

2024 LEGISLATIVE CHAMPIONS FOR CHILDREN: ADVOCACY GUIDE

This month our country will go through immense changes as we elect new leaders in the White House and U.S. Congress. Let's work together to ensure that one of the additional changes that are made going forward include the prioritization of children in policy and budget decisions at all levels of government.

As we know, because children don't vote or have political action committees, their issues are easily overlooked by elected officials. One of the ways that **First Focus on Children's Campaign for Children** seeks to support members of Congress (MOCs) who do the right thing for children (even when it might not generate more votes or money for their campaigns), is via our annual **Champions for Children awards**.

Here's how it works: **First Focus Campaign for Children's 2024 Legislative Scorecard** ranks lawmakers according to votes and bill sponsorships taken during the current congressional session. Our new report examines key pieces of legislation designed to provide high-quality, affordable child care; prevent child labor; improve the child tax credit; better protect foster youth, native American children and other underrepresented kids; preserve the U.S. Department of Education; promote mental health access in schools; ensure that all families can afford their child's insulin; and address other issues critical to advancing the needs of vulnerable children living in some of the poorest places on the planet. The members with the most points are awarded our "Champion for Children" and "Defender of Children" awards.

What makes the 120 "Champions" and "Defenders" unique is that they have repeatedly used their legislative roles to raise and move to the forefront those issues that are important for children. "Champions" received the most points in the scorecard because they consistently pursue policies and legislation that make children a priority across the full array of issue areas. "Defenders" are the second tier below that who more often than most take action in support of the best interests of children in a number of votes and by sponsoring or cosponsoring of bills. (Of course there are others in Congress, who may have just fallen short in terms of points to qualify as a "Champion" or "Defender" but who have nevertheless also taken important votes or played a leadership role for children on some important aspects of policy that would either improve the lives of children or protect children from harm. We also applaud these lawmakers for their work in those areas.)

This month, please join us in expressing our heartfelt gratitude to our Representatives and Senators who are "Champions for Children" or "Defenders of Children". As their constituents, it will mean a lot to them when we recognize and thank them for championing issues that matter most to kids. By thanking them, we reinforce the importance of their efforts and encourage their continued leadership.

A powerful way to thank your member of Congress is to **write a Letter to the Editor** to your local newspaper mentioning your member by name. Representatives and Senators have dedicated staff who monitor what local papers are saying, and they are particularly interested if their name is mentioned. A positive message in their local paper will stand out and have an outsized impact. In addition, your letter will be read by many others in your community, educating and raising awareness publicly about the importance of prioritizing children's issues.

If your member of Congress is not listed as a "Champion" or "Defender" **this year, please write them a respectful letter thanking them for a position they have taken with which you agree and then encourage them to become a leader on children's issues going forward.

Take Action Now:

Write a Letter to the Editor (LTE) thanking your "Champion" or "Defender" of Children

1. Scan your local paper for an article on which you can "hook" what you want to say. (This month you will likely find articles or opinions about the election).
2. Write your letter. Congratulate your MOC for being named a "Champion" or "Defender" of Children by **First Focus Campaign for Children**. Be sure to express your sincere gratitude for your MOC's leadership in Congress on behalf of children.
3. Make your letter short and compelling. Usually, LTEs can be no longer than 200 words but check your newspaper's particular guidelines to be sure. **Here is an example of what you might write.**
4. Include your contact information so they can verify you wrote it.
5. The newspaper will only contact you if they plan to publish your piece. Many newspapers offer guidelines on how many days should pass before you submit to another publication, but if yours does not, you can assume after 3 days that they will not publish your piece. You are then free to submit it elsewhere.
6. If your piece is published, email a copy to your elected officials to be sure that they see it. In the subject line, write "LTE/op-ed that mentions [name of MOC]". They will be very grateful, and this can serve to develop your relationship with the office going forward.
7. Don't forget: highlight your LTE with your connections on social and ask them to amplify your message. Your success can inspire and educate others.
8. And email a copy to **leilan@FirstFocus.org** so that we can celebrate your achievement.

If your MOC is not listed as a “Champion” or “Defender” please email them instead:

1. Find your **Representative** or **Senators** and scan their websites to figure out how to email their office.
2. Introduce yourself and let them know you are a constituent who really cares about their position on children's issues.
3. Highlight the fact that First Focus **Campaign for Children** releases a **scorecard** each year to acknowledge those in Congress who take leadership roles on behalf of kids.
4. Find something on your MOC's website that you can thank them for doing and let them know that going forward you support them taking greater leadership in the area of child wellbeing.
5. Express your hope that they will receive a “Champion for Children” award next year.