

Early Childhood Advocacy Coalition Huddle

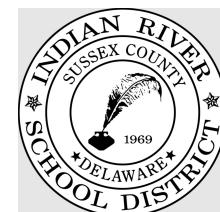
Tuesday, February 3rd, 2026 2:00-3:00 PM

ET

- **Updates**
 - **Survey Roadshow insights:** key takeaways and early wins
 - **Federal landscape**
- **What's ahead**
 - **Legislative Session** kickoff + upcoming milestones
 - **State priorities in focus:** the State of the State and the Governor's Budget
- **Ways to engage:** opportunities to connect with and influence the Joint Finance Committee (JFC)

Please introduce
yourself in the chat

Who's in the Room



Mrs. Marlette's Colorful
World Daycare

Who we are

First Pre-K

First State Pre-K is a coalition of partners focused on expanding access to publicly funded high quality early care and education in Delaware.

"Pre-K" in Delaware refers to child care programs for ages 0-5.

Updates

- **Survey Roadshow insights:** key takeaways and early wins
- **Federal landscape**

Survey Roadshow

THANK YOU

Wilmington Early Care and
Education Council

Innovative Kids Early Learning
Academy

Rotary Club of Wilmington

Community Health Workers
Association of Delaware

Seaford Community of Hope

[Survey Results](#)



What We Heard and Early Wins

What We Heard	What We Got Done
Families Can't Afford Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Governor's Budget includes increased access to pre-K❖ Multiple bills introduced to address affordability
Providers Can't Retain Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Governor's Budget includes POC payment based on enrollment
Licensing is Outdated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Online system under development
No State Guidance on How to Expand or Start Child Care Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Resource created with the Division of Small Business bit.ly/3LUCoOr
Employers Want to Support Employees and Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Employer resource developed bit.ly/3NLRHJO
Policymakers Asking To Help	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Policy solutions with state examples developed bit.ly/4qRgSJD

Federal Landscape

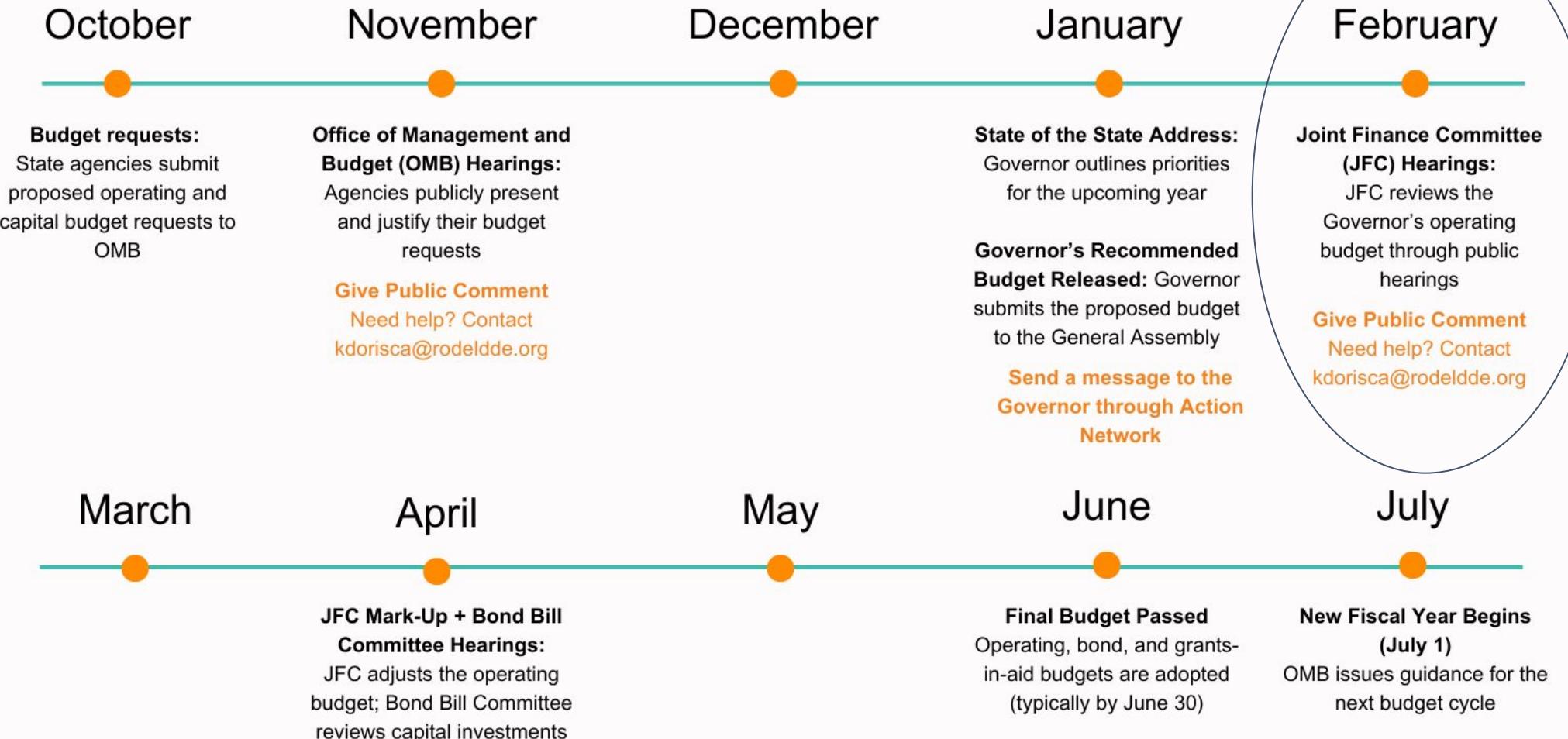
- **Federal Attacks on child care**, including recent investigations of fraud in Minnesota and threats to freeze funds
 - **In Delaware**, no evidence of fraud, and many procedures in place to prevent and address
 - **Nationally**, courts stepping in to block broad freezes and reinforce due process and federal guidance
 - **Concerns about unintended impacts** for families and providers, including fear or reduced participation
- **Threats** to Medicaid, TANF, SNAP, and public health
- **Immigration enforcement harming young children**
- ***Proposed reduced federal requirements*** for paying based on enrollment and prospectively, limiting family co-payments
 - **Delaware proceeding with these policies – funding included in Governor Meyer's Budget**

