2010 Legislative Session Review

Standing Strong for Kids

Tough Times Inspire Tougher Advocacy

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May 2010
On the cover: Early Learning Action Alliance Parenting Caucus Coordinator Kylee Allen and her daughter, Delaney, take part in a rally on the Capitol steps as part of our 2010 Have a Heart for Kids Day.
Photo by Tegra Stone Nuess
In good times and bad, we advocate for laws and policies that support our state’s most vulnerable children – especially those in low-income families and communities of color. We knew well before the 2010 legislative session began that our key challenge during this grueling recession would be to protect vital services for kids and families.

We rose to that challenge with five clear goals:

- Raise new revenue as part of a balanced approach to the state’s economic challenges.
- Fully preserve children’s access to comprehensive, preventive care through Apple Health for Kids.
- Make early learning for infants and toddlers a top priority while adding preschool to our state’s definition of basic education.
- Improve access to summer meal programs that keep children from going hungry when school is out.
- Uphold the commitment to root out and rid our state’s child welfare system of racial inequalities.

During the 60-day regular session and the month-long special session that followed, our undaunted advocacy preserved many critical support systems for families weathering the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

Lawmakers facing a nearly $3 billion budget shortfall did make painful cuts that will hurt kids and families. But our advocacy kept many cuts from happening. In this report, you’ll read how we played a pivotal role in the successful push for:

- Nearly $800 million in new state revenue.
- Full protection of Apple Health for Kids.
- A stronger commitment to early learning for infants and toddlers and a path toward preschool for all.
- Meals for kids in child care, schools and during summertime.
- Continued support for the work of a committee studying how to remedy racial disproportionality in the state’s child welfare system.

The Great Recession has been tough on Washington state, and the tough times are far from over. We know we must continue to stand strong for children and families. The programs we fought to protect this session may face cuts in the years to come. If they do, we will work to be a powerful voice for what kids need.

We and our allies will press for common-sense revenue solutions so that our advocacy can focus less on preventing cuts and more on charting a course for true and steady progress – and a brighter future for children all over our state.
Summary

Advocating for policy changes that improve the lives of children and families takes a year-round effort. And there’s no time of year when our work takes on a greater sense of purpose and urgency than when legislators head to Olympia to make laws and write budgets that determine how much support our state will provide to help kids thrive.

How exactly do we stand up for kids? With persistent and keenly informed, on-the-ground lobbying. By mobilizing advocates across the state to speak up for kids. And by making sure that reporters, editorial boards and bloggers cover key legislative debates with an eye toward children and families.

On the ground in Olympia

Effective lobbying takes preparation, a clear set of objectives, solid relationships with policymakers and legislative leaders, and a tireless commitment to a cause. Our legislative advocacy begins long before lawmakers converge on the Capitol. With guidance from our Public Policy Council and Board of Directors, we set five clear legislative goals last fall: raise new revenue, protect kids health coverage, bolster early learning, feed hungry kids in summertime and preserve our state’s commitment to racial equity in foster care.

The need for substantial revenue threaded through all of our campaigns. Beginning in the summer, we teamed up with a broad cross-section of advocacy organizations and started mapping out our strategy. Throughout the session, the Children’s Alliance brought a voice for kids to the call for new revenue and played an influential role in the Rebuilding Our Economic Future Coalition, which grew to include more than 130 organizations across the state.

We met with legislative members on a daily basis and testified before lawmakers regularly — two or three times a day at critical points during the session. We sent hundreds of e-mails and memos, maintaining steady communications with the governor’s office, House and Senate members, and state agencies. When priority bills faced hurdles, we drafted amendments to keep them alive.

Throughout the session, we lived up to our reputation for on-the-ground effectiveness. House Speaker Frank Chopp summed it up nicely when he called us “a leading voice in Olympia” in ParentMap’s profile of our executive director, Paola Maranan, named as one of the magazine’s 2010 Superheroes for Washington families.

Motivating the grassroots

Winning policy change for kids takes passion, creativity and dogged persistence. Our thousands of members are a powerful and effective force of grassroots advocacy.

This year, our members sent nearly 10,000 advocacy e-mails to lawmakers. We also gathered personal letters from parents who count on Apple Health for Kids and Working Connections Child Care who shared moving accounts of how the programs affect their families. Packaged
together, and hand-delivered, the letters spoke volumes, and lawmakers were moved.

