

Utah's New Early Childhood Commission Needs YOUR Expertise.

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Written by: Anna Thomas

Are you concerned that young families in Utah can't access services to help their kids grow up healthy and strong?

Have you seen families with young children who have special education needs struggle to find diagnoses and early interventions?

Are there more parents in your community who *want* to send their children to preschool and kindergarten, than there are spaces for children in those programs?

Utah's new Early Childhood Commission is tasked with hearing such concerns, and coordinating state resources to better meet those needs. The Commission will need input from you and other members of the public in order to accomplish its legislatively-mandated responsibilities.

All 2019 meetings of the [Early Childhood Commission](#), listed below, will take place in the Kletting Room of the Senate Building at the Utah State Capitol. These meetings are open to the public, and will be recorded, as well.

~~THURSDAY, AUGUST 22, 10:00 a.m.~~ <--- CANCELLED

~~WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 11:00 a.m.~~ <-- rescheduled for 1:00 p.m.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 10:00 a.m.

During the 2019 legislative session, our staff and community partners lobbied hard to pass [HB47, "Early Learning Coordination Amendments,"](#) sponsored by Rep. Lowry Snow (District 74 – Saint George).

That is because we know from experts on the ground – community members, parents, pediatricians, home visiting professionals, early care and education providers, to name just a few – that Utah's resources for families with young children are offered in a way that may be convenient and efficient for government agencies...but not necessarily for families and children.

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HB47 established an Early Childhood Commission to reverse that equation: to assess what families with young children need, and then to align existing state-funded services to meet those needs in a way that is most supportive and empowering of these families.

The Early Childhood Commission is composed of only five members: the Lieutenant Governor; the respective Directors of the Departments of Human Services, Health and Workforce Services; and the Superintendent of the Board of Education. The good news is that these leaders are in a position to make decisions and make things happen. The bad news is, they are very far removed from the on-the-ground work that actually supports and empowers families with young children.

That is why the Commission needs to hear directly from you. They need to hear the stories of parents struggling to find child care for their infants and toddlers, pediatric nurses concerned about malnutrition among the babies they treat, Head Start teachers wanting to help more children of migrant farmworkers, grandparents who never thought they would be raising their own grandchildren, special needs interventionists who believe all kids deserve to be part of the community...

The Early Childhood Commission will be advised by the Early Childhood Utah Advisory Council, an established group of early childhood professionals with expertise in specific areas of Utah's system of supportive programs for families with young children. But feedback from professionals is not enough.

Utah families with young children deserve well-designed programs that are structured around the needs of families, not around the organizational charts of government agencies. Finding special education assistance, or accessing nutritional programs for newborns, should be easy for the families who are seeking that support.

That can't happen without input directly from families with young children, and from the people who work with those families and children most directly. Hope to see you on Capitol Hill for these important public conversations.

Note: It does not escape our attention that all of the currently scheduled Commission meetings will be held during work hours, in Salt Lake City. We understand that this

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makes involvement by working parents, school-based educators, home-based early care and education providers, community members and professionals away from the Wasatch Front, and many others extremely difficult. If you have suggestions for how the Commission can better engage with impacted families who have young children, and those community members who serve and support them, we encourage you to [share that feedback with the Commission](#).