



Communicating the Case for PN-3:

A Research-Informed Messaging Guide

**national
collaborative
for infants
& toddlers**

Full Research Results

To see a complete research summary, please go [here](#).

Overview & How to Use Message Guide

This guide offers research-informed messaging and communications strategies that equip prenatal-to-three (PN-3) advocates to elevate the importance of early childhood issues and increase support among policy leaders.

Use these messages and strategies in legislative conversations, hearings, and testimony, policy briefings, and written materials such as one-pagers, talking points, and public-facing communications.

The guidance helps PN-3 advocates make a compelling case for policies and solutions that strengthen families and improve young children's well-being. Research shows that these frames, messages, and proof points resonate across diverse audiences and political perspectives, offering clear pathways to communicate what's at stake and why action is needed. The messaging guide also provides support for navigating common questions and counterarguments.

A note on context: While families are acutely feeling the pressures of affordability and cost of living, the need for stronger PN-3 supports is not new—and it won't resolve when economic conditions shift. The messaging in this toolkit is grounded in enduring values and structural realities and is therefore designed to remain applicable as the political and economic landscape continues to change.

Methodology

To understand how to persuade audiences to invest in programs and policies that support families with young children, the National Collaborative for Infants & Toddlers (NCIT) partnered with a bipartisan research team from Hart Research and Echelon Insights to conduct mixed-method research with voters, families, and policymakers across the country and on both sides of the aisle. This included a national online survey of registered voters with oversamples of Black, Latino, and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) voters as well as parents of children ages 0-5. Qualitative research included online discussion boards and focus groups with key audiences. The team also conducted 12 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with Democratic and Republican state lawmakers (Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Texas, and Utah). This research occurred between May 2025 and December 2025.

When possible, pair national findings with state and local data—such as state-specific child care affordability and availability, maternal and infant health outcomes, or the share of families struggling to meet basic needs in your community. Grounding national messages in local evidence helps policymakers see PN-3 issues as a pressing challenge their own constituents face, rather than an abstract issue.

What We Heard

Here is a sample of how focus group participants described how families with very young children are doing:

“I’m not even near this group any longer, (but) I can remember what I had to pay, and I don’t think things are going so well for families with really young kids right now ... It’s like you have to be wealthy to afford to have a baby these days. I really feel for these families. They should be focused on bonding with their little one, not stressing over whether they can afford wipes this week.” – Informed Voter, white woman, age 50-59, Republican

“It’s a complex web of challenges, from child care shortages to housing insecurity to limited access to early childhood health care, education services. I think it’s a big complex web of challenges that our young adults are facing.” – Business/community leader, Black woman, age 50-59, Independent

Making the Case for PN-3 Policies

Good news: the work advocates have done to emphasize the importance of the PN-3 period has significantly paid off. The case for why the PN-3 period matters has largely been made — 87% of voters say it is extremely or very important for long-term health, learning, and development. The gap is not awareness, it’s action. About half of voters say the U.S. is falling short in supporting PN-3 families, and only 1 in 4 believe their community has enough programs and services to meet families’ needs. Approximately 65% of voters — including 74% of parents of children ages 0-5 — say government should be doing more. For advocates, that shift is significant: **the case for why the PN-3 period matters has already been established. Now, the focus is on making the case that funding programs and support for families with young children can and will make a substantial difference and should be a priority for policymakers.**

The Core Narrative

“Building strong communities means focusing on what truly matters, and that begins with supporting strong families.

A healthy start takes more than just one factor; safe housing, nutritious food, caring environments, and stability all shape how children develop.

Families are struggling to provide even the basics like groceries, health care, housing — and for those with babies and toddlers, the added costs of formula, diapers, and child care. This is where state and local governments can make a difference. They can invest in our communities by supporting families during those crucial first three years of a child’s life.