We organized two creative projects to harness the advocacy power of telling families’ stories. Three moms shared the benefits of Apple Health for Kids coverage for their families in a five-minute video: “Apple Health for Kids: A Lifeline for Washington Families.” And in a minute-long audio slideshow, high-school sophomore Daniel Perlmutter urged lawmakers to raise revenue by taxing candy and soda.

We helped prepare some of our members to testify before House and Senate committee hearings. The highlight this year was when Sebrena Burr, a devoted mother and recent graduate of our annual Children’s Alliance Advocacy Camp, spoke of the critical importance early learning programs play and urged lawmakers not to cut Working Connections Child Care subsidies for low-income families.

“I tell my daughter that I do this, because it is up to all of us to make the world better than how we found it,” Sebrena said, telling us about what has inspired her to be an advocate for kids. “I encourage every parent to speak up. To let your lawmakers know what your kids need, what your communities need, is the only way they are going to make the decisions that are going to benefit your family.”

With so much at stake this year, we knew we had to dig in and think of new and interactive ways to inform and motivate our members. We hosted our first-ever statewide teleconference call early on in the session, giving our members an up-to-the-minute status report on our legislative goals and inviting them to ask questions and give us input about key kids’ issues. We hosted two more calls, offering timely updates with a mix of policy detail and our big-picture goal of keeping children and families at the top of lawmakers’ priority lists. In all, more than 100 people participated.

**Have a Heart for Kids Day**

Our annual Have a Heart for Kids Day is always a highlight of our work to inform and inspire advocates to speak up for kids. This year, more than 400 people joined us in Olympia on Feb. 15. Our staff briefed participants about our campaigns to protect health care, early learning, anti-hunger and child welfare services.

We got folks fired up and joined an enormous, enthusiastic crowd of 6,000 people calling on lawmakers to raise revenue and protect education, jobs, health care, the environment and services for kids, the elderly and other vulnerable Washingtonians. It was one of the biggest crowds ever to gather on the Capitol steps.

Children’s Alliance Executive Director Paola Maranan and State Labor Council President Rick Bender introduced speakers from all over the state who shared stories of how the economic downturn and budget cuts are hurting our communities. Sebrena Burr spoke eloquently about the pressing need to protect early learning programs that help kids get off to the best possible start in life.

This year, all legislative members were scheduled to be on the floor of the House and Senate debating or voting on bills. So rather than scheduling meetings for constituents in their lawmakers’ offices, we helped Have a Heart for
**Our Advocacy**

Kids Day participants pull their legislators off the floor for quick meetings right outside the House and Senate chambers. It was inspiring to see the hallways packed with passionate advocates and to help these face-to-face meetings happen.

**In the news**

Before the session began, we thought carefully about what our legislative goals needed to be, and how to communicate those priorities to reporters and editorial boards in ways that got our priorities covered in the news. When public policy debates involve kids and families, newsrooms have learned they can turn to the Children’s Alliance for a clear, well-informed take on the issues at play.

In early January, we set the tone for the session with an op-ed in The Seattle Times that made a simple, pointed appeal to lawmakers: “Don’t skimp on kids.” We were among a handful of organizations The Times invited to contribute to “Washington Budget Crisis: Balancing the Books,” which ran prominently on its online opinion page throughout the session.

We called on lawmakers to raise substantial revenue, to protect vital services, and to remember that short-sighted decisions today will make matters worse for kids and families down the road.

As a member of the Rebuilding Our Economic Future Coalition, we helped generate widespread media coverage about proposed cuts that jeopardized Working Connections Child Care subsidies, which enable thousands of parents to work or go to school. News outlets all over the state covered the story.

Twice a week, we kept our growing list of No Kidding! blog subscribers informed with media digests highlighting news about budget negotiations in Olympia, health care, childhood hunger and obesity, early learning and foster care. We blogged about our campaigns throughout the session. And we worked with our partners on the Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition, calling for taxing candy and soda to pay for kids health care. Our board vice president, Dr. Ben Danielson, co-authored an op-ed in The Seattle Times that made a compelling case for using revenue raised from taxes on unhealthy products to prevent cuts to health care and nutrition programs for children.

**How our advocacy paid off**

There’s no way to quantify the number of children our advocacy benefits. We do know that the services we helped protect during the 2010 legislative session support hundreds of thousands of kids across the state – be it health coverage or early childhood education, nutritious school meals or a sustained effort to do away with racial inequities that children of color in the foster care system face.

