

ILLINOIS

# Care Voter

# Guide



## THE STATE OF CARE

Care connects us all. Each of us will need to give or receive care at some point in our lifetime. Whether it's as disabled people or older adults seeking to live independently; parents or other family caregivers providing care for their children, grandchildren, neighbors, and loved ones; or care workers, offering the essential services that make all other work possible.



However, instead of recognizing care as essential, our current policies leave care workers underpaid, families struggling to afford child care, caregivers forced to choose between providing care and keeping their jobs, and hundreds of thousands of disabled people and older adults without the care that they need to live and age with dignity.

Giving and receiving care shouldn't be this hard – and it doesn't have to be. **As care advocates, we can rally our communities to push for truly equitable, affordable, and accessible care that meets everyone's needs.**

### We need:

- **A universal, comprehensive, and inclusive paid family and medical leave program** that provides every worker with job-protected paid leave for bonding with a new child, dealing with a personal or family illness, or handling needs arising from military deployment.
- **A child care and early childhood system that works for every family** with public investments that reflect the true cost of care to support universal access for children and families, high-quality programs that allow small business owners to keep their doors open, and family-sustaining wages and benefits for early childhood educators.
- **A comprehensive system for aging and disability care** that ensures access to care for every person who needs it, including home and community-based settings that enable maximum autonomy, supports unpaid family caregivers, and provides good jobs for all direct care workers.
- **Good jobs for all care workers** that protect workers' rights to organize, the freedom to join together in a union, and the pay and benefits that allow workers and their families to thrive.

**Our policymakers have the tools and power to change the care system, but it will only happen if we come together. Together, we can demand a system that is truly caring and works for every caregiver, care worker, and each of us who needs care, making it possible for people to be there for loved ones, age with dignity, and afford care when we need it.**

## ASK YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS & CANDIDATES ABOUT CARE

**Your representatives, represent — you guessed it! — YOU! They make decisions every day that impact care. It is their duty to be responsive to their constituents' concerns!** In this guide, you'll find sample questions to ask your representatives and candidates, whether they are running for U.S. Congress, your state legislature, a local office, or for President. Additionally, there is guidance on locating town halls

and other events with elected officials and how to share your story with them. **Ask these questions to find out how your elected officials plan to act on care.** As you ask your questions, you can also weave in your own story and connection to care, so your representatives understand your experiences and offer real solutions.

### Aging & Disability Care:

- Most people want to live and age in their own homes and communities. [Over 160,000 older adults](#) and disabled people in Illinois rely on Medicaid services and supports provided by care workers on a daily basis. **What will you do to help older adults, people with disabilities, and care workers get the support they need?**
- Direct care workers provide life-sustaining, dignifying care to disabled people and older adults. Yet these workers aren't paid enough to make ends meet and many are leaving these jobs for other positions, leading to high turnover rates and worker [shortages](#) that impact access to and quality of care. **What proposals do you support to increase pay and improve job quality for direct care workers?**
- [1.3 million Illinoisans](#) are unpaid family caregivers. Many care for their children and a disabled or older adult simultaneously, often with no outside help at all and at the expense of their own well-being. **What would you do to help family caregivers?**
- [Almost 20,000 Illinoisans](#) with intellectual or developmental disabilities are on waiting lists for aging and disability care through Medicaid in their homes and communities. **What is your plan to increase access to aging and disability care in homes and communities and support family caregivers?**
- Far too many care workers, family caregivers, disabled people, and older adults face astronomical costs while trying to pay for care and are often forced to either leave their jobs because of a lack of paid leave, or impoverish themselves to get the care they need. **How would you make aging and disability care affordable in Illinois?**