Government can’t and shouldn’t raise our children. But it can make sure child care is safe and affordable, health care is accessible, and families can afford the essentials they need. When we invest in young families, we build the foundation for families to thrive, for children to grow into successful lives, and for the kinds of communities where we want to live.”

Why This Works

This message resonates because it reinforces shared values (family, stability, responsibility), connects policy to the everyday pressures voters feel, and frames government as a supportive partner rather than an intrusive force.

The narrative is grounded in three research-tested frames that resonate across reachable audiences. Each has its own emphasis, but together they create a unified narrative rooted in what matters most to our audiences.

A core element of the PN-3 narrative is clarifying the role of parents and caregivers versus government: positioning parents and caregivers as primary caregivers, with government stepping in as a supportive partner when pressures become overwhelming. Research consistently shows that families face intense strain during the PN-3 years: high child care costs, housing instability, food insecurity, maternal and infant health challenges,



and the difficulty of balancing work, caregiving, and mental health. The narrative should spotlight families who are doing everything right yet still struggle—not because of personal failings, but because the systems around them fall short.

When families get the support they need, children are healthier and better prepared to learn; parents and caregivers can stay employed and advance in their careers, and communities become more stable and prosperous. This “everyone benefits” framing resonates across ideological lines, appealing to both economic pragmatists and values-driven audiences—helping advocates maintain a strong, consistent message.

Priority Messaging

Message Frames

Three message frames were found to be the most effective in convincing people toward supporting greater government action for families with children under age 3: **Every Child/Family Deserves**, **Economy/Workforce**, and **Strong Families/Communities**. The chart below summarizes which audiences were most swayed by each frame.

ECONOMY/WORKFORCE	STRONG FAMILIES/COMMUNITIES	EVERY CHILD/FAMILY DESERVES
<p>A strong economy depends on strong families. When parents can't find affordable child care, struggle to pay for diapers and formula, or have to choose between their job and their baby's health, our whole workforce suffers. Research shows that when government supports families who need it early on, parents can stay in the workforce, businesses thrive, and communities grow stronger.</p>	<p>Strong families are the foundation of strong communities. When we invest in the health and well-being of young children, everyone benefits. Babies grow up healthier, parents can succeed at work, and communities thrive and become stronger. Government supporting families is good for them and our shared future.</p>	<p>Every child deserves the chance to grow up to live a successful life, and every family deserves to give their child a strong start. But too many families face stress and struggle in the early years—not because parents don't care but because they don't have the support they need. As a country, we have the responsibility to help families start strong.</p>
<p>Most convincing among: Democratic state lawmakers Conservative voters who are strong PN-3 advocates</p>	<p>Most convincing among: Republican state lawmakers On-the-fence voter groups</p>	<p>Most convincing among: Voters who “move” in favor of government action on PN-3</p>

What We Heard

Here is a sample of how focus group participants reacted to this message:

"I feel like this one would truly represent me and my way of thinking that strong families are the foundation for a strong community." – Parent <5, Latina woman, age 30-39, Independent

"When the family/home base is strong, everything positive radiates outward. Our schools, community, and places of faith will reap the benefits of engagement and support." – Latino man, age 60-69, Conservative

What We Heard

Here is a sample of how focus group participants reacted to this message:

"If a family can't find good, affordable daycare a parent may not be able to work therefore won't be able to provide the basic essentials for their families. It puts a lot of stress on parents when they don't know how they're going to pay rent, buy food or provide for their family. That stress trickles down into how they interact with their families."
–Parent, white woman, age 50-59, Conservative

Strong Families/Strong Communities

This frame has the broadest support across audiences, and it conveys that PN-3 support is about helping families in ways that ultimately strengthen the communities around them. In this frame, the government plays a supportive role rather than extending its reach, which makes it especially effective for audiences wary of government overreach.