It’s not all about dollars and cents, but we decided this year to try to calculate just how much of an impact our advocacy had on the 2010 budget. We added up all the programs we took a lead role in advocating for – services that faced cuts in the governor’s, House’s or Senate’s budget proposals, but wound up fully funded in the final budget – and came up with a number that makes us proud: **more than $133 million** in vital services that will continue to help families weather these tough economic times.*

*For a breakdown of all the state and federal funding we helped Washington win or protect, see the appendix on page 17.

**Stand up for kids!**

See page 18 for ways to get involved with the Children’s Alliance.
Summary
The Children’s Alliance played an active and influential role in a coalition of more than 130 groups that started organizing several months before the 2010 session began, calling for new revenue as part of a balanced approach to the state’s economic challenges. With the state facing a nearly $3 billion budget shortfall, we made a compelling case that an all-cuts approach was not an option.

The Rebuilding Our Economic Future Coalition – representing children and seniors, K-12 education and universities, low-income families and communities of color, labor and the environment – put forth a strategic and well-coordinated campaign. In the end, our persistent advocacy moved lawmakers to raise nearly $800 million in new revenue that protected many vital services for children and families.

Background
In 2009, saddled with a $9 billion deficit, the Legislature balanced the state budget with sweeping cuts and an infusion of federal stimulus money. We and other advocates urged lawmakers to raise new revenue, but were not able to rally the two-thirds vote in both the House and Senate required by Initiative 960.

By the 2010 session, because I-960 had been on the books for two years, the Legislature could amend it — as it’s done with many initiatives over the years — and raise much-needed new revenue with a simple majority vote.

A few weeks before the 2010 session, Gov. Chris Gregoire’s first budget proposal included significant cuts to many programs that have been lifelines for kids and families struggling to make ends meet in tough times. State law required the governor to draft that first spending plan with existing revenue only.

The governor minced no words when she said, “I do not support this budget. As required by law, it is balanced. For me, it is unjust.” She said she would protect as many services as possible when she revised her budget in January.

What happened
The governor did preserve many of those services in her revised budget, though there were still millions of dollars in cuts. She did not lay out a plan for how the state would come up with the new revenue to balance the budget, leaving it up to the Legislature to decide what revenue to raise and how much.

In late February, the Legislature temporarily suspended I-960, freeing lawmakers to debate a host of revenue options. As legislators weighed the pros and cons of various proposals – from closing corporate tax loopholes to taxing unhealthy products like candy, soda and tobacco – we and our coalition partners stressed the critical need to raise substantial new revenue to protect vital services for children and families across Washington.

The Rebuilding Our Economic Future Coalition held strategy meetings at least once a week, pushing for the highest level of revenue to prevent as many cuts as possible. The Children’s Alliance and a handful of other revenue coalition lobbyists also formed a subgroup that reached out to give communities of color a stronger voice in talks about the need for new revenue.

Hundreds of kids made an enthusiastic showing at the revenue rally on Have a Heart for Kids Day.
The Need for Revenue

The Children’s Alliance played a leading role advocating for taxing candy and soda, which are driving up rates of obesity, diabetes and other health problems among kids. We made a simple, compelling argument: paying a few more pennies for candy bars and pop today will help thousands of children get the medical and dental coverage they need to stay healthy.

We generated action alerts and news coverage, making it clear that the call for new revenue had strong, widespread support. On our annual Have a Heart for Kids Day, the Children’s Alliance joined a massive Rebuilding Our Economic Future Coalition rally on the Capitol steps. A crowd of 6,000 made the rally the largest in Olympia since the mid-1990s.

Midway through the session, the governor proposed a revenue package that included taxes on candy and soda. House and Senate lawmakers debated various proposals — from closing corporate tax loopholes to taxing unhealthy products — but could not reach agreement. In mid-March, when the 60-day session was scheduled to adjourn, the governor called lawmakers back for a special session, challenging them to come up with a revenue package in one week. It took a month to get the job done.

In the end, the Legislature heeded the call and raised nearly $800 million in new revenue – enough to protect many, though not all, of our policy priorities.

A high-earner’s tax was discussed as a potential long-term solution to our state’s budget woes. But it was not seen as a viable short-term fix for the immediate need to balance the 2010 budget, because it would have to survive an all-but certain legal challenge, and because the state would need time to set up a system for collecting it. (Washington is among a handful of states that does not have an income tax.)

