



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

2009 Legislative Agenda: Kids are counting on you

Without revenue increases, the current state budget crisis endangers our most vulnerable and destabilizes the economic stability of families, on which the economic stability of the state depends. The Children's Alliance supports efforts to increase revenue to ensure that children in Washington can count on critical safety net programs at the moment they most need them.

Childhood Hunger: Meals hungry kids can count on

As more and more families struggle with job loss, low wages and fewer work hours, children need the security of knowing that a nutritious breakfast and lunch are waiting for them each school day. The Feeding Hungry Kids bill (SB 5361/HB 1416) protects free breakfast for all low-income children, protects free lunch for low-income kids in kindergarten through the third grade, and eliminates the 30-cent breakfast co-pay in these grades. The bill also supports creation of more summer food programs to stabilize food options for low-income families during these critical out-of-school months. **We urge lawmakers to protect current school meals funding, invest \$2 million to eliminate the lunch co-pay for all students in elementary school, including pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, and make a modest investment of \$500,000 in summer meals.**

Children's Health coverage: Protect children's health in uncertain times

The foresight our leaders showed in developing the Apple Health for Kids program nearly two years ago is now playing a key role in protecting the economic security of Washington families and the state as a whole. This time of extreme economic insecurity is exactly when we need to protect Apple Health coverage for children who lack private health coverage. It also is important to fund equal access to mental health services, as promised in the Cover All Kids law. **We urge lawmakers to take full advantage of increased federal support for children's health coverage, to invest \$6 million in state funds to support the Apple Health for Kids program, and to invest \$3 million to create equitable mental health benefits for kids.**

Early Learning: Support vulnerable families in a stressful economy

Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. Research shows that home-visiting programs significantly reduce the risk of child abuse and provide parents with the support they need to get their children ready for school. Early learning should remain a priority, especially as families face the stress of potential job losses and other effects of the recession. **We urge legislators to protect the \$3.5 million allocated to home visiting programs for at-risk families through the Council for Children and Families.**

Foster Care: Preserve our commitment to fairness

All foster kids should be getting what they need to lead successful adult lives. Today, they aren't. African-American and Native-American children end up in foster care more often and stay longer once they're there. We need to move forward to reduce disproportionality in the child welfare system, with an emphasis on three key decision points: the initial referral to Child Protective Services, removal of the child from the home, and keeping a child in placement beyond two years. **We urge lawmakers to pass SB 5882/HB 2164 to maintain our state's commitment to eliminating disproportionality in the child welfare system.**

For more information, contact Teresa Mosqueda at 800-854-KIDS x21 or teresa@childrensalliance.org
www.childrensalliance.org