

Dear members and advocates,

As we conclude this year's budget season, I wanted to take a moment to express my gratitude and admiration to all of the parents and families who made their voices heard at the 22nd Stand for Children event at the State Capitol, and their tireless yearlong advocacy work. As I reflect on the impact and energy of Stand for Children, I'm reminded of all the hours our Parent Voices families volunteer, working behind the scenes to actualize a vision that all families are supported so that parents can be the best support for their children. I truly believe it is this piece of advocacy – the stories told and relationships built - that steers our field forward.

Watching the day unfold, it can be easy to forget the amount of planning and effort involved leading up to it. Before the parents can give their statements, they have to craft their stories and practice them over and over; before everyone can rally and march around the Capitol, all the steps and logistics need to be planned; before the legislative visits and face-to-face meetings, all the details and arguments are researched and rehearsed. The parent leaders spend an entire day brainstorming and deciding the theme (this year's was "Help Us Grow"), and every Monday night leading up to the event they participate in phone calls to strategize its implementation. This year's two youth leader MC's (only 10 and 14 years old) spent 25 hours prepping for the day.

Parent Voices has established themselves as a respected and recognized voice in the field. Members were present at Assembly Budget Chair Phil Ting's local town hall convening on the state budget, and they were an integral part in the state budget process. The relationships that Parent Voices leaders foster makes them unique; many significant people at the state, including key budget staff, know the leaders personally, and come to expect the "sea of blue" at the North steps every May. Not only do the parents dedicate their time to advocate at the State Capitol; many of them are also doing important work to change policy at the local level.

These parents are volunteering their time when many of them don't have much to spare; they're making themselves vulnerable by sharing their very personal stories because they believe in fighting for a more just society that has opportunities for every parent to fulfill their parenting expectations despite being a low-income family. They're making their voices heard, even when it's difficult and inconvenient. It's these stories that remind policymakers how the decisions they make from a distance impact real people. I believe the most significant wins is because of their dedication and persistence, and the comradery and leadership these amazing parent volunteers have shown. These voices bring essential life and humanity into our advocacy, and I have endless appreciation for their strength, courage, and commitment.

In unity,
Linda Asato