Next steps
The fight is not over. The Children’s Alliance remains an active member of the revenue coalition, which is monitoring possible November ballot initiatives that could threaten the revenue we fought so hard to raise. Another initiative that may be on the ballot would reinstate I-960’s two-thirds vote requirement for tax increases; in early June, the Children’s Alliance Board of Directors voted to oppose Initiative 1053.*

There’s also an opportunity: a measure that would generate $1 billion a year for education and health care by taxing the wealthiest 3 percent of households in Washington, while lowering property taxes by 20 percent and giving tax credits to small businesses. Our Board of Directors voted to support Initiative 1098.*

More budget shortfalls are likely in the years to come. It’s our job to move lawmakers to stand up for kids, to do what’s best for them, regardless of the economic climate. We will keep Olympia focused on doing right by kids, and if new revenue is needed, we will do as we did this year and make sure the Legislature does what it takes to protect children and families.

Resources
Rebuilding Our Economic Future Coalition: http://www.fusewashington.org/budget
Details on revenue: http://budgetandpolicy.org/schmudget
*Report updated in early June.
Summary

For the third year in a row, the Children's Alliance played a leading role in protecting Apple Health for Kids, Washington's nationally recognized health coverage for low- and moderate-income children. Though the session opened with the threat of a cut that would have dropped 16,000 kids off coverage, the Legislature fully preserved Apple Health for Kids eligibility levels and benefits, which include medical, dental and behavioral health coverage.

Children all over the country won big with the passage of federal health care reform, which guarantees Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) funding levels for the next several years. That’s good news for children in Washington state who rely on Apple Health for Kids for affordable, high-quality health care.

Background

Over the past five years, more than 140,000 previously uninsured children in Washington have gotten coverage through Apple Health for Kids, which provides comprehensive preventive care and treatment to children who qualify for Medicaid, CHIP and other programs.

Apple Health for Kids has been a lifeline to families struggling to make ends meet. During this lingering recession, the number of uninsured children in our state has remained among the lowest in the nation; Apple Health for Kids has provided free or low-cost coverage to children whose parents have lost jobs or benefits, and other health coverage has become unaffordable or unavailable.

Over the last five years, we have made steady progress toward our goal of providing health care to all of our state’s children by 2010. But around 78,000 kids in Washington remain uninsured today; children of color lack coverage at higher rates than white kids.

What happened

A few weeks before the 2010 legislative session started, Gov. Chris Gregoire proposed an $11 million cut that would have lowered eligibility for Apple Health for Kids to families earning 205 percent of the federal poverty level. That would have dropped 16,000 children off coverage.

Then came a timely windfall: The Obama administration awarded Washington a $7.5 million performance bonus for the progress we’ve made toward signing up our lowest-income children and making it easier for parents to enroll their kids and keep them covered.

The governor cited the performance bonus – which only eight other states received – when she fully protected Apple Health for Kids in the revised budget she proposed shortly after the session started.

The House and Senate also fully protected Apple Health for Kids, which covers the state’s...
poorest children as well as kids whose parents earn up to three times the federal poverty level (just under $55,000 for a family of three).

When the final budget passed in mid-April, it included two key provisions that will strengthen Apple Health for Kids; we fought for the provisions when the Department of Social and Health Services announced sweeping budget cuts days before the special session ended.

One of those provisions will preserve the Employer-Sponsored Insurance program, which covers premiums for children who are eligible for Apple Health for Kids but can get coverage more affordably through a parent’s private insurance plan; this will help Washington meet one of the key requirements to qualify for millions of dollars in future federal performance bonus awards.

The second provision, which has been a top Children’s Alliance priority, paves the way for “express lanes” – a way for children to get enrolled in Apple Health for Kids when their parents sign them up for other support services, such as food assistance. A large percentage of kids who receive food assistance don’t have health coverage, so express lanes will help us better use information we already have to get more kids covered.

In other victories for families, the final budget protected Maternity Support Services, which have helped thousands of high-risk moms deliver healthy babies over the last two decades, as well as the Basic Health Plan that covers low-income adults.

But there were some setbacks. The final budget wiped out the state’s remaining $425,000 budget for Apple Health for Kids outreach efforts. These efforts, vital to identifying and enrolling eligible children, are especially important as we work to cover kids who are more likely to be uninsured, including the state’s poorest children, a disproportionate percentage of whom are children of color.

We and other members for the Health Coalition for Children and Youth (HCCY) strongly urged lawmakers not to cut dental services by almost $5 million. In the end, lawmakers reduced that cut in half. The final budget also states that preventive care – especially for children – will be protected if possible.

Meanwhile on the federal level, HCCY and our allies across the country worked to keep kids in the key conversations about health care reform. Our goal: to make sure that health care reform leads to better coverage for kids. The reforms President Obama signed into law in mid-March extended CHIP funding for states through 2015 and eligibility levels through 2019 – major victories for kids nationwide.