Why this matters: Together, these actions create uncertainty for states and providers, highlighting the need for **coordinated, child-centered policy responses**.

What's ahead

- **Legislative Session** Kickoff + Upcoming Milestones
- **State Priorities In Focus:** The State of The State and The Governor's Budget

State Budget Timeline



Legislation

Bills We Are Monitoring

Bill or Topic	Purpose
<u>HS1-HB 204 (Romer)</u>	Creates a dedicated team within the state's child care licensing office to handle complaints about licensed child care providers.
<u>HB 274 (Ross Levin)</u>	Increases Delaware's child and dependent care tax credit from 50% to 100% of the federal credit for all eligible taxpayers.
<u>HB 284 (Yearick)</u>	Doubles the child and dependent care tax credit for residents earning under \$60,000 and makes it refundable; the credit is unchanged for those earning \$60,000 or more.
<u>HB 259 (Williams)</u>	Requires lead screening for children ages 12 months and older before enrollment or continued attendance in child care facilities and schools.

Governor's Recommended Budget for FY 27 (July 2026- June 2027):

Nearly \$50 million total (\$33 million in ongoing state funding)

Agency	Recommended Budget Increase	What We Know <i>What We Think it Means</i>	“Historic” Context
DOE	\$8M for Delaware Early Childhood Care & Education Alliance +	<p>“...Invest in expanding high quality affordable early child education opportunities offered statewide through a child care hub”</p> <p><i>480 additional ECAP seats and investments in shared service “hubs”</i></p> <p><i>Alliance refers to oversight by IRMC</i></p>	<p><i>Larger than increases in recent history</i></p> <p><i>\$22M (Markell, Quality 2011)</i></p> <p><i>\$20M (Carney + Senate Leaders 2021)</i></p>
DHSS	\$25M for Purchase of Care +	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• \$21M for paying providers based on enrollment (vs attendance) - 16% increase in POC budget• \$3.5M for special education rates• <i>\$1.7M for prospective payment (in advance each month) absorbed in current budget year</i>	
\$11M one-year, one time federal Preschool Development Grant for systems building (data, shared services, governance)			

Governor's Recommended Budget for FY 27 (July 2026- June 2027)

Agency	Recommended Budget Increase	Our Positioning: Support the Governor's Budget	AND
DOE	\$8M for ECAP seats and shared services	<p>✓ Expands access for more families to high-quality programs</p> <p>✓ Fairly compensates providers, by paying at cost of care, based on enrollment</p>	<p>→ increase eligibility beyond 200% FPL</p> <p>→ create an infrastructure fund to build capacity and grow supply</p>
DHSS	\$25M for Purchase of Care enrollment payments and special education rates	<p>✓ Stabilizes providers by paying based on enrollment, streamlines attendance reporting, encourages more providers to participate to expand access for more families</p> <p>✓ Compensates providers for services for children with special needs</p>	<p>→ increase eligibility beyond 200% FPL</p> <p>→ raise rates to at least the federal benchmark (75th percentile)</p> <p>→ implement commitment to incentivize non-traditional hours care</p> <p>→ address affordability of copayment scale</p>

Connecting Budget Increases to Long-Term Vision

Matt Meyer: As Governor, I will...

