



2009 Legislative Session Review

The 2009 session was defined by a mounting budget crisis. The state began the session with a projected \$3 billion deficit. By the session's end it had grown to \$9 billion, a full 25 percent of the state's general fund and one of the worst state budget deficits in the nation.

As the session began, the Children's Alliance adjusted our legislative agenda to match that reality. We aimed to protect vital programs that the state had spent years building and which would serve as an essential safety net for children as hard times hit.

The Children's Alliance [2009 Legislative Agenda](#) focused on reminding legislators that kids were counting on them to protect investments in foster care, early learning, anti-hunger strategies and children's health. Holding the line against devastating cuts to the safety net for kids counted as success in this session.

Doing so required an all-out push by Children's Alliance staff, by the 10,300 members of the Children's Action Network, and through support for our priorities in the media.

The Children's Alliance maintains a full-time lobbyist in Olympia to track bills and budget items, meet with legislators, and testify in hearings to build bipartisan support for legislation that helps children. The first week of the session, Children's Alliance staff were joined by Vicky McIntyre, a mom who attended a hearing to urge lawmakers to restart suspended Apple Health for Kids coverage for her daughter and other children in moderate-income families.

Members of our Children's Action Network sent almost 15,000 emails to lawmakers advocating for legislation and investments in children and their families. Parents sent in 124

photos to join our "[Kids are counting on you](#)" [virtual rally](#)—an online campaign that supported our ongoing effort to highlight what the budget cuts would mean for kids.

On February 27, in beautiful sunshine, more than 300 parents, children, and advocates gathered on the steps of the Capitol as part of our annual **Have a Heart for Kids Day**. House Speaker Frank Chopp made an appearance to reiterate his commitment to health coverage for all kids. In fact, he called for making health care for children a constitutional right.

Media coverage of threats to children's health coverage—including front-page stories in the *Seattle Times* and the *Yakima Herald-Republic*—helped build support for protecting Apple Health for Kids.

The Children's Alliance achieved remarkable success in protecting programs in our priority areas. However, major cuts in other areas, from healthcare to K-12 education, will inevitably hurt families. Some vital programs for kids were protected, but children were not held harmless in this difficult session.

Foster care

This session our foster care priorities were preservation of the Washington State Racial Disproportionality Advisory Committee and securing funding for an evaluation of the practices recommended by Department of Social and Health Services to reduce racial disproportionality in the foster system. Despite efforts to eliminate many boards and commissions, we achieved both goals. RDAC was preserved and Senate Bill 5882 calls for research by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy into whether DSHS practices reduce racial disproportionality.

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Early learning

The Children's Alliance's priority issue in early learning this year was maintenance of \$3.5 million for evidence-based home visiting programs, administered through the Council for Children and Families (CCF).

Through coordinated efforts by the Early Learning Action Alliance and the Washington State Home Visiting Coalition, instead of eliminating these programs, the legislature reduced funding to \$1.492 million and retained CCF to administer the programs. The result will be a 25 to 30 percent cut to services in the 2009-11 biennium, but our state will retain infrastructure to build on as funding becomes available.

In addition, the state crossed a major milestone for early learning in the 2009 legislative session: Early learning for at-risk three- and four-year-olds is now included in the definition of basic education, making it part of the state's responsibility under the constitution. ELAA pushed for inclusion of this language in the education reform bill, House Bill 2261, that passed this session.

Ending childhood hunger

At the beginning of the session, our goal was to build on our success in 2007, when lawmakers eliminated the co-pay that K-3rd grade students previously paid for reduced-price school lunch; we wanted to eliminate the lunch co-pay for all elementary grades.

However, the budget deficit worsened and Feeding Hungry Children legislation (House Bill 1416 and Senate Bill 5361) stalled in the fiscal committees, leading us to adjust our goals.

We helped protect more than \$10 million in state funding for: 1) elimination of the co-pay for all school breakfasts and school lunches in K-3rd grade, 2) the Meals for Kids breakfast subsidy, 3) start-up funding for breakfast, lunch and summer meals, and 4) a small subsidy for summer meals.

Children's health

This session we called upon policymakers to preserve investments in children's health and take advantage of opportunities provided by

recent changes in federal law—most notably the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act, which sends millions of new children's health dollars to our state. Legislators protected a planned extension of the Apple Health program to uninsured children living in families earning up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Lawmakers also invested \$850,000 in outreach to let families know about Apple Health and how to apply for it.

This victory will protect children as mounting job losses cause more families to lose health coverage. As of April 2009 more than 1,100 kids between 250 and 300 percent of the poverty level had enrolled in Apple Health, and the state projects that by June 2011 more than 4,400 children in this income range will have enrolled.

Additional results

This session's budget crisis brought to the fore the structural problems in Washington's tax code. Washington is one of only seven states without an income tax, and as a result its tax code is among the most regressive. It is also highly vulnerable to economic ups and downs, as became painfully clear this session.

The Children's Alliance's call for new revenues, including a high-earners' tax, gained visibility. Our support for a high-incomes tax, in our response to the Senate budget, was termed "the most dramatic statement of the day" by the blog Publicola.

Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown publicly supported a high-incomes tax, but the idea went nowhere. An effort led by Rep. Eric Pettigrew to ask voters to approve a temporary sales tax hike, to buy back some of the devastating cuts to health care, also failed. Lawmakers left Olympia with no plans for new revenue to offset the deep cuts in the state budget.

It remains to be seen if discussion of new revenue and reform of Washington's tax code resumes later this year.

Resources

Detailed bill information: www.leg.wa.gov

Parent resources: www.parenthelp123.org