Sample message: "Strong families are the foundation of strong communities, but too many families with babies and toddlers are being stretched thin by the rising costs of child care, health care, housing, and basic necessities. No one thinks the government should raise our children. But when parents and caregivers have access to safe, affordable child care, quality health care, and stable housing, they can work, provide for their families, and contribute to their communities. When we support families in those crucial first three years, children grow up healthier and more prepared to succeed—and the communities around them are stronger for it. That's not just good for families; it's good for all of us."

Sample proof points:

- Infant care is more expensive than college tuition in 30 states. Costs range from more than 29% to nearly 94% of a family's income, depending on where they live.
- On average, it costs \$30,000 a year to raise a small child. That's up 35% since 2023.

Note: Local examples of programs that support families and communities (such as home visiting services, child care subsidies, and health care centers) are especially powerful here. Where possible, lead with state or local data on program reach or outcomes.

Economy & Workforce Stability

This frame positions PN-3 policy as a practical workforce and economic infrastructure, rather than a niche social program. It is effective across contexts because affordability and workforce participation are persistent concerns for families and policymakers alike. This frame also works well in conversations about child care, paid leave, and tax credits with lawmakers focused on labor shortages or business impacts.

Sample message: "A strong economy depends on strong families. When parents and caregivers can't find affordable child care, struggle to pay for diapers and formula, or have to choose between their job and their baby's health, our whole workforce suffers. Research shows that when government supports families who need it early on, parents can stay in the workforce, businesses thrive, and communities grow stronger."

What We Heard

Here is a sample of how focus group participants reacted to this message:

"Everybody, regardless of the level of privilege they have, their humanity should be seen. Seeing the humanity of everyone doesn't really cost that much money because ultimately everyone benefits. There's the saying that when we do better or a particular group does better, we can all do better. And it's our responsibility as humans to take care of each other."

– Latina woman, 50–59,
Democrat

Sample proof points:

- A major investment in child care and early learning would create an estimated 2.3 million new jobs and provide opportunities for parents with low incomes to return to the workforce.
- Infant care exceeds college tuition in 30 states, with costs ranging from more than 29% to nearly 94% of a family's income depending on where they live.

Every Child/Family Deserves a Strong Start

This frame conveys a message of opportunity, fairness, and shared responsibility. Rather than focusing on what's going wrong, it centers on what children and families deserve—and calls upon all of us to help deliver it.

Sample message: "Every child deserves the chance to grow up healthy, supported, and ready to learn—and every family deserves the tools to make that possible. When we ensure that families with babies and toddlers have access to quality child care, health care, and basic stability, we're not just helping individual children. We're building a society that lives up to its values and gives every kid a fair shot from the very start."

Sample proof points:

- One in three U.S. children between the ages of 3 and 5 is not healthy and ready to learn.
- Among children from low-income families, nearly half (48%) arrive at kindergarten unprepared to succeed.
- Negative early childhood experiences can be linked to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and depression, which account for more than \$600 billion in health care costs in the United States annually.





A Note on ROI: Use It Thoughtfully

ROI framing — the idea that early investments avoid larger costs later — can resonate with some voters, but it falls flat with some lawmakers, particularly conservatives who have heard "spend now, save later" arguments for years and are skeptical of projections disconnected from real budget cycles.

When ROI can help:

- With voters who are already inclined to support PN-3 policies
- In broad public communications where "smart investment" language adds urgency
- When tied to specific, practical outcomes—not abstract, long-range projections

When to avoid it:

- As your lead frame with lawmakers
- With conservative or skeptical audiences
- When you cannot point to clear, near-term constituent impacts

What to emphasize instead:

- Short-term wins families will feel now: reduced financial strain, access to child care, healthier pregnancies, greater stability
- Immediate workforce benefits: parents and caregivers staying employed or returning to work
- Proof points tied to near-term outcomes and shared values

