

# The Children's Movement of Florida

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## **101 Florida Mayors Join Forces with The Children's Movement of Florida** to urge Governor DeSantis to prioritize early childhood for Florida

- 101 Florida mayors from small and large cities have signed a collaborative letter asking Gov. Ron DeSantis to prioritize Florida children's early years through budgets and policy.
- Spearheaded by The Children's Movement of Florida, the 100 Mayors initiative ([www.childrensmovementflorida.org/100-mayors](http://www.childrensmovementflorida.org/100-mayors)) represents millions of citizens in blue and red districts.
- This achievement speaks to the universal importance of the early years for securing Florida's prosperity.

**Miami, FL:** In an overwhelming outpouring of support, 101 Florida mayors have joined forces and signed a letter asking Governor Ron DeSantis to use his leadership to prioritize early childhood issues for Florida's future. Their letter is being sent by email to the Executive Office of the Governor today.

These local government leaders, who represent millions of citizens in blue and red districts, have embraced the universal, overarching importance of prioritizing the state's youngest children. Support for the statewide initiative spans from Apalachicola to Bartow, Gainesville to DeLand, and Cape Canaveral to Vero Beach. Members of the initiative also include leaders from cities like Miami, Orlando, Fort Lauderdale, St. Petersburg, and our state capital, Tallahassee.

"As mayors, we take seriously the responsible stewardship of our constituents' tax dollars," the letter begins. The mayors reflect that by investing in early learning initiatives, more widespread health care for children under five, and greater access to parent support resources, Florida actually saves money in the long run. Beyond what is right, prioritizing Florida children's early lives is also the most practical, effective and efficient solution to numerous problems faced by our state, like crime and workforce gaps.

Mayor Ellen Glasser of Atlantic Beach is a former law enforcement officer and educator. Her experience taught her "that getting kids—and particularly those in at-risk environments—enrolled in school at 3 or 4 years old gives them a greater chance for later success. Keeping them interested in learning can actually keep them out of prison. Early learning is the key....It is good for kids and it is good for the community."

Currently, a mere 1.5% of Florida's total budget is spent on programs that benefit children from birth to age five. Meanwhile, about 325,000 children in the state lack health insurance. More than 220,000 children are born in Florida each year and only 54% are deemed "ready" by the Department of Education when they enter kindergarten. By third grade, nearly 40% of students are not reading at grade level, and it is difficult for them to catch up from there.

[www.childrensmovementflorida.org](http://www.childrensmovementflorida.org)



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“My wife has been a VPK teacher for over 20 years and I have personally seen the benefits early education has for the students she has impacted in her tenure,” said Ben Malik, Mayor of Cocoa Beach. Mayor Malik knows that what happens in a pre-k classroom is not babysitting—it is brain development, and it is the beginning of the education continuum.

In Pre-K, children develop pre-literacy and early math skills, as well as the social-emotional skills that allow them to pay attention, work collaboratively, and learn once they enter kindergarten and beyond. What’s more, the working memory, mental flexibility, and self-control developed in the early years become the soft skills that prepare them to be successful in the workforce. According to the Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation, graduates of high-quality early learning centers are 23% more employable than those who did not have access to high-quality centers.

“I want to see a greater percentage of high school students in Miami graduating on time and ready to train for high-paying jobs or to pursue a college education. I know that track starts with the early years,” said Miami Mayor Francis Suarez.

“These mayors have acknowledged the positive impact early childhood investment has on Florida's public safety, economic health, and quality of life. This is about the continued prosperity of our state,” said Dave Lawrence, Chair of The Children’s Movement of Florida, the nonprofit organization that spearheaded the #100Mayors initiative.

Lawrence was a force behind the constitutional amendment passed in 2002 that guarantees access to Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) for all 4-year-olds in Florida and is designed to build the foundation for their success in school and in life. The program has meant progress for the more than 160,000 Florida children who enroll each year, but it is funded at a lower level today than it was when it began in the 2005-2006 school year. “We can do better,” says Lawrence.

**About The Children’s Movement of Florida:** The Children’s Movement of Florida is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan movement of Floridians insisting on a strong start for all Florida children. We advocate for high-quality early learning opportunities, access to children’s health care, and parent support programs in Florida. The Movement was founded in 2010 by former *Miami Herald* publisher and nationally known early childhood leader, David Lawrence Jr., who now serves as board chair. Visit [www.childrensmovementflorida.org](http://www.childrensmovementflorida.org) to learn more.

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