Provide universal access to pre-K throughout the state by the end of my first term.

Make affordable, high-quality childcare and early childhood education accessible to all parents.

How can we keep the long-term vision top of mind to ensure annual activities contribute to this vision and a plan?



Call to Action: Speak Up at JFC Hearings

Give Public Comment on Delaware's FY27 Budget

Drop your name
in the chat if
you're providing
public comment!

Dates

Department of Education (DOE)

Feb. 18 | 12:30 PM – 4:00 PM

Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)

Feb. 24 | 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Location

411 Legislative Ave, Dover DE 19901

Ground Floor, Legislative Hall

Joint Finance Committee Hearing Room

Three Ways to Give Public Comment

1. **In-person (recommended):** Day-of registration
2. **Virtual**
 - a. Via Zoom
 - b. Registration required in advance
3. **Written comments** (always a good idea even if you choose 1 or 2): Submit to

JFC_Public_Comment@delaware.gov

[State of Delaware Public Meeting Calendar](#)

Advocacy Talking Points and Letter Campaign



HELP MORE DELAWARE FAMILIES ACCESS EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION!

Delawareans United in Need for Child Care Supports
Families, child care providers, and local employers continue to struggle to make ends meet, despite some positive gains in recent years.

Let's help Gov. Matt Meyer and his administration follow through on their commitment to provide universal access to pre-K throughout the state. This year let's capitalize on Delaware's historic investments and serve even more children and families by investing more state dollars and allowing more families to access care by increasing eligibility.

Today, Less than 1 in 5 children are served in public programs.

- Care is too expensive for many families, costing as much as a mortgage payment
- Employers face daily disruptions, a shrinking workforce, and business losses
- Child care providers want to offer more openings to families but cannot

We are grateful for the historic investments outlined in the Governor's Recommended Budget for FY27: Nearly \$50 million total (\$33 million in ongoing state funding). But we must do more to reach our goals.

Joint Finance Committee: Invest Today
Department of Education: Increase access to state-funded pre-K (ECAP)

1. Increase eligibility to serve families up to at least 300% of the Federal Poverty Level
2. Provide infrastructure funds to expand early care and education capacity through grants and by allowing public school capital funding to cover pre-K

Department of Health and Social Services: Increase access to child care (Purchase of Care) for more families

1. Increase per-child Purchase of Care rates to at least the federal benchmark of the 75th percentile so programs can open more classrooms and increase staff pay and benefits
2. Expand eligibility to serve families up to at least 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (making about 5,000 more families eligible)

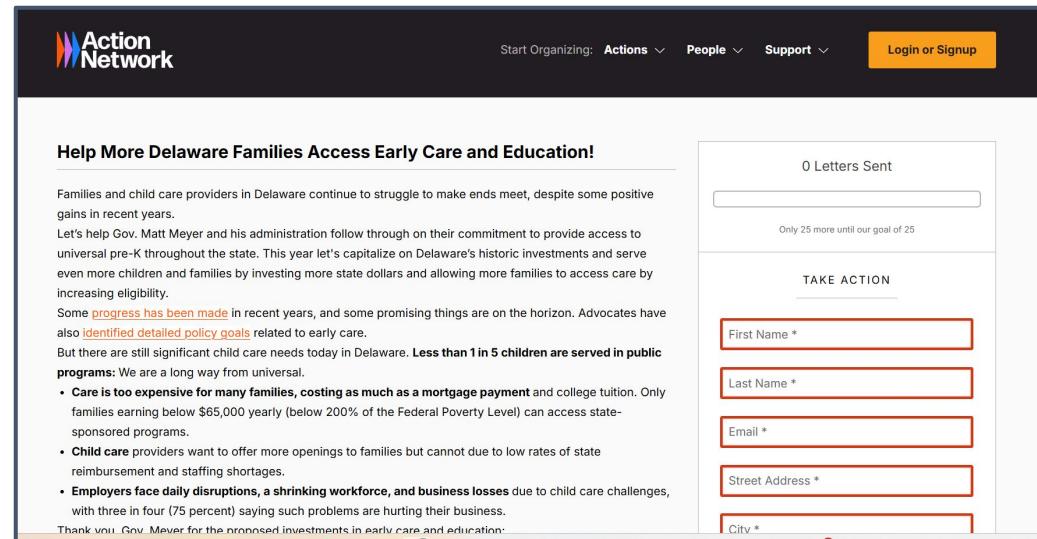
Take Action today: bit.ly/fspktakeaction
Contact your legislator: legis.delaware.gov/FindMyLegislator