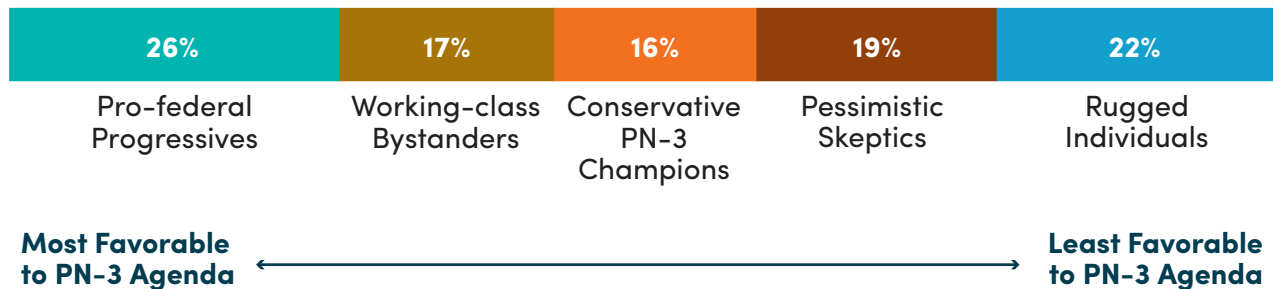
ROI can support your message, but it should never lead it.

Audience Segments & How to Engage Them

Audience Segments

Researchers used voter data to identify five main PN-3 audiences. Each segment is defined by core values, views on the role of government, and reactions to PN-3 messages and solutions. The three most movable and effective audience targets are as follows: **Working-Class Bystanders, Conservative PN-3 Champions, and Pessimistic Skeptics.**

Five PN-3 audience segments and the % of the public they comprise



This messaging guide focuses on the three most persuadable audiences that represent the greatest opportunity for advocates to build support and move the needle on PN-3 policy. This toolkit discusses the three segments; it does not address Pro-federal Progressives, who are already firmly supportive, or Rugged Individualists, who are unlikely to be moved by messaging. See below for a profile of each of the three most-persuadable groups and the messaging approach most likely to reach each of them.

Working-Class Bystanders

Working-Class Bystanders are typically younger, lower income, and female, often juggling financial and other pressures. See a full list of key facts for this audience below:

Demographic Information	Predominantly women (69%) Skew younger (ages 18-34) Majority have household incomes under \$50,000
Education Level	Overwhelmingly non-college educated
Civic Engagement Level	Low civic engagement and do not closely follow policy issues
Opportunities	Want stability, fairness, and the ability to work and care for their children Support PN-3 policies and want the government to do more
Challenges	Immediate financial and caregiving pressures Skeptical that systems work for them Questions about program effectiveness
Strongest Frames	Every Child/Family Deserves a Strong Start Economy & Workforce (how policies help them work and support their kids)
Best Proof Points	Child care and early learning creating 2.3 million jobs Infant care is more expensive than college tuition in 30 states 1 in 3 children not healthy or ready to learn
What to Avoid	Abstract, long-term projections Heavy jargon

Conservative PN-3 Champions

Conservative PN-3 Champions are the main parent audience and are generally supportive of PN-3 policies. See a full list of key facts for this audience below:

Demographic Information	<p>Mostly made up of parents</p> <p>Most likely to have children, especially ones aged 0-5</p>
Education Level	<p>Mostly representative of the broader population</p>
Civic Engagement Level	<p>Civically engaged and closely follow the news</p>
Opportunities	<p>Personal responsibility, strong families, pro-family and pro-life values</p> <p>Ideologically conservative but generally supportive of PN-3 investments</p>
Challenges	<p>Tend to think families with young children are generally doing well and that many communities already have adequate programs</p> <p>Cautious about government overreach and long-term spending</p> <p>Less likely to perceive an urgent gap in PN-3 policies</p>
Strongest Frames	<p>Strong Families/Strong Communities</p> <p>Economy & Workforce (how policies help them work and support their kids)</p>
Best Proof Points	<p>Children and early learning creating 2.3 million jobs</p> <p>Low-income children unprepared for kindergarten</p> <p><i>*Return on Investment Messaging (ROI) (\$7 return for every \$1 invested) can be used with this group in conjunction with other proof points. See callout box above for more information on ROI.</i></p>
What to Avoid	<p>Universal eligibility language (“support for <i>all</i> families”)</p> <p>Large, bundled policy packages</p>

