="radio"/>
Identify your state senator	<input type="radio"/>
Identify your U.S. Representative	<input type="radio"/>
Identify your U.S. Senators	<input type="radio"/>
Call your representatives about an issue you're passionate about	<input type="radio"/>



**Scan the QR Code:**

It is a short clip from a parent of a young child calling his representative

## Resources and Tips



- To find your elected officials visit this website:  
[www.usa.gov/elected-officials](http://www.usa.gov/elected-officials)



- To call your Senators and Representatives you can use any of these resources:
  - Call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard and it will connect you with any member's office; all you need is your ZIP code
    - 202-224-3121
  - You can also contact your member of Congress by phone, by calling 866-426-2631

# Advocacy Actions In Under 10 min



## Under 10 minutes

Make a list of 3 issues you care about	<input type="radio"/>
Read a book to your child about advocacy or an issue you care about	<input type="radio"/>
Encourage your child to share their experiences or perspective on issues	<input type="radio"/>
Email your representatives about an issue you care about	<input type="radio"/>



### Scan the QR Code:

It is a short clip of a parent making a list of 3 issues he cares about.

## Resources and Tips



- Visit your local public library and check out free books tailored for young children about advocacy or community involvement. Ask your librarian where the children's section is located.
- Common Sense Media provides a booklist with ratings on social justice and activism. Visit: [www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/books-to-inspire-young-activists](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/books-to-inspire-young-activists)



- The National Association for the Education of Young Children has a article on useful tips about encouraging your child to share their thoughts. Visit: [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

# Advocacy Actions In Under 30 min



## Under 30 minutes

Make a sign or banner	<input type="radio"/>
Talk to your neighbor about an issue you care about	<input type="radio"/>
Post on social media about an issue you're passionate about	<input type="radio"/>
Sign on to a letter of support from a non-profit organization that aligns with your values	<input type="radio"/>



### Scan the QR Code:

It is a short clip of a parent posting on social media about an issue he cares about.

## Resources and Tips



- The free version of Canva includes a wide range of templates, graphics and tools for creating various visual content. [www.canva.com](https://www.canva.com)
- It doesn't need to be complicated; a piece of a paper and markers is a great way to make a sign or banner.



- Start with introducing yourself to your neighbor, if you have never met.



- The National Center for Youth Law often has "action alerts" to sign onto. Contact us to ask about our active actions: [info@youthlaw.org](mailto:info@youthlaw.org)

# Additional Resources and Information

**Check out the resources below to learn more about advocacy, how laws are made and ways to get involved.**

## **Attend a protest**

- ACLU “Know Your Rights: Protesters’ Rights” pocket guide – what to bring, how to interact with police, and emergency hotline numbers. [www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/protesters-rights](http://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/protesters-rights)

## **Email your Senators & Representative**

- [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) “Contacting U.S. Senators” directory
- [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) “Find Your Representative” tool

## **Mailing art to your Senators & Representative**

- Search for your rep on this website and use the mailing address on here to ensure they receive it. [www.clerk.house.gov/Members#MemberProfiles](http://www.clerk.house.gov/Members#MemberProfiles)

## **Free space – Take some deep breaths**

- Headspace offers a free “Box Breathing” tutorial you can play on your phone before, during, or after advocacy tasks. [www.headspace.com/content/mindful-activity/box-breathing/5647](http://www.headspace.com/content/mindful-activity/box-breathing/5647)

## **Learn more about how our laws are made**

- This online resource provides a basic outline of the numerous steps of our federal law-making process. [www.congress.gov/help/learn-about-the-legislative-process/how-our-laws-are-made](http://www.congress.gov/help/learn-about-the-legislative-process/how-our-laws-are-made)

**Advocacy isn’t one-size-fits-all. Everyone comes into advocacy with different backgrounds, experiences, concerns, comfort levels, and life circumstances. Always prioritize your safety and well-being.**

# Personality & Advocacy Action

There are lots of ways to advocate! What's the right fit for you and your family?

We are creative and love art projects!



Art is a great advocacy tool! Try making a sign, banner, or art piece expressing your values. You can put them in the window of your home to share out your message.

We love to be out in the community and help bring our neighbors together!



