

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Local Legislators and Business Leaders Join Capital Area United Way in Celebration of inaugural Louisiana Early Ed Month

Baton Rouge, La. (February 8, 2022) – Today, legislators and business leaders from the Capital area joined with the Capital Area United Way, the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, and the East Baton Rouge Early Childhood Community Network for an Early Education convening in recognition of the first annual Louisiana Early Ed Month (LA Early Ed Month). For the past five years, the event has been celebrated as Early Ed Week, but this year marks the first annual Louisiana Ed Month.

Held in partnership between the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children (LPIC), Louisiana Association of United Ways (LAUW), United Way of Northeast Louisiana, United Way of Southeast Louisiana, United Way of Southwest Louisiana, United Way of Acadiana and Capital Area United Way, LA Early Ed Month is an opportunity to further educate local policy makers, business leaders and the Baton Rouge area community on the critical and ongoing need to increase and improve access to quality early care and education for children, birth through age four, throughout the state. This year's Early Ed Month is especially critical as Louisiana continues to be disproportionately impacted by the nation's child care shortage.

"It is critical that Louisiana invests in quality early care and education for children," said George Bell, President and CEO of Capital Area United Way. "Today, three out of five children in our state enters kindergarten unprepared to learn and grow. Today's children are tomorrow's workforce. If we don't improve early education in Louisiana, the economic impact has the potential to cost our state \$12 billion over the next 10 years.

Today, Capital Area United Way hosted one of LA Early Ed Month's signature events in the Capital region at the Louisiana State Capitol, hosting local business leaders, elected officials and early care and education experts. State Senator Regina Barrow (D-15) and State Representative Barbara Freiberg (R-70) served as co-hosts for this event.

"We are proud to have the opportunity to connect Louisiana legislators, business leaders and other participants with child care directors," said Dr. Libbie Sonnier, Ph.D., Executive Director of LPIC. "We hope that we were able to demonstrate the importance of investing in early education in our state. For each year that we let our children go without high quality child care, we lose over a billion dollars in productivity. The time for change is now."

The program gave attendees a firsthand perspective as to what high quality early care and education looks like, insight into the challenges providers have faced in recent years, and a greater understanding of just how important these centers are to Louisiana's families.

"We serve over 800 families and enjoy every moment spent educating their children. But the reality is, while we are caring for our students, parents and caregivers are spending their time working and contributing to Louisiana's economy," said Tessa Holloway, owner of Kidz Karousel. "We are grateful that LA Early Ed Month 2022 gives us a platform to tell our story. Childcare is the base of the economy and the beginning to creating stability. At our core we are preparing these children to one day be productive citizens both socially and mentally."

"At Louisiana Association of United Ways, we've seen firsthand the importance early care and education plays in the lives of our youngest learners and have advocated for this cause through the many challenges of these past few years," said Sarah Berthelot, President and CEO of LAUW. "In order for our state to fully recover from the pandemic, and thrive well into the future, every child needs the right tools to succeed in school and in life. We urge legislators to act now to increase funding and access to quality early care and education – for the benefit of the Capital area community and our entire state."

To learn more about early child care and education in Louisiana, please visit PolicyInstituteLA.com. Additionally, you can join in the conversation by using #LAEarlyEdMonth on social media.

***Photo Attached**

Photo 1 Caption: Attending today's Early Ed Month convening at the State Capitol are (L to R): George Bell, President and CEO of Capital Area United Way; State Senator Regina Barrow, District 15; Dr. Libbie Sonnier, Executive Director of the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children; State Representative Barbara Freiberg, District 70; and Sarah Berthelot, President and CEO of the Louisiana Association of United Ways.

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Capital Area United Way

For more than 97 years, Capital Area United Way has touched thousands of lives in our 10-Parish service area. We envision a community where everyone is empowered to reach their full potential. Our mission is to solve our community's toughest challenges by leveraging partnerships to advance the common good in education, income stability, and healthy living. To learn more visit www.cauw.org.

About Louisiana Policy Institute for Children: Louisiana Policy Institute for Children is a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that Louisiana's young children, from birth to age four, are best prepared for success in school and in life. The Policy Institute develops policy proposals informed by data, research, best practices and the experiences of other states to improve the outcomes of Louisiana's youngest citizens, and further provides educational and outreach activities based on recommended policy solutions. The organization works to ensure children are safe, healthy and have the opportunity to reach their full potential. For more information, visit www.policyinstitutela.org and follow the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

About Louisiana Association of United Ways: The Louisiana Association of United Ways is an association of nine regional United Ways serving 53 parishes throughout Louisiana. Our mission is to integrate action and resources for the common good. We work across our communities to tackle challenges that affect individuals, families and whole communities — challenges that are ultimately bigger than any of us and impact our entire state. We are part of a global network of more than 1,800 United Ways, servicing communities in 41 countries.