Pessimistic Skeptics

Pessimistic Skeptics skew older, are evenly split by gender, and aren't as likely as the other audience segments to have children. Although they have broad support for PN-3 policies, their support is also soft and can erode under messaging pressure—advocates should not assume their support is as durable as other audience segments. Unlike other segments, a brief, grounded acknowledgment of why PN-3 matters can still be useful here, as this group understands the PN-3 period matters but is less likely than other groups to view it as critical. See the full list of key facts for this audience below:

Demographic Information	Typically older (34% are 65+) Evenly split by gender Mostly suburban
Education Level	Mostly representative of the broader population
Civic Engagement Level	Mostly representative of the broader population
Challenges	General distrust of institutions Doubt government programs are actually effective, especially since a majority have never participated in a government program themselves Limited connection to PN-3 issues Prefers targeted supports only for struggling families (as opposed to all families)
Strongest Frames	Economy & Workforce Strong Families/Strong Communities Every Child/Family Deserves a Strong Start
Best Proof Points	Child care and early learning creating 2.3 million jobs 1 in 3 children not healthy or ready to learn Infant care is more expensive than college tuition in 30 states Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) impact on preterm births
What to Avoid	Overly broad or universal framing Soft or abstract language about community benefits

“Most of these legislators want a strong economy. They’re talking about how we have got to make money and have business. And they love the word ‘strong families.’ You know, ‘strong families make the world.’ And we don’t really need government if we have strong families. And so those, those two words, economy and families are right at the front.” – Democratic lawmaker in a frontier state

“I would say anything here that is going to support families first is going to rise to the top, if we can couch it in a way to say, ‘this supports the family unit.’” – Republican lawmaker in a frontier state

Deep Dive: Talking to Lawmakers

Lawmakers are not a monolith, but there are messaging throughlines that work across the board. Lead with concrete, standalone policies rather than large PN-3 packages, and keep to near-term wins that constituents will feel while lawmakers are still in office. Anchor your ask to clear, local impact. Link holistic PN-3 goals to winnable, incremental next steps.

The research shows that lawmakers on both sides of the aisle broadly agree that families need more support during the PN-3 years, but lawmakers consistently raise concerns around cost and budget constraints, feasibility, workforce capacity, and the durability of large, bundled policy packages. Broad PN-3 packages are seen as harder to pass in bipartisan settings and more vulnerable to being cut when administrations or political priorities change. Standalone policies, however, are easier to move quickly, and because they are individual policies, the effect of one policy being cut is less detrimental to the cause than if a large-scale PN-3 policy package was cut. Incremental progress through standalone bills, lawmakers suggested, may ultimately be the most effective way to build a lasting PN-3 policy landscape over time.

Progressive Lawmakers

Progressive lawmakers already see the value of PN-3 approaches and tend to grade their states’ current efforts as inadequate or mediocre. With this audience, there is room to lean into population-centered language and holistic narratives about systems, provided they are paired with concrete policies. The **Economy & Workforce** and **Every Child/Family Deserves a Strong Start** frames are both the strongest with this audience. However, the **Strong Families/Strong Communities** frame also resonates with this audience and could serve as another effective entry point.

Conservative Lawmakers

Conservative lawmakers often share the same underlying PN-3 values—support for families, the importance of the PN-3 period, and community stability—but they have core concerns related to cost, government overreach, and workforce capacity. As such, it remains important to frame the government’s role as a supportive partner to parents and caregivers, not a substitute for them. The **Strong Families/Strong Communities** frame is the strongest entry point for this audience and should be connected to community safety, economic stability, and faith-based or pro-family values when appropriate.