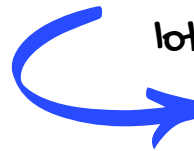
You're natural organizers! Try attending an event or demonstration, and INVITING others to join you, or speaking up at a local council or school board meeting about an issue important to you.

We are chatty and not shy about telling people what we think!



Use your voice to make change! Try making calls to your representatives about the needs you are seeing in your community. Gather up some friends and phone bank together, teaching others how to speak their minds, too.

We are quiet and public speaking isn't our thing, but we follow news closely and have lots of opinions to share!



Put pen to paper! Try writing a blog post or op-ed about a topic you care about, or emailing your reps about issues you're tracking and thinking about.

We have a big group of friends and family that we stay in touch with, but spread out in different states and cities.



Tap into your broad network and lean on your communication skills! Share information to raise awareness about important topics, and circulate email sign-ons and petitions on key issues.

# Q&A with Former D.C. Staffer

Klarissa Reynoso served as a federal staffer for two Congress members and has more than four years of experience meeting with parents, caregivers, and community members on issues they care about. We asked her to share memorable advocacy stories and words of encouragement for people looking to advocate. Check out Klarissa's responses below.

## Can you share words of encouragement to people who are advocating for the first time with their federal elected officials?

Remember that the systems try to divide us to distract us. Before you blame your neighbor, take a look at the systems that are holding us down collectively. Take a moment to educate yourself and then take that anger, anxiety, frustration, creativity, and joy and share it with the world through communal action. Lean on your neighbors, educate each other, and listen to each other. Activism revolves around bringing us together and uniting our voices for change. Your voice is important and deserves to be heard.

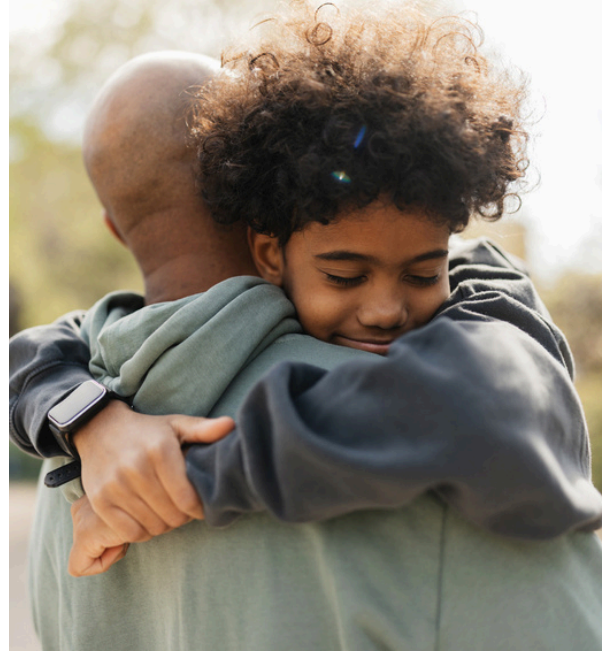
## Is there anything you would like to share with parents and caregivers who want to engage in our democratic process with federal elected officials?

Give yourself grace! We want to protect our kids and create a world where they are loved. When we cannot do that, it can feel daunting. But we are stronger as a community that is tied together through compassion. So be compassionate with one another and with yourself. Rest, when you need to rest. Cry, when you need to cry. And when you are ready... protest, march, call your representatives, write letters, read, share information, and show the children in our lives how strong our love for them is.



# Q&A with Former D.C. Staffer

Parents and caregivers often juggle many tasks for themselves, their children, and family. What are quick but effective ways that they can engage to express their concerns and advocate for change with their federal elected officials?



Our world today can be extremely overwhelming. When we turn on the news or open our social media accounts, we're immediately flooded with negative stories from around the world. For many of us, this brings feelings of empathetic doom or sadness. When we add kids into the picture, a new sense of anxiety can come along. Having time and space to channel that anxiety and worry into action can help us feel like we're contributing to positive change.

Some simple options might be signing petitions—they often take just one to two minutes to fill out. Making lawn signs with your loved ones can also be a fun and creative activity for all ages, and it's a great way to express what you want to share with the world.

You can also invite kids to join you while you call local politicians, or host watch parties at your home for city council meetings. And perhaps most importantly, just have honest and open conversations with your kids.

