

Voices for Utah Children 2025 Legislative Priorities

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Written by: Anna Thomas



Looking to the 2025 Legislative Session, Voices for Utah Children remains committed to speaking out for all those Utahns who can't vote but are greatly impacted by public policy: **our kids!**

Despite an increasingly difficult state policy climate, we intend to do our best to do right by Utah kids this session in the following ways:

- Protecting policy gains that have helped Utah children in recent years, such as [early intervention services for kids who are at risk of juvenile justice involvement](#);
- Speaking out against policies that hurt Utah children, such as [slashing Medicaid coverage that helps thousands of kids](#) in our state every year;
- Ensuring that people who care about kids have accurate, truthful information about Utah's legislative process, outcomes, and impacts;
- Supporting everyday Utahns who want to [learn about and participate in the legislative process](#) for the benefit of the kids in their lives; and
- Empowering our community partner organizations to engage as leaders on the Hill.

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With so many recent bad-faith attacks on public policies that help children, we expect the 2025 session to be a particularly bruising one. While we have been able to focus our energies on moving proactive policies that help Utah children and their families in the past, our legislative advocacy will be primarily defensive in nature this year.

Our northstar for children's health in Utah is protecting and expanding health care access for children through Utah's popular kids health insurance programs: Medicaid, CHIP and State CHIP. More than 200,000 Utah children rely on Medicaid and CHIP to access the basic health services that they need to grow up healthy and strong! That means our organization has more than 200,000 reasons to ensure these programs survive and thrive.

There is a lot of misinformation out there about Medicaid, specifically; we are prepared to challenge this with the facts about how helpful Medicaid is for Utah kids. Did you know that the largest share of Utah's Medicaid population are kids? In rural Utah, Medicaid is often the primary source of health coverage for families. One out of every four kids living in rural Utah is covered by Medicaid!

In 2025, we will support efforts to secure Medicaid reimbursement for Community Health Workers in Utah. These professionals are critical to the distribution of important health information and resources, particularly to children and their families in hard-to-reach communities.

We also plan to support legislation from Rep. Ray Ward (R-Bountiful) that will seek to better integrate the CHIP and Medicaid programs, which will have the effect of making coverage more accessible for kids.

We are deeply concerned that the upcoming legislative session may bring harmful consequences for immigrant children in our state and their families. We anticipate proposals rooted in the misguided belief that immigrant and refugee children in Utah are not vital, enriching members of our communities.

Particularly in the crosshairs will be children who need extra assistance learning English as part of their public education journey. Conservative state legislator [Trevor Lee \(Layton-R\) has suggested](#), both on social media and through past legislative

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efforts, that multilingual students who immigrate to Utah should no longer have access to free public education.

Recently, the Education Interim Committee advanced [a bill](#) to provide additional funding to schools experiencing a 50% increase in English Learner (EL) enrollment over a three-year average. While this measure represents a step forward, we are concerned it excludes schools that have historically served high numbers of EL students, as the 50% threshold is unattainable for them. Legislators argued that these schools already receive funding, yet many educators from these schools have expressed that current funding levels are insufficient.

We encourage the legislature to craft policies that ensure resources are directed toward schools with the greatest need, rather than setting thresholds that may leave many struggling schools behind.

We expect commonsense public policies, such as driver privilege cards, to be threatened in 2025. This policy is good for immigrant children, by ensuring their parents can more safely engage in community life. Immigration policy is complicated and policies that impact immigrant parents also target Utah kids who are undocumented or who belong to “mixed-status” families (wherein some family members are legally residing in the U.S. while others lack the appropriate documentation).

We are taking very seriously the threats made against immigrant communities by public officials at the federal level and the impacts they will have in our state. Our governor has already signaled his enthusiasm for increased [deportations](#), [immigrant detention](#), and legislation that will impact immigrants and refugees.

Voices for Utah Children is proud to have helped advance important policies that make life better for immigrant and refugee children in our state. We intend to protect those important policy gains during the 2025 session alongside our [Utah Immigrant Advocacy Coalition](#) and other community partners.

Despite enthusiastic efforts by parents and early educators in recent years, the Utah Legislature continues to make the bare minimum of effort to invest in the early years of Utah kids’ lives. In response, we will continue highlighting the central importance

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of public investment in early care and learning policies. We will advocate for time-tested policies and programs that we know work to build a stronger foundation for families with young children.

During the 2025 session, we will support efforts to scale up the state's high-quality school readiness program to serve more kids, and will seek funding for a promising child care sector stabilization program (the "Kentucky Model") that the state's Office of Child Care has so far [failed to implement](#).

We plan to support legislative proposals based on the recommendations of the [Child Care Solutions & Workforce Productivity Plan](#), recently completed by the Women in the Economy Subcommittee, as well as the expansion of Utah's limited Child Tax Credit included in the Governor's [FY2026 Budget Recommendations](#).

We will continue to work closely with our early education partner organizations to combat ongoing efforts to degrade the health and safety of childcare settings. Legislative leaders have signalled that they plan to propose dangerously lax requirements for people who are paid to care for children. Specifically, they hope to increase [again](#) the number of children an unlicensed individual can care for without any safety regulations, training, or oversight.

[Sanctioning potentially dangerous child care environments is not an effective way to improve our child care system](#). We will support efforts by Senator Luz Escamilla to return Utah licensing requirements for child care programs to levels that are healthy and safe for children, as well as for the providers who care for them. Sen. Escamilla also plans to reintroduce her public-private partnership proposal to repurpose state buildings for child care programs.

Though we have yet to hear the usual pre-session chatter about yet another cut to Utah's income tax rate, we are not convinced legislators won't do it. [Legislative leaders have been clear](#) in recent years about their plans to fully choke off this source of funding for public education, as well as programs for children and people with disabilities. They have made no indication that they plan to stop chasing their "zero income tax" dream.

Our usual legislative approach has been to ask the legislature to enact targeted tax

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cuts that benefit children and their families, such as the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit, rather than simply slash revenue through rate cuts. We do not expect any substantial action by the legislature this session to improve either of these existing non-refundable state tax credits, which currently help far too few children in Utah. We are hopeful, though, that legislative leaders will fulfill a minor Child Tax Credit expansion recommended by the Governor's Office (including children 0 to 1 in the eligibility criteria).

Our approach to taxes and the state budget during the upcoming session will be to provide the public with accurate information about the real impacts of cutting and/or eliminating Utah's income tax without any substitute revenue strategy. This information will also be available, as always, to our elected state officials.

Our focus continues to be ensuring that commonsense, effective policies are in place to best serve the children who become involved in Utah's juvenile justice and child welfare systems. We will defend policies that recognize the critical importance of cultural connections for children of color, despite recent legislative attacks on state programs that seek to promote equitable opportunities for all Utahns.

During the 2025 session, we will be supporting a second attempt to codify the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) at the state level, via "Indian Family Preservation Act Amendments," sponsored by Rep. Angela Romero (D-Salt Lake City).

While we are not currently aware of specific legislation aimed at unraveling Utah's nationally-recognized juvenile justice system improvements in recent years, we will be monitoring closely for any such attacks.