In terms of policy, stick to standalone proposals targeted at families who need support now. Avoid leading with any universal eligibility language, such as “all parents and caregivers deserve…” or “every family should receive…” as these can raise cost concerns. Instead, messaging should emulate “support for families who need help giving their children a strong start” to keep the messaging effective.



Trusted Messengers & What to Avoid

The research shows that the most credible voices for lawmaker conversations are:

- **Pro-family and pro-life leaders**, who are particularly influential with conservative lawmakers.
- **Business leaders and chambers of commerce**, especially effective for the Economy & Workforce frame, bringing credibility to cost and workforce arguments.
- **Faith-based organizations**, trusted among both sides of the aisle and effective at grounding PN-3 in shared moral values.
- **Local pediatricians, nurses, and health providers**, who add clinical credibility and constituent-level authenticity.

Importantly, lawmakers—regardless of party—do not want to be shamed or positioned as uncaring about children. They are not receptive when advocates lead with moral pressure rather than partnerships and hard data. Similarly, avoid jargon-heavy advocacy and long-range ROI arguments disconnected from real budgets and political timelines. Keep messaging grounded, local, and actionable.

Proof Points Library

When using proof points with any of the frames, be sure to use a mix of national and local proof points, as this makes messages feel relevant and urgent to lawmakers and constituents. It's important to pair national statistics with state or local data on key issues, such as child care, maternal care, housing, etc. Local outcome measures, where available, will further strengthen the proof points.

Engaged Public (Voter) Proof Points

The research identifies the following proof points as the most persuasive for the engaged public voter group:

- A major investment in child care and early learning would create an estimated 2.3 million new jobs and help parents with low incomes return to the workforce.
- One in three U.S. children between the ages of 3 and 5 are not healthy and/or ready to learn.
- 48% of children in families with low incomes begin kindergarten unprepared to succeed.
- Infant care is more expensive than college tuition in 30 states. Costs range from more than 29% to nearly 94% of a family's income, depending on where they live.



ROI messaging proof points did not prove to be effective for lawmakers, especially conservatives who said that they have heard it before. Be sure projections are clearly connected to budget cycles or real-world implementation.

Lawmaker Proof Points

Generally, lawmakers on both sides preferred the proof points below. They also emphasized the need for concrete outcome data over abstract ROI facts, and proof points tied to specific, familiar programs, such as WIC, child care, or health care.

- Toddlers with two or more years of early childhood education in their first five years do better in school and earn more as adults.
- Participation in WIC reduces preterm birth risk by 25%.

Policy Goals That Resonate

Support for PN-3 policies is broad, with a lot of overlap in bipartisan support. However, not all policy objectives are supported equally, and it's important to note that how you present them is as important as the policies themselves. Lead with the policy goals that meet basic family needs and present them as standalone proposals rather than a single package. *Please note these policy goals were tested in 2025 before the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" was introduced and passed.*

Policy Goals with the Broadest Support Among Voters

Voters prioritize concrete supports that relieve financial pressure and improve children's health. The most strongly supported policy objectives, in order of priority, include:

1. Affordable health care for children under three (50% selected as a top priority) – The single most supported policy tested, with strong backing from Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. Health care for young children is a near-universal value and the most reliable common ground.
2. Nutrition assistance for lower-income families (44%) – Closely linked to health care in terms of support. Programs like WIC resonate because they are concrete, targeted, and clearly tied to child well-being.
3. Stable, affordable, and safe housing (44%) – A top priority for independents and all age groups under 65. Housing costs are a lived reality for many families, making this a relatable proof point.
4. Prenatal health care for mothers (35%) – Strong across the board, particularly with women and parents/caregivers of young children. This policy is directly tied to the PN-3 period and requires little additional context to land.
5. Quality, affordable child care (30%) – Especially salient with working parents/caregivers and workforce-focused audiences. It pairs powerfully with the Economy & Workforce frame.
6. Full funding for Early Head Start (25%) – Slightly lower overall support, but very strong among Democrats and communities of color. This policy is effective when paired with local examples of impact.