Federal health care reform also will ensure that new plans offer parents free preventive care for their children, and soon insurance companies will be barred from denying coverage to kids because of pre-existing conditions.

Next steps

Our post-session advocacy began in the governor’s office – the same day the Legislature passed the final budget. In our meeting with Gov. Gregoire, we called for continued efforts to streamline Apple Health for Kids administration and enrollment procedures that will keep Washington eligible for future performance bonus awards.

We will continue working to get more children covered through Apple Health for Kids by working with policymakers, coalition partners, and outreach organizations. We are also working with the state to figure out how to prevent the Apple Health for Kids outreach budget cut from putting an end to this important work.
Protect Apple Health for Kids

We are forging ahead toward our goal of covering all kids by advocating for administrative changes that will make it easier for parents to enroll their kids and keep them covered. Some procedures that are already in place, such as simplified renewal processes, will help us do that. The same will be true with express lane eligibility once it’s rolled out.

In the months and years to come, as health care reform is implemented, we will work with federal agencies and the governor’s Health Care Cabinet to make sure that coverage for kids in Washington remains affordable and accessible, and that kids get healthier because of the coverage we’ve fought so hard to protect.

Resources

Our campaign to cover all kids: http://childrensalliance.org/our-current-work/cover-all-kids


The governor’s first budget proposed an $11 million cut to Apple Health for Kids. The final budget fully protected the program’s eligibility levels and benefits.
Summary

Our top early learning priority this session was to strengthen Washington’s commitment to investing in the critical infant-to-toddler years, when so much of a child’s social, emotional and intellectual development takes place. We and our Early Learning Action Alliance partners also pushed to broaden access to preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds. And in the face of cuts that threatened to set back hard-working, low-wage parents, we sought to protect Working Connections Child Care subsidies and home visiting programs that give parents the support they need to help their children get off to the best possible start in life.

Background

Research has shown that roughly 85 percent of brain development occurs during the first three years of a child’s life. These also are the years when families are most likely to live in poverty, largely because of the challenges of balancing work and child care. Some studies have pointed to warning signs of developmental delays in babies as young as 9 months old. Yet across the country, a very small percentage of the public dollars we invest toward child development – only 4 percent according to some estimates – pay for early learning services targeted toward infants and toddlers.

Home visiting programs that help vulnerable families navigate the first trying years of their children’s lives can lower rates of child abuse and neglect and help set up children for school success. These evidence-based programs connect new and expectant families with trained professionals who help parents thrive in their role as their children’s first teachers. Yet these services are so poorly funded that they reach less than 5 percent of eligible families.

Preschool also has a proven track record for helping children start kindergarten ready to learn. Yet more than 2,600 kids in low-income families are on the waiting list for the state’s Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). Last year, we got close to adding preschool to the state’s definition of basic education. But at the last minute, the governor vetoed that section of the bill. We and our Early Learning Action Alliance partners regrouped and once again made a compelling case for strengthening our state’s commitment to preschool for all by starting with kids in low-income families.

What happened

With dogged persistence, we convinced legislators to start laying solid groundwork for sharpening the state’s focus on early learning for infants and toddlers. Our hope was to win a firm commitment for the state to invest in the birth-to-three years as it builds and strengthens pre-kindergarten programs.

The compromise we won with the passage of House Bill 2867 adds infants and toddlers to the Department of Early Learning’s statutory
responsibilities. By the end of this year, the department must prepare a plan for making early learning available to more infants and toddlers in low-income families, and recommend funding levels for those services.

Two key early learning bills that passed this year, House Bill 2731 and Senate Bill 6759, pave the way for a comprehensive high-quality system of early learning that serves children birth to age five.

While HB 2731 did not make preschool part of basic education, it will give more kids access to early learning by making ECEAP the starting point for a statewide preschool program that will be available to all children below a certain income level.

Under SB 6759, the state will study the pros and cons of giving all children in low-income families access to ECEAP vs. making preschool part of basic education. The underlying goal: to give more children access to preschool and to seamlessly integrate preschool with the state’s K-12 education system.

In another key early learning victory, the Legislature fully protected Working Connections Child Care subsidies that make it possible for thousands of low-income parents across the state to work or go to school.

