



NEWSLETTER NO. 3

ELLEVATE LOUISIANA



ELLEVATE LOUISIANA'S MISSION IS TO EMPOWER WOMEN LEADERS THROUGHOUT LOUISIANA BY CONNECTING & EDUCATING THEM ON THE CHALLENGES IMPACTING OUR STATE WITH DATA-DRIVEN, NON-PARTISAN SOLUTIONS TO USHER IN A NEW COMPETITIVENESS FOR OUR STATE.

Now, IN Session...

In even-numbered years, the legislature is required to convene for Regular Session in Baton Rouge at noon on the second Monday in March. This year, that was March 11th. Session is limited to 60 legislative days during a period of 85 days. That's about 12 weeks. Last week, the legislature concluded its fourth of those 12 weeks. Here are some of the things that we have been hearing.

The legislature is getting tired. They have not only been in session for these four weeks but have already held two special sessions prior to this one. The idea of jumping straight into a constitutional convention seems less than palatable to them. For this and other reasons, most guess that a constitutional convention won't happen until the Fall. If that is true, it might be for the best. While there is a real need to move much of what we have in our constitution over to statute, this is not a process that should be rushed, especially with a new legislature and a high number of freshmen legislators.

One of the biggest items being debated is Educational Savings Accounts. ESA's have a very large potential price tag. It will be interesting to see what the final structure of the plans working through the House and Senate look like, because many Louisianans worry that our school systems cannot withstand a huge financial hit. With plenty of others that crave choice in public education, it is a tough thing to balance. However, it is very important to our future that we find that balance.



Ellevate Louisiana members are optimistic that the \$2.6m budgeted for Home and Community-Based Supports for Long Term Care (the Community Options Waiver Fund) will remain in the budget. We feel strongly that beginning to offer Louisianans options in their elder years is necessary for quality of life.

We are also hopeful that additional funds will be added to the budget for Early Childhood Care and Education. This has always been a high priority for Ellevate. It is essential for helping parents participate in the workforce and to giving a strong educational start to our youngest citizens.

One of the tragedies of the initial budget was that last year's funding for domestic violence victims was cut this year. Last year's funding was an important step toward giving victims a way out of their dangerous situations. It is our ardent hope that the funding gets amended back into the budget.

On the workforce front, most would agree that we need to do everything that we can to get credentials into the hands of our citizens to grow our workforce participation rates. The M.J. Foster Promise Program is an important tool to do just that. The initial budget document contains \$10.5m for that program. There is a bill out there to increase that to \$40m and another that lowers the required age to 17 and allows former incarcerated individuals to participate in the program. Enhancing the educational opportunities available to our citizens should be one of our highest priorities. It should be noted that many people cannot get to school to earn those credentials, even if they are free, because they do not have access to childcare. It is our hope that we can find a way to balance these priorities to get training and help to those that want to participate in our economy.

It will be eight more weeks before we find out what this year's legislative session holds for Louisiana. It is always interesting to watch. At Ellevate Louisiana, we also think it is important to participate. MANY Louisianans don't pay attention to our state government. If you are reading this, it is probably because you care and want to play an active role. One way to do this is by attending our Day at the Capitol on April 22nd. Check it out on the last page of this newsletter and register! We would love to share it with you!

By: Julie Stokes, *Ellevate Louisiana CEO & President*



Photo: Ellevate Louisiana members being recognized by the Senate during the 2023 Legislative Session

Continuing the Investment

Over the last two years, the state has made historic investments in early care and education. With a new administration and legislature comes new priorities, but the wellness of our youngest children and their parents is something that cannot be reprioritized. High-quality early care and education prepares students for success, enables families to be productive in the workforce, and supports a thriving economy.

Early experiences affect the development of the brain architecture, which provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. Before children turn 5 years old, 90% of their brain is developed, making the first 5 years of life particularly critical to the foundation of their future. During this time, children begin to learn to regulate their emotions, solve problems, express their feelings, organize their experiences, and then use those skills when they arrive at school.

Various studies have confirmed the impact that access to high-quality early care and education has on children's success in school and in life. Longitudinal research has found that children who had access to high-quality early learning had higher rates of high school graduation and total years of education, higher income levels in adulthood, and lower rates of adverse health conditions and criminal activity. A study of Louisiana's pre-K program for 4-year-olds, LA4, found that children who were in LA4 had lower rates of special education referrals by first grade, were more likely to score "Basic or above" on third-grade English Language Arts LEAP tests, and were more likely to graduate high school. These LA4 results were particularly true for students who were economically disadvantaged.

Quality early education programs are led by trained, credentialed professionals who support positive interpersonal interactions and foster a safe and secure learning environment. Despite the enormous impact these educators have on young children, they are not compensated competitively, making just \$9.77 an hour on average. While surveys show that early educators love their work, persistently low wages often force them out of the profession. Not having a large enough early educator workforce is one of the reasons why gaining access to early care and education is difficult for families, and when parents are unable to secure child care, it impacts their own participation in the workforce.



