

Embracing Legal Problem-Solving to Address SDOH: Lessons from an Early Childhood-Based Learning Community

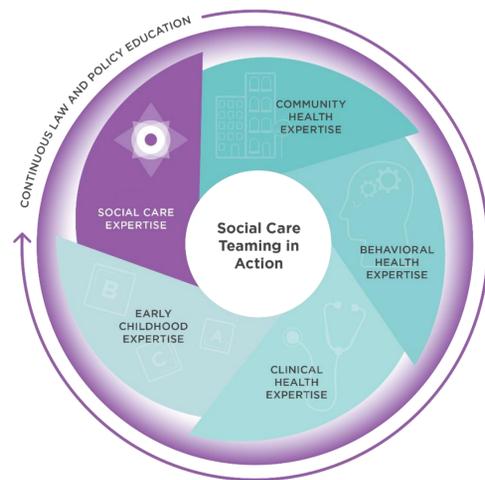
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Background

Many families confront barriers to critical resources like housing, food, employment, income, and personal safety – resources that are vital for families and communities to flourish. In most states and localities, families are legally entitled to a range of health-promoting benefits and services that foster access to **concrete support in times of need**.

Early childhood workforces are supported to foster and maintain high-trust, long-term relationships with families. This **relationship-based practice** is a strong foundation on which **legal problem-solving** efforts can sit. With a bigger toolbox that taps legal problem-solving resources both inside and outside one's sector, perinatal and early childhood systems, programs, and teams can more effectively meet their mission and families are better positioned to flourish.

This project brought together a diverse set of stakeholders. **Ask yourself:** What kind of expertise do you bring to your team and community?



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Methodology & Key Project Activities

In Spring 2021, MLPB convened a **Learning Community** comprised of parent leader and professional stakeholders representing three partner communities. The Learning Community leveraged frontline, firsthand experience drawn from diverse geographies, roles, and organizational structures.

Local liaison teams assembled ambassadors to the Learning Community's two bodies: a **Planning Advisory Committee** and a **Content Advisory Committee**, each of which met 5 times (20 hours total). Through guided conversations, the Learning Community's key accomplishments included:

1. Facilitation of the first-ever **multi-state survey on early childhood sector perspectives on legal problem-solving**.
2. Prioritization via multi-voting of key topics for a **pilot training series**: Immigration Status, Family Court Involvement and Educational Access.
3. Co-development of a **working definition of legal problem-solving** and a **publicly available handbook** on key considerations in implementing these strategies.

Learning Community Composition

Structure	Location	# of Members	Key Roles Reflected
Neighborhood-focused, place-based initiative	Boston, MA & Washington, DC	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent-leaders Coordinator, Specialist, Manager
County agency	Orange County, CA	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent-leaders Coordinator, Manager Directors and administrators
State agency with Office of Family Visiting overseeing home visiting services statewide	Rhode Island	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinator, Specialists, Supervisor, Manager Administrators Practice Transformation specialists

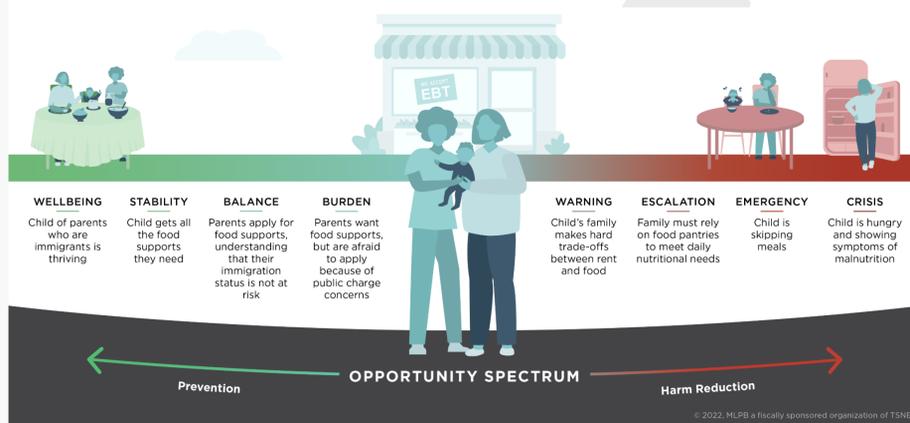
The 23 additional committee members reflected a diverse array of roles including pediatricians, public interest lawyers, policy analysts, researchers, and public health practitioners.

Preliminary data summarizing self-reported confidence in applying legal problem-solving strategies

(Likert-style scale where 1 = Not at All Confident; 5 = Very Confident)

Law & Policy Domain	M (SD)
Criminal Legal System Involvement	2.33 (1.3)
Immigration Status	2.40 (1.3)
Family Court Involvement (e.g. paternity, child support, custody)	2.49 (1.3)
Housing Stability	2.51 (1.2)
Transportation	2.53 (1.2)
Child Welfare System Involvement	2.57 (1.3)
Employment & Income Supports (e.g. paid family leave)	2.59 (1.3)
Utilities	2.66 (1.3)
Interpersonal Safety (e.g. neglect, abuse, human trafficking, etc.)	2.77 (1.3)
Intimate Partner Violence (e.g. domestic violence)	2.92 (1.3)
Food Security	2.95 (1.3)
Access to Health Care	2.99 (1.3)
Education (e.g. IEPs, special needs)	3.15 (1.3)

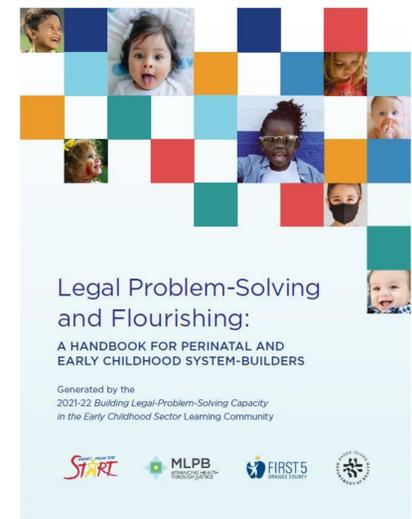
Immigration Status & Benefits Eligibility



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Ask yourself: Where along this spectrum was the last family that you supported?

Access the Handbook!



Working Definition of Legal Problem-Solving

Access to resources is impacted in significant ways by law and policy. Legal problem-solving encompasses a range of relationships, processes and collaborations geared to supporting people and communities to secure the resources they seek. It can include, among other things:

- Policymaking
- Direct legal services (representation) that takes different forms/intensities
- Rights education that supports people to assert their power
- Coaching on system navigation and strategies to reduce barriers to resources and legal protections
- Facilitating coordinated hand-offs to responsive resources
- Clear expectation management about the responsiveness of specific resources, and how a particular decision could generate trade-offs or unintended consequences
- Community organizing

Potentially, anyone who communicates with families in the perinatal context or delivers early education and care services can operate as a legal problem-solving partner in some way!

Excerpted from *Legal Problem-Solving and Flourishing: A Handbook for Perinatal and Early Childhood System-Builders* (pg. 3)

Acknowledgements

A full list of Learning Community Members & Co-Authors can be found on pg. 31 of the handbook. This Learning Community came together with generous support from The JPB Foundation. Many thanks, as well, to Keri-Nicole Dillman, PhD.