As parents and caregivers, one of the most powerful forms of activism is raising a generation that is compassionate. When we teach our kids about what's happening in the world—and help them understand that we can advocate for others and for ourselves—that is advocacy education.

# Q&A with Former D.C. Staffer

## Can you share examples of how parents or caregivers advocated with the elected official's office for which you served?

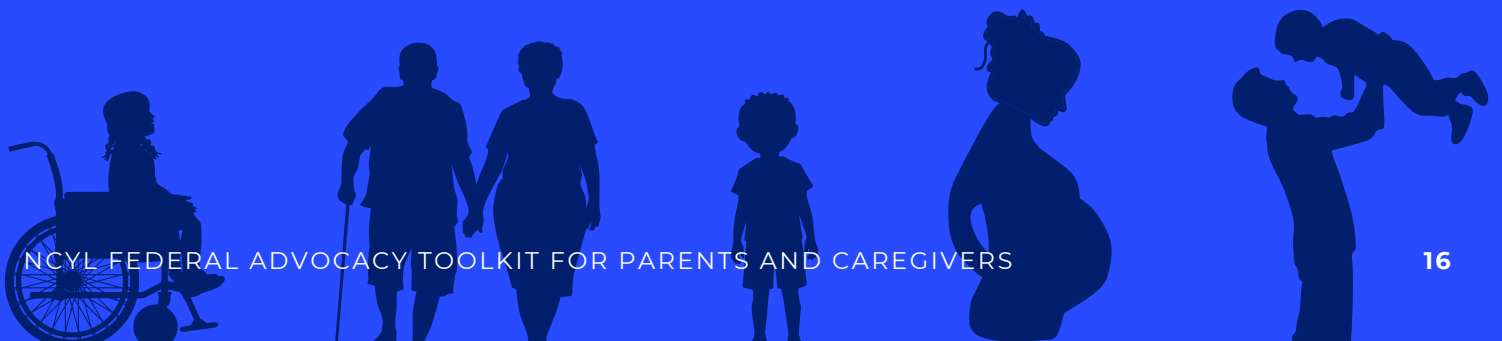
During my time at the US House of Representatives, I saw many loving adults, whether that be a parent, sibling, tio, tia, neighbor, or caregiver advocate for the children and young people in their lives. When I hear this question, two families come to mine.

Here's one: a mother and her two daughters from Oakland, California, walked into our District 13 DC Office, with handwritten letters, posters, and photos. The mother was showing her daughters how to advocate for a future that they deserve — one with healthy school lunches, patient and trauma-informed teachers, and a budget that took care of people. The mother helped the daughters write their letters and we took photos with their posters.

Another example was a man whose niece had passed away due to gun violence. He dedicated his afternoon to calling offices and sharing her story with congressional staffers — even those who did not want to listen. He was persistent and carried on her legacy with him. Both advocated for children in different ways, yet both were impactful and their stories stuck with me as I drafted legislation.



# Federal Advocacy Activities **WITH KIDS**



# BINGO

## Federal Advocacy

 <p>Make a sign or banner</p>	 <p>Make a list of 3 issues you care about</p>	 <p>Talk to your neighbor about an issue you care about</p>	 <p>Attend a protest</p>	 <p>Email your Senators about an issue you care about</p>
 <p>Identify your state representative</p>	 <p>Identify your state senator</p>	 <p>Identify your U.S. Rep.</p>	 <p>Identify your U.S. Senators</p>	 <p>Email your rep about an issue you care about</p>
 <p>Write a blog post or op-ed</p>	 <p>Sign a letter of support from an organization that aligns with your values</p>	<p><b>FREE SPACE</b></p> <p>take a deep breath</p>	 <p>Ask your child what they think about an issue</p>	 <p>Call your Senator about an issue you care about</p>
 <p>Attend a local council or school board meeting</p>	 <p>Talk to your child about voting, and why it matters</p>	 <p>Share your experiences with a nonprofit or on a podcast</p>	 <p>Post on social media about an issue you care about</p>	 <p>Call your representative about an issue you care about</p>
 <p>Complete the advocacy word search</p>	 <p>Write a letter with your child and send it to your representative</p>	 <p>Mail your child's art piece to your rep</p>	 <p>Read a book to your child about activism, advocacy or issues you care about</p>	 <p>Make a video statement of an issue you support and send to your rep</p>