At times during the session, cuts ranging from $30 million to $88.5 million threatened to force up to 17,000 families to lose their child care subsidies, likely increasing their reliance on other support services. In the end, after intense pressure from the Children’s Alliance, our coalition partners, parents and educators across the state, the Legislature did the right thing for families, child care providers and our state’s recovering economy by preserving Working Connections.

That wasn’t the only win for Working Connections. Under House Bill 3141, families will have to reapply for their child care benefits just once a year, rather than twice or several times a year. This change – which starts with families in Head Start, Early Head Start and ECEAP – will give kids much more continuous care and allow child care providers to focus less on administrative tasks and more on what they do best: providing a nurturing and stimulating environment for playing, learning and growing.

We had hoped the governor would approve all of HB 3141’s provisions, but she vetoed sections that aimed to reform our state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to better serve low-income parents and children. Even so, it was an important step in the right direction to give children and their child care providers more stability.

The final budget was slated to fully maintain the state’s investment in evidence-based home visiting programs. The morning the final budget passed, we and other advocates began working to correct a technical error that resulted in an unintended cut to the Council for Children & Families, which oversees some of Washington’s state-funded home visiting programs; as of early May, the work to correct that cut continued.

Lawmakers showed their commitment to home visiting by going a step further and creating a new public-private home visiting fund. Thrive by Five Washington, the state’s public-private partnership for early learning, will match every dollar the state invests in home visiting.

Home visiting also won a boost from federal health care reform, which set aside $1.5 billion in grants that states will compete for over the next five years to improve their home visiting programs.
We couldn't declare victory on every front. A $193,000 cut to ECEAP will cost around 30 children in low-income families access to free, high-quality preschool services. It also lowers the bar for protecting preschool funding in future years.

And the Washington Child Care Resource and Referral Network, which provides valuable services that help families find high-quality child care, and serves as crucial infrastructure for local programs, suffered a 50 percent cut in state funding that covers its core services.

Next steps

Over the next several months, we will be working closely with the Department of Early Learning (DEL) as it maps out plans for improving infants and toddlers’ access to early learning opportunities, and taking the next steps to make high-quality preschool available to more children.

As DEL and Thrive by Five Washington start selecting the first programs that will get funding from the state’s new home visiting services account, we and other members of Washington’s Home Visiting Coalition will work to raise the public’s awareness about these important services. As the 2011 session approaches, we will make a strong case for increasing the state’s investment in home visiting so that more new and expectant parents can benefit from the support that nurses and early learning professionals provide.

We and our allies will be doing whatever we can to give our state its best shot at federal health care reform grants. If Washington wins just one-fiftieth of the first round of $100 million in grants, we could almost triple our state’s general-fund investment in home visiting programs.

On the Working Connections front, we will urge the Legislature to allow all families to reapply for benefits every 12 months, rather than multiple times a year.

We and our Early Learning Action Alliance partners also will continue working to cultivate new allies and prepare for next year and beyond by honing our knowledge, strengthening the way we advocate for researched-based policies with a well coordinated and unified voice, and getting more parents, providers, and the public involved in advocacy for kids.

Resources


Children’s Alliance home visiting work: http://www.childrensalliance.org/home-visiting


Washington Department of Early Learning: http://www.del.wa.gov

Thrive by Five Washington: http://www.thrivebyfivewa.org

Early Learning Left Out: An Examination of Public Investments in Education and Development by Child Age http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/29/dd/66.pdf
Summary

Heading into the session, the top priority of our end childhood hunger campaign was to secure a modest increase in state funding to improve children’s access to summer meal programs. We stressed that a small investment could draw millions of dollars in federal funding to feed thousands of children at dozens of summer meal sites across the state. We also stood ready to protect school meal programs that are feeding a growing number of children across Washington during a recession that has driven up hunger rates, while resources to serve that rising need have shrunk.

Background

Summer has always been a hungry time for children in low-income families. Families who rely on school meals often have a hard time providing one – let alone two – extra meals to their children during summer months. The Federal Summer Food Service Program plays a vital role in our goal of ending childhood hunger, but it is desperately underutilized.

Around 300,000 school children across Washington state sat down to a free or reduced-price lunch on any given day in the 2008-09 school year. But last July, summer meals reached less than 11 percent of these children.

With the recession forcing budget cuts at many school districts, parks departments, nonprofits and other summer meal providers, about 60,000 fewer summer meals were served in 2009 than in 2008. At the same time, the number of children signed up for free and reduced-price school meals at the start of the 2009-10 school year rose to an all-time high of more than 433,000. That’s 42 percent of public school children statewide.

