

MELISSA BACON

Director of
Policy & Advocacy

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Groundwork
OHIO

As the Director of Policy & Advocacy, Melissa Bacon advances Groundwork Ohio's research and data-driven policies to support the health and early education of Ohio's youngest children and their families. As a member of the Groundwork Ohio team, Melissa works collaboratively through building and leveraging relationships in the legislative and executive branches of state government, as well as with state and national health and human services partners also committed to improving the lives of young children. Melissa joined the Groundwork Ohio team in March 2021, bringing to the organization more than 25 years of experience in state health and human services advocacy.

Before joining Groundwork Ohio, Melissa worked as the Director of Government Affairs and Stakeholder Engagement for OCALI, a nonpartisan organization advancing policies that improve the lives of individuals with disabilities. During her tenure, she co-led the OCALI Office of Policy and the Interagency Workgroup on Autism, focusing on developing relationships with members of the General Assembly and the Administration as well as other policy advocacy organizations. While at OCALI, Melissa advanced issues such as social emotional education, early intervention, Medicaid managed care and waiver services, state scholarship programs for the education of children with disabilities, ending custody relinquishment for families in need of crisis services for their child, and leveraging technology to advance independence for individuals with disabilities.

Before OCALI, Melissa worked in several health and human services state agencies as a member of leadership teams during the Kasich Administration. She served as the Chief of Policy and Communications for the Ohio Department of Health; Assistant Policy Director for Health and Human Services for Governor Kasich; and Director of Government

Affairs for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. She co-facilitated the development of Governor's Task Force on Human Trafficking, advanced Ohio's Employment First Initiative and the development of ASD Strategies in Action, Ohio's free online training for families and caregivers supporting any child, notably children with autism. From this work she learned the value of cross agency systems work, strong stakeholder relations, and shared policy agenda setting. In addition, Melissa worked as the Director of Policy and Stakeholder Engagement for the Ohio Children's Hospital Association.

Melissa began her career as a Page and Constituent Aide for the Ohio Senate. After graduating from The Ohio State University in 1994, she was hired as a Legislative Aide in the Ohio House of Representatives. After managing Merle Kearns' successful state senate campaign in 1996, she became Chief Legislative Aide for State Senator Kearns, a respected leader in policies to improve children's health, education, and access to food, security, and housing. After Senator Kearns was term limited in running for the Ohio Senate, Melissa was promoted to Health and Human Services Policy Assistant for Ohio Republican Caucus and later, Medicaid Specialist.

Melissa is the proud mother of three young women ages 21, 19 and 17. When her oldest daughter was diagnosed at an early age with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Melissa became a passionate advocate for policies to advance early screening and diagnosis for children with developmental delays, access to necessary interventions and supports for children and families, and policies that meet the needs of individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. Melissa most enjoys time with her family and considers raising three strong, independent young women her greatest accomplishment.

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