Two-thirds of children in Louisiana under age 5 have both parents, or their single parent, in the workforce. According to a report by LSU and the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, 1 in 6 Louisiana workers with young children have quit a job due to child care issues; over 40% have missed work in a three-month period for the same reason; 14% have turned down a promotion; and 10% have refused to go full time from part time due to concerns about child care. It is pretty simple: if a parent cannot find affordable, accessible child care, they are unable to reliably participate in their career or attend school. Additionally, statewide, employee absences and turnover due to child care issues cost Louisiana employers \$762 million a year, which in turn causes a \$1.3 billion loss annually for our economy, according to research from the Blanco Public Policy Center at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette.

Early care and education is the backbone to the success of our children, parents, and our economy. Child development occurs over multiple years, which means that increasing access to quality early care and education for a single year is not sufficient. In the 2024 legislative session, there are two ways for the state to prioritize early care and education.

Maintaining state investments: During this legislative session, the state investment into the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) must be sustained in the budget to ensure children and parents continue to have the access they need for success. Governor Landry's executive budget maintained the significant investments into CCAP, which now includes \$87 million in state funding.

Increasing data transparency: Legislators also have the opportunity to support early care and education program transparency through SB 433, which creates an early care and education data dashboard. The dashboard will show where and how many children in the state have access to child care, and where parents struggle to find it the most. This dashboard would further illustrate the need for increased investment in early care and education across Louisiana.

We have a better Louisiana when our children and families thrive. Early care and education is a foundational element to the immediate and future success of our state.

**LIBBIE SONNIER, PH.D., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LOUISIANA POLICY INSTITUTE FOR CHILDREN**

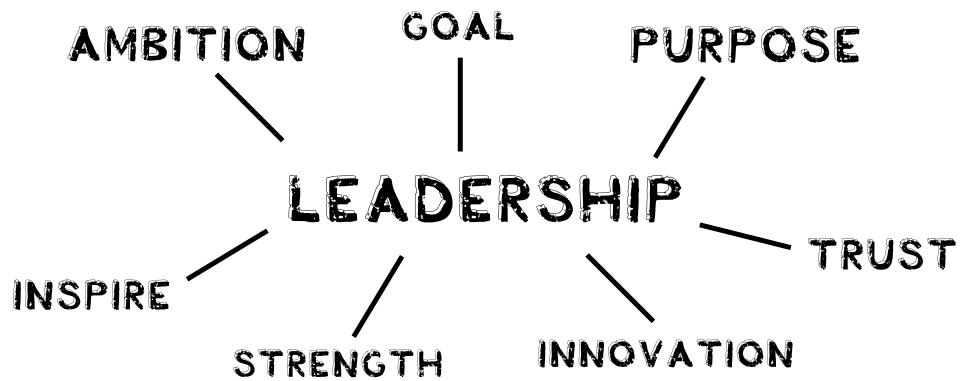


**MATTILYN KARST BATSON, RESEARCH & POLICY DIRECTOR
LOUISIANA POLICY INSTITUTE FOR CHILDREN**

Empowering Your Leadership Legacy in Politics and Policy

As women leaders shaping the future of policy and politics, have you ever paused to reflect on who ignited the spark within you to lead? Leadership is more than strategic plans or organizational achievements; it's about the enduring impact you create, influencing not just your immediate circle but echoing across communities and generations.

In the realm of policy, where decisions can sculpt the social and political landscape, understanding the legacy you wish to establish is crucial. Yet, many leaders find themselves at a crossroads, uncertain of the imprint they desire to leave. It's not uncommon to see a leader's personal aspirations overshadowed by their organization's overarching mission. But isn't leadership about crafting a personal legacy that transcends organizational boundaries, one that is uniquely yours yet universally impactful?



Consider this: What drives your leadership? Beyond the day-to-day, what are the broader goals you aim to achieve? These reflections aren't mere philosophical musings but are essential in defining the purpose and direction of your leadership journey.

What does it mean to align your leadership with the impactful legacy you aspire to create? It's about connecting your day-to-day actions with your long-term vision, ensuring that every decision, no matter how small, is a step towards the profound impact you aim to have. This alignment is not just beneficial—it's transformative, imbuing your leadership with a sense of purpose and clarity that inspires others and amplifies your influence.

In the dynamic arenas of policy and politics, where the ripple effects of leadership can shape futures, understanding and owning your legacy is not just beneficial; it's imperative. It's what distinguishes a leader who merely holds a position from one who truly makes a difference.

You are not just leading; you are shaping the future. Let's ensure it's a legacy worth remembering.



RAYNE MARTIN
IT'S THE IMPACT



UPCOMING EVENT:

ELLEVATE LOUISIANA'S DAY AT THE LEGISLATURE 2024

Join Ellevate Louisiana as we get an up-close look at advocating at the Louisiana State Capitol

REGISTER

ONLINE TODAY!

MEMBERS: \$35 | NON-MEMBERS: \$70

Lunch at the Lt. Governor's Apartment



Location

**Louisiana State Capitol
Baton Rouge, LA 70802**



Date

April 22, 2024



Time

8:30am



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