 /FirstStatePreK
 #InvestEarlyDE



← Download
and use our
advocacy
talking points!
[bit.ly/FY27TALK
INGPOINTS](https://bit.ly/FY27TALKINGPOINTS)

Send a letter to
JFC members
and spread the
word! →
bit.ly/ECEFY27



Action Network

Start Organizing: Actions ▾ People ▾ Support ▾ Login or Signup

Help More Delaware Families Access Early Care and Education!

Families and child care providers in Delaware continue to struggle to make ends meet, despite some positive gains in recent years. Let's help Gov. Matt Meyer and his administration follow through on their commitment to provide access to universal pre-K throughout the state. This year let's capitalize on Delaware's historic investments and serve even more children and families by investing more state dollars and allowing more families to access care by increasing eligibility.

Some [progress has been made](#) in recent years, and some promising things are on the horizon. Advocates have also [identified detailed policy goals](#) related to early care. But there are still significant child care needs today in Delaware. [Less than 1 in 5 children are served in public programs](#): We are a long way from universal.

- Care is too expensive for many families, costing as much as a mortgage payment and college tuition. Only families earning below \$65,000 yearly (below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level) can access state-sponsored programs.
- Child care providers want to offer more openings to families but cannot due to low rates of state reimbursement and staffing shortages.
- Employers face daily disruptions, a shrinking workforce, and business losses due to child care challenges, with three in four (75 percent) saying such problems are hurting their business.

Thank you, Gov. Meyer, for the proposed investments in early care and education!

0 Letters Sent
Only 25 more until our goal of 25

TAKE ACTION

First Name *
Last Name *
Email *
Street Address *
City *

Bitly links are case sensitive!

What is JFC & Who's There

JFC = Joint Finance Committee

- Legislative committee that **reviews and finalizes the state operating budget**
- Co-chaired by **House and Senate leadership**
- Holds public hearings on **agency budget requests** after the Governor releases the Recommended Budget

At the Hearing

- **JFC legislators** – question agencies and weigh funding decisions
- **Agency leaders** – present and defend their budget requests
- **Public commenters** – provide input and advocate for priorities
- **OMB & Governor's Office staff** – observe and support agency testimony

Goal: Influence legislative budget decisions and shape what funding is **approved, increased, or cut** before the final budget is passed by the General Assembly.