7. Paid family and medical leave (24%) – Growing support across partisan lines, particularly among women and younger voters. It connects well to the Strong Families frame.
8. Child tax credit (21%) – Bipartisan in appeal and particularly popular with Republican lawmakers as a standalone policy. This policy frames well as direct, efficient family support.
9. Home visiting services (9% top priority) – Lower salience as a headline issue, but broad underlying support once explained. Home visiting services are best introduced after establishing trust with higher-priority policies.

Universality vs. Targeted Support

A slim majority of voters (51%) believe PN-3 supports should be targeted to families who need financial help – and that preference shapes how you should talk about policy with cross-partisan and conservative audiences.

- **Universal framing triggers resistance.** "All families should receive..." activates opposition among conservatives and skeptical audiences.
- **"Families who need help" outperforms "all families"** with Working-Class Bystanders, Pessimistic Skeptics, and conservatives – your most critical persuadable groups.

The bottom line: Lead with targeted framing even when the underlying policy has broader reach. The design doesn't have to change; the language does.

Counter-Messaging

The voter survey tested four opposition messages, and it's important to note that none of the messages below are particularly effective with voters. However, for voters who want the government to do the same amount or less to support families, these messages carry more weight and are more likely to surface in legislative conversations.



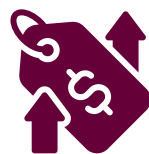
"Parental responsibility" – *It's the caregivers and parents' job to provide for their children, not the government's.* This is the most common and most effective opposition frame. It resonates especially with voters who are already skeptical, and it is the counter-message most likely to surface in conservative lawmaker conversations.



"Our parents didn't need this" – *Our parents and grandparents didn't have/need all this help, and they did just fine. Parents today need to work hard and do this too.* This argument implies today's struggles stem not from structural pressure but from a lack of personal responsibility. While this message is weak with the engaged public, it ranks as the most persuasive among negative voters at 42%.



"Bad parenting" – *These kinds of policies reward people who aren't willing to provide for their families and bail out people who have children even when they can't afford to.* This message suggests PN-3 family support policies reward irresponsibility. This message has low overall salience but reaches 40% among negative voters.



"Expensive" – *We can't afford these policies, and the more families we make eligible, the more expensive they become.* Cost and fiscal concern are the least effective messages of the four overall but gain traction with negative movers (39%) and with conservative legislators concerned about long-term budget commitments. Universal eligibility language makes this argument easier to make, which is another reason targeted language is key.



Citing financial struggle is the most effective counter to the parental responsibility argument, and it outperforms community benefit framing across all three target audiences. When asked whether the government's role should be framed around families who struggled financially versus community and country benefits, the struggling families frame wins by a significant margin among all three groups.

In practice, this sounds like: "No one is saying the government should raise our children. But when families continue to face the pressures of putting food on the table, providing health care to their kids, and affording child care, support early on means parents and caregivers can work, kids can thrive, and communities are stronger for it."

Messaging Dos & Don'ts for Policymakers

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start from shared values (strong families, strong communities, opportunities for every child).• Use local stories and proof points whenever possible.• Keep proof points tangible and timely (short-term, visible benefits).• Emphasize standalone, winnable policies with clear near-term payoffs.• Tailor language to audience segment and ideology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead with ROI messaging or long-term "pay now, save later" claims.• Spend time convincing lawmakers that PN-3 is important — they already understand this.• Lean heavily on universal eligibility framing with conservative audiences.• Overload on jargon or distant projections that feel disconnected from real-world constraints.

Appendix

The research tested nine messages in favor of government programs and investments to support early childhood development.

