



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

2008 Legislative Agenda

Keep our promises to kids

Keep our promises to foster kids

All foster kids should be getting what they need to lead successful adult lives. Today, they aren't. African American and Native American children are particularly poorly served by our child welfare system—they end up in foster care more often and stay longer once they're there. We could make life a lot better for all children in foster care if we followed through on legislation passed in prior years. We call on lawmakers to invest \$10 million to adequately fund improved sibling visitations, comprehensive (CHET) screens, educational support and other improvements to the lives of children in foster care.

Keep our promises to hungry kids

Concerned organizations across Washington State have embarked on a remarkable effort to end childhood hunger. School meals play a critical role, with the potential to ensure that all school-aged children get two solid meals per day. Last year, lawmakers made a down payment on that promise when they eliminated the "co-pay" some children in lower-income families pay for school lunch. Eliminating co-pays for school meals is a proven method for boosting participation in the programs, getting balanced meals to more children. This action will especially benefit children of color, who are more likely to live in families qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. We call on lawmakers to finish the job this year by investing \$4 million to eliminate the school lunch co-pay for all children through grade 12.

Keep our promise to Cover All Kids

In 2007, Washington State made an historic commitment to the health of children when lawmakers passed and the Governor signed the Cover All Kids bill (Senate Bill 5093), which makes affordable, comprehensive health coverage available to every child in the state. Now we need to fulfill the promise of the bill. The Children's Alliance supports policies and investments necessary to realize the goal of covering all kids and promoting access to health coverage and a medical home by the year 2010.

Keep our promises to our youngest learners

Mentally, emotionally and physically, very young children are continually learning and developing. Offering quality support in the home to parents, who are the primary caregivers to 44% of Washington's children, can help our youngest learners get off to a great start. Last year, lawmakers included a \$3.5 million "down payment" for evidence-based home visitation services to strengthen support for parents as their children's first teachers. However, this funding was only a portion of the original request. The unmet demand for home visitation programs in our state is much greater, particularly for low-income children and children of color. In studies of individual home visitation programs, low-income children and children of color have improved greatly in school readiness, making these programs an important strategy for erasing the preparation gap, where disadvantaged students enter kindergarten already behind. We call on lawmakers to invest an additional \$5 million in quality home visitation programs this year.

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