Target Legislators

JFC Members - Senate

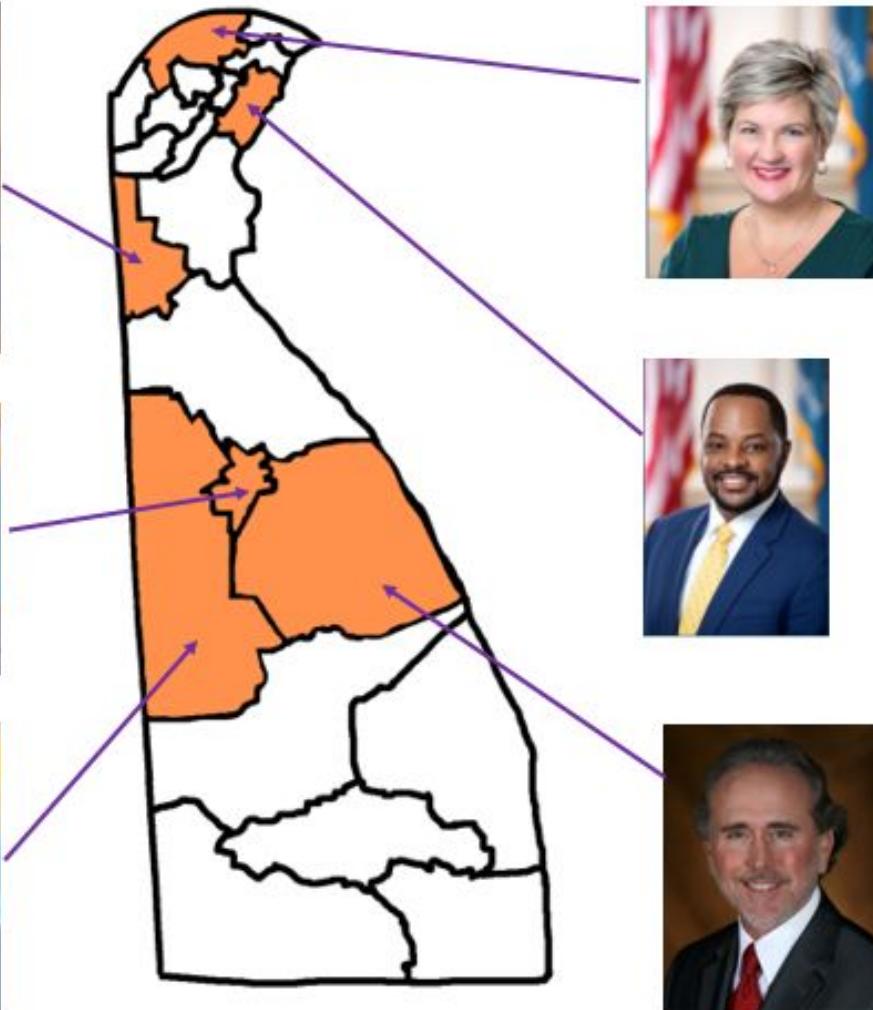
Stephanie Hansen
(SD 10)
*Also on Education
Committee*



Trey Paradee (SD
17) - Co Chair
Chair



Dave Lawson
(SD 15)



Laura Sturgeon (SD 4)
*Also on Education
Committee*



Darius Brown (SD 2)
*Also on Labor
Committee*



Eric Buckson (SD 16) *Also
on Education Committee*



If you know these
legislators or live in
these districts, **please**
reach out before
February 18!

[legis.delaware.gov/Find
MyLegislator](http://legis.delaware.gov/FindMyLegislator)

Target Legislators

JFC Members - House

Krista Griffith (RD 12)

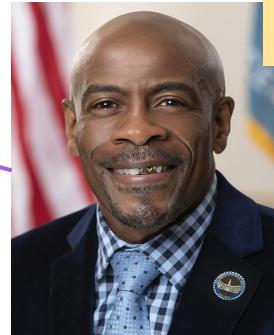
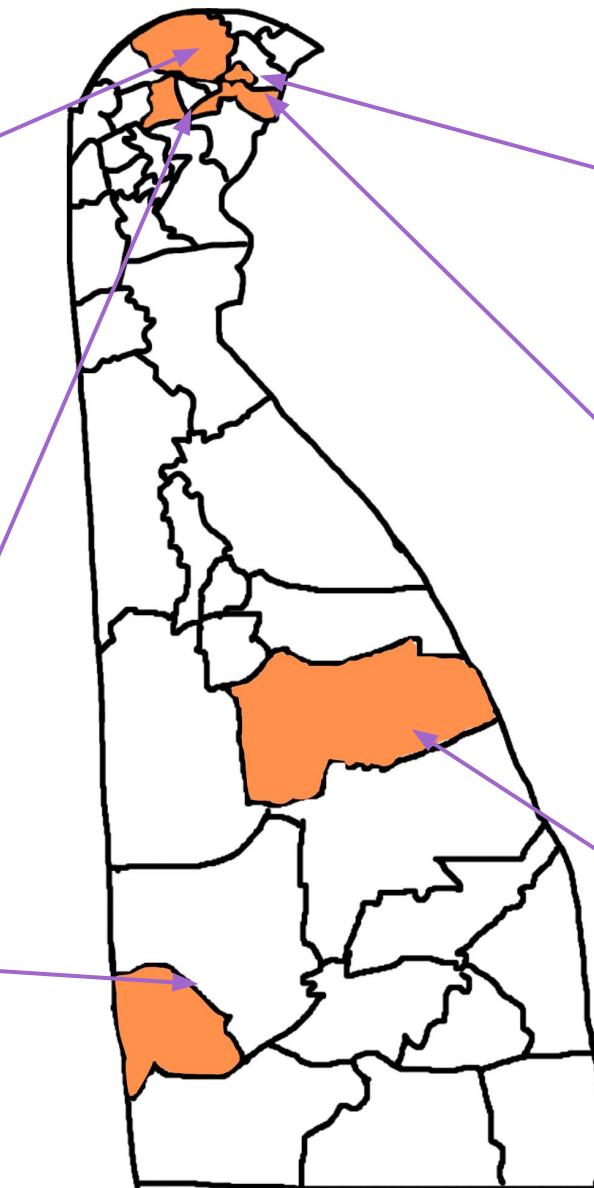


Kim Williams (RD 19)
JFC Chair, Education and Labor Committees



Vice-Chair

Daniel B. Short (RD 39)



If you know these legislators or live in these districts, please reach out before February 18!