### Child Care:

- The average cost of child care in Illinois is [more than \\$14,000](#) per year for infants and toddlers. **Do you support a universal child care system where all families have access to care and providers are paid family-sustaining wages and have a path to a union?**
- In Illinois, child care workers make an [average hourly wage of \\$14.86](#), and preschool teachers make an [average hourly wage of \\$18.02](#), which has resulted in high rates of turnover and workers leaving the profession. **What are you doing to support child care workers so they are paid family-sustaining wages, receive benefits, and have a path to a union?**
- Like clean water, the highways we drive on, and good public schools, affordable and accessible child care is a public good that our economy and communities need to thrive. Public investments are needed to fill the gap between what families can afford to pay and what educators need to make to provide high-quality care and sustain their own families. Statewide, the child care shortage is so severe that, in 2022, [over 650,000 children](#) lacked a slot in a licensed child care center or family child care home. [Almost 6 in 10 Illinoisans](#) live in child care deserts. **How will you prioritize funding for child care so families and providers no longer have to navigate these challenges on their own?**
- In a time when millions of families are struggling to make ends meet and child care costs comprise one of the largest shares of household budgets, **what would you do to help make it easier for families to access care that meets their needs?**

## Paid Family & Medical Leave:

- As one of the only countries in the world without any form of national paid leave, the US leaves too many people, particularly women and women of color, in the position of choosing between caring for our loved ones and keeping our jobs. **How would you support a paid family and medical leave program in Illinois that guarantees all working people access to paid leave to care for a new child, a seriously ill or disabled loved one, or their own serious health issue—like those that now exist in 13 other states and DC?**
- A record 85% of people want a national paid leave program. **What will you do to ensure that when someone falls ill, welcomes a new child, or needs to care for a loved one, they can do so without losing their jobs or their paycheck?**
- Illinois workers can earn up to 40 hours of paid time off per year under the recently passed Paid Leave For All Workers Act. **Would you support strengthening this policy so that no Illinoisans have to choose between their job and their health?**

## Ask About Their Experience With Care:

- What's your connection to care?
- What supports do you wish you had for care in your own life?
- Millions of family caregivers and people who receive care feel isolated, alone, and like their struggles aren't seen by our representatives. What can you tell the people who feel like there's little help for them?

## HOW TO VOTE IN ILLINOIS

Voting is one of the most powerful tools we have to push for equitable, affordable, and accessible care in our communities, but it can be difficult to know what to do ahead of and on election day. You can find resources on how to register to vote and learn more about issues on the ballot at [Disability Vote Illinois](#).

## HOW TO FIND TOWN HALLS, SET MEETINGS, AND OTHER WAYS TO INTERACT WITH YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Especially during an election year, representatives and candidates will be more frequently publicly available. They'll hold town halls, come to parades, and engage in debates, press conferences, and more. You can also always ask to meet with your elected officials or their staff — it's their job to serve their constituents! And town halls are explicitly for them to hear from and respond to their constituents.

### How to identify your elected officials and find town halls or other events:

- Enter your address on the [Illinois Board of Elections 'Find My Elected Official' tool](#). You'll be able to find your United States Senator, United States Representative, State Senator, and State Representative, as well as other national and statewide elected officials.
- Most elected officials at all levels of government have a newsletter that you can sign up for, which will often include information about town halls or other public meetings. They will also post on their website and social media about upcoming events. Follow those communications to find an upcoming event and then plan to attend.



## Request a Meeting:

- Almost all elected officials have websites where you can typically find information to request meetings or find the numbers for their offices. You can call to ask about scheduling a meeting or ask for the contact information of the staffer who handles scheduling for constituent meetings.

## SHARING YOUR CARE STORY

Sharing your story with your elected officials is a powerful way to move policy forward. Elected officials are moved by people's stories, more than by statistics or facts. You can use these tips to help think about sharing your story!

### Make it personal:

- Tell us about how you're connected to care. Have you given care — to a parent, child, family member, loved one? Received it?
- The more personal and specific your story, the more effective it'll be. Don't skip the details, but share as little or as much as you're comfortable sharing.
- Don't be afraid to be honest about how hard it is to give or receive care because of our patchwork system.