BRAIN & BODY DEVELOPMENT	Babies' brains grow faster from birth to age 3 than at any other time in life. Positive early experiences shape their brain and body development, laying the foundation for lifelong health and emotional well-being.
EVERY CHILD/ FAMILY DESERVES	Every child deserves the chance to grow up healthy, and every family deserves the chance to give their child a strong start. But too many families face stress and struggle in the early years – not because parents don't care but because they don't have the support they need. As a country, we have the responsibility – and the power—to help babies and families start strong.
WHOLE CHILD	A healthy start takes more than just one factor – it takes many. Safe housing, nutritious food, a caring environment, and stability all shape how a child grows and develops. When all these needs are met, children have the best chance to thrive – growing up healthy, confident, and ready to succeed.
STRONG FAMILIES/ COMMUNITIES	Strong families are the foundation of strong communities. When we invest in the health and well-being of young children, everyone benefits. Babies grow up healthier, parents can succeed at work, and communities become more resilient. Supporting families is good for them and our shared future.
VALUES	Supporting families with young children reflects our deepest values—compassion and doing what's right. When we help families through the critical and challenging early years and meet children's most basic needs, we're putting our values into action and making families stronger. We are called upon to love our neighbor and help those in need, and supporting young families is part of that.
PAY NOW OR PAY LATER	Early childhood is one of the best investments our country can make. When we act early to get babies what they need, kids thrive and families succeed. But when we delay, problems and costs rise. We either invest now, or we pay more later with problems like lower educational attainment and higher rates of chronic disease – which is why investing in babies and toddlers is the smartest thing we can do.
ECONOMY/ WORKFORCE	A strong economy depends on strong families. When parents can't find affordable child care or have to choose between their job and their baby's health, our whole workforce suffers. Research shows that supporting families strengthens them and helps bolster the economy. When families have the support they need early on, parents can stay in the workforce, businesses thrive, and communities grow stronger.
BIRTHRATE	We expect a lot from parents – raising children, working hard, and building strong families. But today, many young families feel overwhelmed because the economic burden is too great and the support too little. None of us can do it alone. If we want our population to grow, we need to show that society has families' backs. <i>(Not tested in focus groups)</i>
URGENCY/ POLICIES AT RISK	State and federal programs help provide young families with essentials like nutrition, child care, and healthcare, so parents can give their children the best possible start. But now, across the country, those supports parents rely on are under threat, putting babies and toddlers at risk. The future of our youngest generation is being shaped today, and it's up to all of us to protect it. <i>(Not tested in focus groups)</i>

Proof Points Tested

Several proof points help make the case.

% best examples for why it is important for the government to provide support to these families (3-4 chosen)

A major investment in child care and early learning would create an estimated 2.3 million new jobs, as well as provide opportunities for parents with low incomes to return to the workforce.	39
One in three U.S. children between the ages of 3 and 5 are not healthy and not ready to learn.	37
48% of children in families with low incomes arrive in kindergarten unprepared to succeed.	35
Infant care is more expensive than college tuition in 30 states. Costs range from more than 29% of a family's income to nearly 94% depending on where the family lives.	35
On average, it costs \$30,000 a year to raise a small child. That's up 35% since 2023.	30
Every year, U.S. families lose out on \$8.3 billion in wages due to lack of child care.	30
Every dollar spent on high-quality early childhood programs has a payoff of at least \$7 that strengthens families and bolsters local economies.	30
Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and depression, three of the most common and costly conditions that account for more than \$600 billion in healthcare costs in the United States annually, can be linked to negative early childhood experiences.	27
U.S. businesses lose \$3 billion annually due to employee absenteeism resulting from child care issues.	22
The birthrate in the U.S. is at a record low with a decline of 20% since 2007.	15

Sources for Proof Points

- **A major investment in child care and early learning would create an estimated 2.3 million new jobs, and help parents with low incomes return to the workforce.**
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