Nnamdi Chuckwuocha (RD 1)
Education Committee



Stephanie T. Bolden (RD 2)
Education and Labor Committees



Charles S. Postles Jr. (RD 33)

[legis.delaware.gov/Find
MyLegislator](http://legis.delaware.gov/FindMyLegislator)

Senate and House Leadership

Senator David Sokola (SD 8)
Senate President Pro Tempore



Bryan Townsend (SD 11)
Senate Majority Leader



Gerald W. Hocker (SD 20)
Senate Minority Leader



S. Elizabeth Lockman (SD 3)
Senate Majority Whip



Brian G. Pettyjohn (SD 19)
Senate Minority Whip



Representative Melissa Minor-Brown (RD 17)
Speaker of the House



Kerri Evelyn Harris (RD32)
House Majority Leader



Edward S. Osienski (RD 24)
House Majority Whip



Timothy D. Dukes (RD 40)
House Minority Leader



Jeffrey N. Spiegelman (RD 11)
House Minority Whip



Send a Message to JFC Members Now!

<https://bit.ly/ECEFY27>



Additional Ways to Engage

Leading Up To & After JFC

1. Office Hours - Mondays at 3:00 pm [via Zoom](#)

- Get support with preparing your public comment for JFC

2. Connect with your legislators

- At legislator hosted coffees and town halls, or at 1:1 meetings (we can help schedule and support you), or at a center site visit!

3. Save the date for Advocacy Day - April 21st, 10 am - 3 pm–

Legislative Hall in Dover

- Rally format
- emphasis on legislator meetings

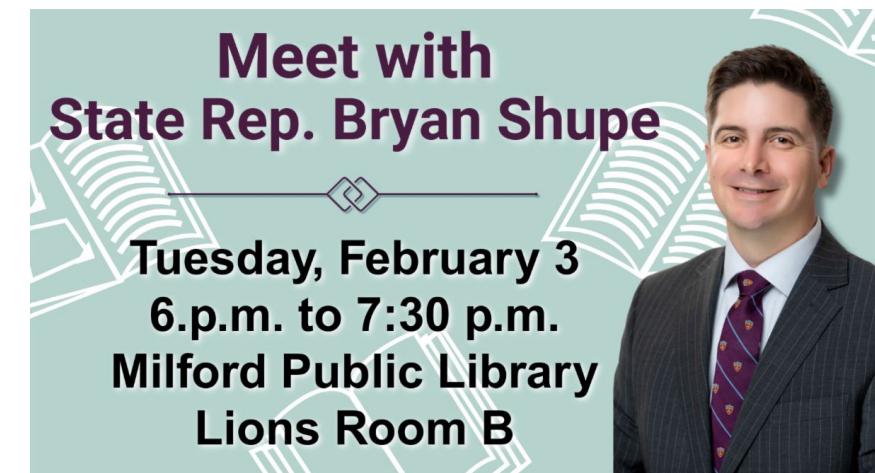


Let's start our day with coffee & conversation!

Join
State Rep.
Kevin Hensley

for a Coffee Meeting!
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10TH
8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.
Odessa Fire Company
304 Main Street, Odessa, DE 19730

Kevin will provide the coffee.



Resources



Guidance for Providers:

[Safe Spaces Guide for Providers \(CLASP\)](#)

[Rapid Response Resources \(Child Thrive Action Network\)](#)



Know Your Rights: Immigration & Education

[Delaware Department of Education](#)

[Delaware Attorney General on Know Your Rights](#)
[ACLU – If ICE is at Your Door](#)



Legal & Advocacy Support in Delaware

[ACLU Delaware](#) – Advocacy & legal aid

[Parent Information Center of Delaware](#) – Special education & parental rights

[Community Legal Aid Society \(CLASI\)](#) – Legal support for low-income individuals



Further Reading

[Every Child Deserves Safety](#) - NAEYC

[Universal child care boosts family, community health](#) - American Public Health Association



Questions and Discussion

Thank You!