### Some topics may include:

- The high cost you are paying out of pocket for care and difficulty finding care providers.
- If you've had to decrease your work to provide care for yourself or a loved one, or remove money from your retirement savings or increase your work to be able to pay for care
- Experiences with lack of care — like not having child care or experiencing firsthand the difficulty of managing disability needs day to day without access to the help of a care worker
- What it means to not be able to afford child care or aging or disability care
- What it means to not have paid leave to care for your loved ones or yourself — including the money you may lose
- The emotional experiences related to care – do you feel like you're being pulled in every direction? Do you feel like you can't ever seem to get everything done?
- Any positive emotions related to care — like the feeling of security when you do have a care worker who you trust, or the freedom that comes from having paid leave to care for a parent who is struggling

**You can end your story with a positive vision of what you'd like to see from our care systems. What are the improvements or changes that you'd like your legislator to make?**



## Want to share your care story online?

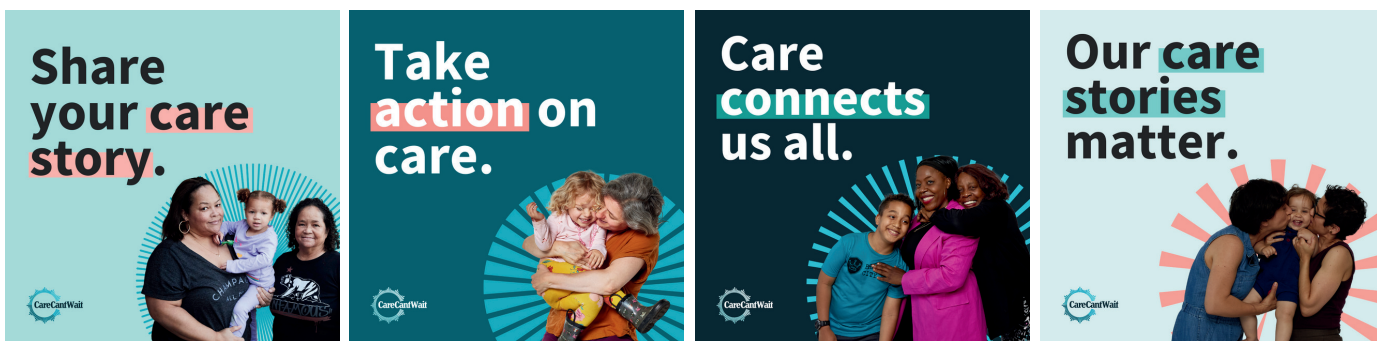
You can here: [https://stories.caringacross.org/question/share\\_your\\_care\\_story](https://stories.caringacross.org/question/share_your_care_story)

Here are some **best practices when sharing your story via video**:

- Try and take a video that is well-lit and make sure your audio is captured clearly.
- Act naturally! Read through the prompts above and decide what you'd like to say ahead of time. If it helps, jot down some notes. No need to be scripted, do what feels natural.

**Encourage your friends and family to share their care stories, too.**

- Your post on Facebook, Instagram, or any other platform could include the video you've created, or the graphics or sample language below.
  - We all have care in common. Sharing our stories helps show how powerful our care movement really is.
  - Our stories are powerful. That's why I've just shared my care story to help fight for a better care system for all of us. Join me: [https://stories.caringacross.org/question/share\\_your\\_care\\_story](https://stories.caringacross.org/question/share_your_care_story).
  - You can download the graphics below [at this link](#).



## CARE FACTS

Millions of families are sitting at their kitchen tables, struggling to pay for care for their children, grandchildren, parents, siblings, chosen family, other loved ones, and themselves. Here's more information about the state of care in Illinois and around the country.

- There is no state-level policy that provides paid family and medical leave for all Illinoisans. Only [1 in 4 workers](#) receive dedicated paid family leave through their jobs. The most underpaid workers, who are particularly likely to be women, people of color, disabled people, and/or immigrants, [experience the most barriers to accessing paid leave](#).
- The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides unpaid, job-protected leave, but is still inaccessible for [62% of Illinoisans](#) — who are either ineligible based on employer size or job tenure or who cannot afford to go without income for a long period of time. For a typical Illinoisan, four weeks of unpaid leave means [\\$3,700 worth of lost income](#).
- More than [1 in 10](#) Illinoisans — 1.3 million people — are unpaid family caregivers, who provide more than [\\$21 billion in unpaid care](#). This labor disproportionately falls to women and people of color.

