



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

For Immediate Release

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Grim state budget protects some critical programs for kids

Severe cuts in other programs, rising need for services mean budget will hurt families

April 27, 2009—In crafting the state's 2009-11 budget legislators made an effort to protect children from the worst of the budget cuts. But children live in families and communities that are facing harsh cuts in health care and other services. Children will suffer when their parents lose jobs, lose health insurance and can't make ends meet. In a time of growing poverty and growing need the state budget falls short of giving children and families the support they need to get through the severe recession we now face.

“We appreciate that lawmakers protected children's health coverage and school meals—two programs that give low-income children and families a measure of stability in these tough times,” said Paola Maranan, Executive Director of the Children's Alliance. “But the fact of the matter is you can't close a \$9 billion budget hole with cuts alone without hurting children and families. Cuts at these levels are not sustainable without causing further harm to struggling families in Washington state. We are disappointed that this legislative session ended with no new revenue.”

The Children's Alliance is grateful the substantial infusion of federal funding from reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) made it possible to continue the Apple Health for Kids program at a reduced cost to the state. And legislation passed this session streamlines enrollment, making Washington eligible for bonus funding through the federal CHIP program. Lawmakers ensured that kids in low-income families can get free meals at school by continuing to waive the co-pay for school for lunch in kindergarten through 3rd grade and breakfast for all grades and supporting summer meal programs that feed hungry kids when school is out.

At the same time, demand for safety net programs will grow as unemployment rises, further straining a system that isn't able to meet the need we have now. Over the next year, an estimated 40,000 new kids will drop into poverty, driving up the need for programs that help children and families.

The final budget cuts about 30 percent of the funding for home visiting programs that are proven to help vulnerable families nurture their children through tough times and reduce child abuse rates. The budget also cuts the rates paid to pediatricians, clinics and other providers, which could make it harder for children to get in to see a doctor.

The Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP), the state program for low-income kids that is similar to Head Start, will be hit with a \$2.3 million cut that will eliminate an estimated 160 seats in ECEAP programs. This cut will drive up the 2,600-child waiting list, leaving low-income 3- and 4-year-olds without the early education that could have prepared them for kindergarten.

While the legislative session is over we must continue looking for ways to raise new revenue for the support families need during this severe recession.

“All of us in Washington state have to think about what we want for our children,” Maranan said. “Are we satisfied with children who enter kindergarten already behind the curve? With rising child abuse rates? If that's not the kind of Washington we want to live in, we have to keep talking about how to raise revenue in an equitable and sustainable manner. We in Washington have done better than most states in ensuring that poor and low-income children have what they need. It's a legacy worth protecting. The end of the legislative session can not be the end of our efforts.”

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