Like school meals, summer meals do more than just fill hungry bellies. They often draw kids to community centers, parks and enrichment programs that offer opportunities to learn, play and thrive. And they are building blocks for personal and academic success. Well-nourished children have an easier time retaining the lessons they learned throughout the school year, and picking up new skills and concepts during the summer.

What happened

As we sought state lawmakers’ support for a $250,000 investment in start-up grants for summer meal programs, we noted that this small investment would leverage up to $4 million in federal funding and help feed children in 10 to 12 areas of the state with few or no summer food programs. The grants we were seeking aimed to bring a wide range of community organizations together to work toward building sustainable summer meal programs.
End Childhood Hunger

But as lawmakers struggled with a nearly $3 billion budget shortfall, it became clear that it would be difficult – if not impossible – to secure any new funding for summer meals. Determined to keep up the fight, we formed a working group that will continue advocating for expanding summer meal programs.

We were relieved that none of the budgets introduced during the session proposed any cuts in the state’s $11 million annual investment in school, summer and child care meals – money that supplements federal funding for several meal programs and covers children’s co-pays for school breakfasts. Last school year alone, this critical state investment helped serve 1 million more school breakfasts than the year before.

In another victory for kids and families, our quick budget analysis and effective lobbying helped prevent a $4.3 million cut to a food assistance program that serves thousands of legal immigrants across the state who don’t qualify for federal assistance.

Meanwhile, with the Child Nutrition Act up for reauthorization in Congress, we convened a coalition with a broad cross-section of organizations to support President Obama’s proposal for a $10 billion increase in child nutrition programs over 10 years. This money will pay for program improvements to give more kids access to nutritious meals, ensure that those meals meet dietary guidelines, and encourage kids to develop healthy eating habits.

**Next steps**

Expanding access to summer meals remains a key priority for the Children’s Alliance. The summer meals working group we convened has set a goal of doubling summer meal participation by summer 2011.

We are collaborating with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Within Reach, School’s Out Washington, Northwest Harvest and Food Lifeline, working to do more outreach to connect with low-income families and communities that need more summer meal sites. We will advocate on the state and federal level for greater support for summer meals.

Over the next few months, we have an opportunity to strengthen summer meals and other programs by securing federal funding through the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. Our hope is that the work Congress has begun to reauthorize the Child Nutrition Act will make wholesome, delicious meals available to more children.

By helping communities feed children where they live, learn and play, we make kids healthier – setting them up to succeed in school and thrive in life, and moving us closer to our goal of ending childhood hunger.

**Resources**

End Childhood Hunger in Washington: [http://childrensalliance.org/sites/default/files/Plan_to_ECHWA_FINAL.pdf](http://childrensalliance.org/sites/default/files/Plan_to_ECHWA_FINAL.pdf)


Child Nutrition Reauthorization Coalition: [http://www.childrensalliance.org/category/audience-type/child-nutrition-reauthorization](http://www.childrensalliance.org/category/audience-type/child-nutrition-reauthorization)

Family Food Hotline: 1-888-4FOODWA (888-436-6392) or [www.parenthelp123.org](http://www.parenthelp123.org)

Food Resource Action Center: [http://www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)
Racial Equity for Foster Kids

Summary

Our top priority this session was to maintain our state’s investment in making Washington’s child welfare system more equitable for children of color. For the second year in a row, our advocacy helped preserve the state’s Racial Disproportionality Advisory Committee (RDAC), reaffirming Washington’s commitment to racial equity for foster kids.

Background

In 2007, the Children’s Alliance took a leading role in forming RDAC, a 14-member committee made up of social work professionals, parents, government employees, and nonprofit, faith and tribal leaders. The Legislature directed the committee to determine whether children of color — particularly Native-American and African-American children — enter Washington’s child welfare system at higher rates and stay in the system longer than their white counterparts do, and if so, to remedy that disparity.

Two years ago, an RDAC study confirmed that children of color are referred to Child Protective Services (CPS) at disproportionately higher rates than white children. Native-American children were three times more likely to be referred to CPS than white children, black children nearly twice as likely. Native American and black children were more frequently removed from their homes, and they stayed in out-of-home care longer than white children.

National research — including findings by The Urban Institute, a nonpartisan economic and social policy research center — has shown there is no higher incidence of abuse and neglect in African-American and Native-American families than in white families. Studies have also found that rates of addiction, a factor that often leads to a child’s removal from his parents’ home, are the same across races. Yet children of color here and all over the country are removed from their homes and enter foster care at higher rates than their white peers.