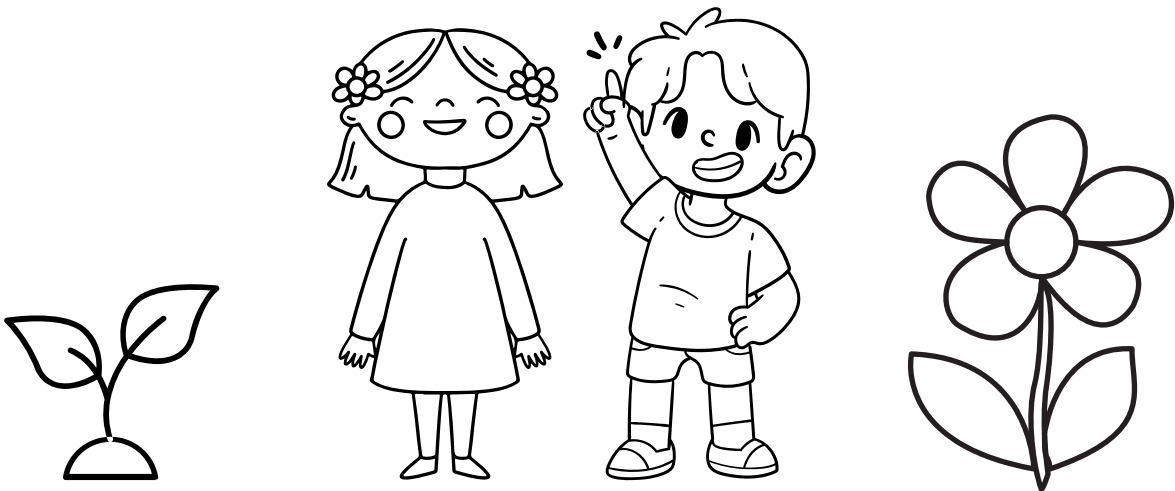
# BINGO for Kids

## Federal Advocacy

Draw a picture: What makes you feel happy?	Make a list of 3 things that help you stay healthy	Talk to your friend about a topic you care about	Attend a peaceful community event	Ask your caregiver to take you to a local public library
Learn the name of your State Rep.	Learn the name of your State Senator	Learn the name of your U.S. Rep.	Learn the names of your U.S. Senators	Write to your reps about a topic you care about
Read a book about kindness	Make up a short song about a topic you care about	<b>FREE SPACE</b>	Name the three branches of government	Talk to your caregiver about a topic you care about
Read a book about community	Learn how to spell <u>care</u>	Read a book about diversity	Take a deep breath	Learn how to spell <u>vote</u>
Complete the advocacy word search	Name 3 things you would do if you were president	Mail your artwork piece to your reps	Read a book about emotions	Read a book about voting

# KIDS' VOICES

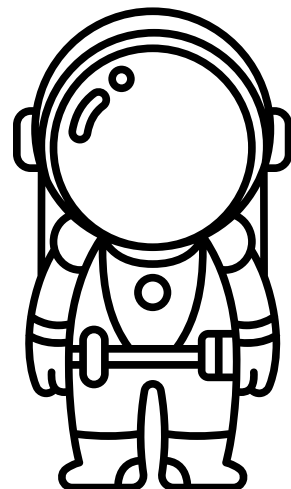
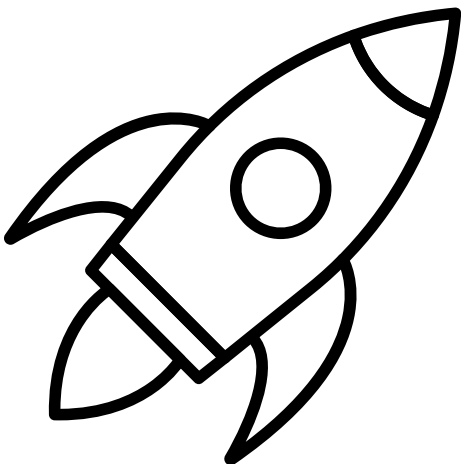
**MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE**