[Family caregivers](#) experience significant workforce and earning losses, and are often providing care without training or other support.

- [56% of caregivers in Illinois are women](#). Among the 19% of caregivers who provide over 40 hours of care per week, 51% are not employed, highlighting the economic barriers faced by those providing unpaid care to family members and loved ones.
- [34% of caregivers have a disability](#) themselves, adding to the challenges they face in providing care while managing their own health needs.
- While the vast majority of adults in the US would prefer to receive care at home instead of in a care facility, one in five adults report that they or a family member need new or additional paid support, demonstrating the need for investments in care. Within Illinois, [almost 20,000](#) people with intellectual or developmental disabilities are on waiting lists for Medicaid programs in their homes and communities, even more don't qualify for any financial support that would make care affordable, and the average out-of-pocket cost for long-term care is [approximately \\$70,000 per year](#).
- There are [11 million sandwich-generation caregivers](#) in the United States, providing care to both their children and to an aging or disabled loved one.
- While direct care workers provide critical care, the average income for a direct worker in Illinois is [less than \\$21,000 yearly](#). Most care workers do not receive benefits such as health insurance and paid time off. [42% live at or near poverty](#), and [46% rely on public assistance programs](#) to make ends meet.
- In Illinois, the [annual cost of center-based child care](#) for two children (\$28,360) exceeds the cost of housing (\$22,836) and in-state public college tuition (\$15,362).
- Almost 18% of Illinoisan early educators live in poverty — [8.5 times higher](#) than the poverty rate for other teachers in the state.
- If women in Illinois were to enter into the workforce at a rate equal to women in countries with paid leave, the state would gain around 124,000 workers and [\\$4.4 billion in wages](#).

- Illinois loses [\\$4.9 billion each year](#) in economic productivity and revenue due to the lack of child care. We must create a child care system that meets the needs of children, families, communities, and child care providers.
- The lack of a comprehensive, robust care system in the United States particularly impacts women of color, who make up the [majority of direct care workers](#), a [disproportionately high percentage of child care workers](#), and a [large percentage of family caregivers](#), and who experience particularly high levels of stress related to caregiving without adequate support. The same is true in Illinois, where the [direct care workforce](#) and [child care workforce](#) is disproportionately composed of women of color.



## COMMUNITY-BASED CARE ORGANIZATIONS

If you'd like to learn more and find ways get connected with organizations working to create a care infrastructure that meets the needs of everyone in Illinois, check out:



[Access Living](#): Access Living is a service and advocacy center in Chicago for disabled people run and led by disabled people. They believe in driving positive change to create a more inclusive world for all people with disabilities and that we are our own best advocates.

[SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana](#): SEIU HCII is a union of healthcare, child care, home care and nursing home workers in the Midwest. Uniting more than 91,000 workers who provide vital care to Illinois' children, older adults, patients and people with disabilities, they are committed to quality care and quality jobs for home care, hospital, nursing home and child care workers.



[Shriver Center on Poverty Law](#): Shriver Center on Poverty Law leads the fight for economic and racial justice by litigating, shaping policy, and training and connecting people in the advocacy community.

[Women Employed](#): Women Employed is an Illinois-based organization that pursues equity for women in the workforce by effecting policy change, expanding access to educational opportunities, and advocating for fair and inclusive workplaces so that all women, families, and communities thrive.



**Care Can't Wait Illinois** is a coalition of aging, disability, family caregiver, and worker advocates uniting to create an Illinois in which all Illinoisians have access to quality, affordable, and accessible care at every stage of life including aging and disability care, paid leave, and child care. We advocate to build a care infrastructure for Illinois to ensure that disabled people and older adults have the resources to access care in the way they choose, family caregivers have the support they need, and care workers are paid family-sustaining wages and benefits with career advancement opportunities. The coalition is led by Access Living of Metro Chicago, Caring Across Generations, COFI, SEIU HCII, Shriver Center on Poverty Law, The Arc of Illinois, and Women Employed.