It is traumatic for a community when disproportionately large numbers of its children are represented in the foster care system. Identifying inequity and the practices that lead to it are the first steps toward ending this injustice.

What happened

The governor kicked off the session by proposing that a list of boards and commissions, including RDAC, be shut down. The Children’s Alliance pushed back by urging legislators and the governor to preserve RDAC, which we highlighted as an important priority in action alerts to our members.

Later in the session, a revised list of boards and commissions that the governor was recommending be shut down no longer included RDAC and a handful of other committees that do important work for kids. The Legislature kept RDAC off the list throughout the session, and when the final budget passed, we were pleased that it included the administrative funding needed to continue staffing RDAC.

The final budget also preserved funding to complete the research on whether two model child welfare practices are succeeding in reducing the disproportionate representation of African-American, Native-American and Latino children in the state’s child welfare system.
Next steps

We eagerly await the outcome of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy’s review of two model practices our state’s social workers use as they consider what happens with kids in the child welfare system. This review will determine whether family team decision-making and structured decision-making are addressing racial disparities. The institute’s analysis, which is slated to wrap up by September 1, 2010, will give us a clearer picture of whether Washington is making progress toward our goal of fostering fairness for children of color.

Our executive director, Paola Maranan, will continue to represent the Children’s Alliance on RDAC.

We will monitor WSIPP’s research and partner with DSHS to determine how best to review practices for their impact on racial disproportionality, working to keep policymakers and legislative leaders committed to making our state’s child welfare system more equitable for kids of color.

In the upcoming sessions, we will work with our coalition partners from the Child Welfare Advocacy Coalition and keep advocating for policies and investments that will improve outcomes for children of color.

Resources

Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare: [http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/about/disproportion.asp](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/about/disproportion.asp)
Our Advocacy: By the Numbers

The Children’s Alliance played a pivotal role in protecting many public investments in vital services for children and families this session. Here’s a breakdown of public funding our advocacy preserved or helped the state win.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public investments in children and families*</th>
<th>Protected in 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple Health for Kids</td>
<td>$4.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHIPRA performance bonus (federal)</td>
<td>$7.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple Health for Kids (federal match)</td>
<td>$21.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer-Sponsored Insurance premium payments</td>
<td>$1.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental health services**</td>
<td>$6.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Connections Child Care</td>
<td>$88.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State food assistance program</td>
<td>$4.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$133.2 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All state funding unless otherwise noted.

** Dental health services initially faced a cut of more than $12 million in state and federal funds. In the final budget, the loss of state money and federal matching funds was reduced to $6.4 million.

Teresa Mosqueda (right), who heads up advocacy and legislative relations for the Children’s Alliance, leads our march to the Capitol steps on Have a Heart for Kids Day.
Get Involved!

Speaking up for kids is a year-round job. Here are a few suggestions for how to get involved:

- **Organize** a meeting with your legislators to talk about how issues you care about are affecting kids in your community, or organize advocacy training for your organization or community group – we can help. Contact Mobilization Coordinator Siobhan Ring for more information at siobhan@childrensalliance.org

- **Sign up** for action alerts from the Children’s Alliance. Or invite someone you know. It’s easy! [http://www.childrenshub.org/calliance/join-forward.tcl](http://www.childrenshub.org/calliance/join-forward.tcl)

- **Apply** for the next Children’s Alliance Advocacy Camp, scheduled for October 18 to 20, 2010, in North Bend, Washington. Contact Community Organizer Emijah Smith for more information at Emijah@childrensalliance.org

- **Save the date** for our next Have a Heart for Kids Day on Feb. 22, 2011. Better yet, organize a group to come! Contact Community Organizer Emijah Smith for more information at Emijah@childrensalliance.org

- **Give a gift** and fuel the advocacy that is making policy work for kids in Washington state. Contact Office Manager Deborah Bowler at deborah@childrensalliance.org, or go to: [https://secure.ga3.org/03/protecting_kids](https://secure.ga3.org/03/protecting_kids)
At the Children’s Alliance we advocate for kids.

We ensure that laws, policies and programs work for kids, and we hold leaders accountable until they secure the resources required to make all children safe and healthy.

It’s time for all of us to stand up for kids. By joining and supporting the Children’s Alliance, you and thousands of others like you make kids’ lives better. We’ll give you what you need to connect your passion to action, live your beliefs and do right by kids.

Join and give online at www.childrensalliance.org. Contact us at action@childrensalliance.org or call us at 1.800.854.KIDS.