# KIDS' VOICES

**ARE OUR FUTURE**



# Advocacy Word Search

L	W	L	O	P	K	H	E	A	L	T	H	D	Y	C	Q	O	J
C	P	E	P	P	K	D	A	D	V	O	C	A	C	Y	J	Y	S
F	N	Z	L	U	F	A	T	H	E	R	A	T	G	O	T	Y	U
F	A	M	I	L	Y	O	V	M	C	H	A	M	P	I	O	N	P
D	W	T	X	U	B	O	E	M	O	M	N	P	Y	C	G	V	P
R	E	P	R	E	S	E	N	T	A	T	I	V	E	B	E	O	O
J	C	H	I	L	D	R	I	F	U	O	H	V	O	P	T	I	R
S	E	N	A	T	O	R	F	N	T	K	H	E	B	T	H	C	T
I	Z	I	Q	L	T	S	F	V	G	C	A	U	R	B	E	E	V
F	J	V	I	I	J	F	E	D	E	R	A	L	P	V	R	X	T
O	C	O	N	G	R	E	S	S	L	B	P	A	R	E	N	T	C
K	B	Y	H	L	E	G	I	S	L	A	T	I	O	N	V	O	Z

Find the following words in the puzzle.  
Words are hidden →, ↓, and ↘.

REPRESENTATIVE  
LEGISLATION  
WELLBEING  
ADVOCACY  
TOGETHER  
CONGRESS  
CHAMPION

FEDERAL  
SENATOR  
SUPPORT  
PARENT  
HEALTH  
FAMILY  
MOTHER

FATHER  
CHILD  
VOICE  
VOTE

# Fill in the Blanks for Advocacy

## HOW TO USE:

Read each sentence out loud with your child and ask them to choose a word to fill in the blank. Once the letter is completed, you and your child can email it to your representative, make a call together to your representative, or mail the letter to them.

### Fill in the Blanks #1: Planet Protector

Hello [Name of Congress Member],

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ (name), and I am \_\_\_\_\_ (number) years old. I love our Earth!

My favorite animal is the \_\_\_\_\_ (animal).

When I play outside, I like to \_\_\_\_\_ (action).

Please help keep the air and water \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective).

Let's plant more \_\_\_\_\_ (plural noun) together!

Thank you for helping take care of our \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) planet.

Your friend,

\_\_\_\_\_ (your name)

### Fill in the Blanks #2: My School Adventure

Hi [Name of Congress Member],

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ (name). I am \_\_\_\_\_ (number) years old.

My favorite part of school is \_\_\_\_\_ (activity).

My teacher is very \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) and helps me \_\_\_\_\_ (verb).

Please make sure all schools have lots of \_\_\_\_\_ (plural noun).

School makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_ (feeling).

Thank you for helping my school be \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective)!

Your friend,

\_\_\_\_\_ (your name)

# Fill in the Blanks for Advocacy

## Fill in the Blanks #3: Happy Feelings!

Dear [Name of Congress Member],

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ (name). I am \_\_\_\_\_ (number) years old.

When I feel happy, I like to \_\_\_\_\_ (verb).

My favorite thing that makes me smile is \_\_\_\_\_ (noun).

Please help make sure all kids feel \_\_\_\_\_ (feeling).

Thank you for helping kids.

Your friend,

\_\_\_\_\_ (your name)

### EXAMPLE:

#### Fill in the Blanks #3: Happy Feelings!

Dear **Congresswoman Lateefah Simon**,

My name is **Monica**. I am **5** years old.

When I feel happy, I like to **sing**.

My favorite thing that makes me smile is **going to school**.

Please help make sure all kids feel **loved**.

Thank you for helping kids.

Your friend,

**Monica**

## SHARE YOUR STORIES OF ADVOCACY AND CONNECT WITH US!

Email us photos, videos, or reflections of your participation in advocacy at **[health@youthlaw.org](mailto:health@youthlaw.org)**

Connect with us on social media

**[@ncylnews](#)**

**[@aflourishingstartpodcast](#)**

Visit our websites

**[www.youthlaw.org](http://www.youthlaw.org)**

**[www.flourishingstart.squarespace.com](http://www.flourishingstart.squarespace.com)**

