



## Advocating for Local Policies to Make It Easier for Providers to Open and Expand Programs

### Root Cause Addressed

- Challenging regulatory and business environment
- Lack of community coordination and engagement

### Challenges Addressed

Care families need is not available

### Rationale

While many long-term structural changes are needed to how child care is funded, there are short- and medium-term steps that the region can take to begin addressing the root causes and resulting impacts of the challenging regulatory and business environment and the lack of community coordination and engagement. The strategies in this section, which leverage already engaged and motivated individuals and organizations, can begin moving forward in the first half of 2024. While longer-term funding questions identified in the previous action area are still needed to open centers and ensure they are financially viable, the strategies of this section can facilitate quicker, more efficient use of future dollars earmarked for child care.

### Community Objectives

1. Advocate for local governments to adopt the regional action plan and recognize child care as a pressing economic crisis
2. Advocate for local policy change related to zoning and development

# Advocate for Local Governments to Adopt the Regional Action Plan and Recognize Child Care as a Pressing Economic Crisis

Priority: High | Time frame: June 2024

## Description

Many strategies in this plan will require interest and action by local entities in the region moving forward. As local governments serve a significant role as a funder and convener of much of this work, getting the counties, cities, and townships in the region to adopt this plan is an important first step when laying the groundwork for future activities.

## Key Parties

- Ann Arbor SPARK
- Coalition members
- Local governments

## Potential Activities

- Create a contact list of local governments to reach out to and share the plan with upon its publication
- Develop a brief advocacy tool kit that members of the coalition or other interested parties can use to encourage local governments to adopt the plan and take initial action in line with the plan
- Track local governments who have adopted the plan to keep them engaged and informed about other steps they can be taking in line with this plan

## Opportunities for Statewide Coordination

Given the local focus of this work, there is less need for statewide coordination at this time. However, gaining a better understanding of what other communities are prioritizing this work could help in connecting neighboring regions whose childcare systems can impact each other.

## Why Is This Important?

Elsewhere in the plan, local governments are identified as key partners to make important policy and funding decisions to support child care in the region. To increase buy-in for those efforts, ensuring local policymakers are educated and engaged on current state of child care and impacts of child care on several aspects of our community is critical. Sharing this plan directly with local governments and then encouraging coalition members and concerned community members to use their voices to amplify importance will greatly increase the likelihood of immediate and long-term action.

## Key Considerations

There is a wide variety of local governments in the region. The two counties, while sharing many characteristics, also have their own unique challenges related to child care. Further, within counties, cities and townships vary greatly in how much their municipality is impacted by child care and the capacity they have as an entity make significant impact on any of these issues. Ensuring that outreach and engagement is tailored to engage local governments in a meaningful and relevant way will be critical to creating a broad base of support.

## Tracking Progress

### *Outputs*

- The number of local municipalities sent the regional action plan
- The number of local municipalities that adopt the regional action plan and recognize child care as a priority issue



# Advocate for Local Policy Change Related to Zoning and Development

Priority: Medium | Time frame: December 2024

## Description

Multiple conversations at coalition meetings highlighted stories from providers struggling to establish or expand their business due to zoning laws that were not made with child care providers in mind. The result is a taxing and slow process that stifles the increase in the number of slots available while also making it hard for providers to stay up to date. Additionally, with municipalities lacking consistency in their planning processes, even individuals who are well informed can struggle to navigate the system themselves or support others to do the same.

## Key Parties

- Ann Arbor SPARK (lead)
- Coalition members
- Local government planning entities
- Public Sector Consultants

## Potential Activities

- Host a preliminary meeting with local providers, policymakers, and planning entities in spring 2024 to start a process and identify individuals or organizations to lead this work moving forward
- Identify a list of best practices to develop draft zoning language that can be adopted by local governments in the region
- Reach out to local governments and planning entities to educate them on child care-specific topics and encourage the adoption of draft zoning language
- Keep group of local providers, policymakers, and planning entities engaged to identify other local zoning or municipal policies that could be enacted, such as incentivizing the development of child care facilities as part of new developments or redevelopments, as is sometimes done in affordable housing policies

## Opportunities for Statewide Coordination

As this region and other regions move these conversations forward, sharing of any policies or ordinance language that is developed and adopted would allow for the consistency that providers have highlighted being needed throughout the state.

## Key Considerations

While the above steps detail how action can happen locally, reform is also needed at the state level to reduce regulatory burden. To that end, in addition to these actions, people living and working in the area who care about improving the state of child care must also be ready to advocate and support policy solutions identified by other coalitions and statewide efforts to ensure a broad base of support to increase the speed and priority of those policies moving forward.

In addition to local efforts to develop and adopt draft best practice policies, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation recently funded the creation of early care and education guidelines for use by Redevelopment Ready Communities. Any municipality could also use these guidelines, which are expected by Fall of 2024, to inform local policy decisions.

## Tracking Progress

### *Outputs*

- The number of local municipalities with whom example policies and ordinances are shared
- The number of local municipalities that adopt the example policies and ordinances

### *Outcomes*

- Increase in the number of licensed slots in the region
- Increase in the sustainability of child care providers by reducing the number of owners who identify regulatory burden as a business challenge

