



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

For Immediate Release

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Impact of Senate budget goes beyond dollars and cents

Children's Alliance calls for a long-term solution to state's revenue problems

March 30, 2009—The State Senate budget proposal released today protects some key programs for children and families, but in this time of growing need the nearly all-cuts budget does not hold kids harmless.

“We appreciate that the Senate budget proposal includes funding for children’s health coverage, home visiting programs and school meals. At the same time we must recognize that we are underfunding some of the very programs that will help children and families survive this devastating economic period,” said Paola Maranan, Executive Director of the Children’s Alliance.

The Children’s Alliance appreciates the Senate’s preservation of investments in Apple Health for Kids. We are grateful for the substantial infusion of federal funding from reauthorization of the Children’s Health Insurance Program that made it possible to continue the Apple Health for Kids program at a reduced cost to the state.

Additionally, we commend the Senate for ensuring that kids in low-income families can get school meals by continuing to waive the co-pay many low-income children used to pay for school breakfast and for lunch in kindergarten through 3rd grade. The Senate budget also continues modest support for summer meal programs that feed hungry kids when school is out.

At the same time, cuts included in the Senate’s proposed budget must be understood within the context of the severe recession facing families. 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 make it through difficult times.

We appreciate that the Senate’s proposed budget continues 70 percent of current funding for home visiting programs that are proven to help vulnerable families nurture their children through tough times and reduce child abuse rates. This reduced level of investment, however, may mean

that nearly one-third of the families currently getting state-supported home visiting services will no longer be able to get them.

The Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP), the state program for low-income kids that is similar to Head Start, would absorb a 2.1 percent cut in funding. While small in percentage terms, this cut translates into about 165 children losing their places in ECEAP—and the opportunity to be prepared to succeed in school.

Finally, adolescents in foster care will be harmed by this budget, which eliminates housing and other services for teens transitioning out of care.

In the longer term, we recognize that the state's tax structure is inequitable and unstable. We urge lawmakers and residents of this state to pursue a long-term fix to this problem.

“Moving forward, we call on lawmakers to meet this challenge by looking at all solutions, including creating a tax on high incomes to bring more equity and stability to the state budget in coming years,” Maranan said. “Certainly, this is the biggest economic challenge we've faced as a state. At the same time, we believe that with bold action, leadership and pulling together as a community we can solve this crisis without eroding the public systems and structures that make Washington a great place to live and raise a family. But we will only meet this challenge if we look at all options, including raising new revenue, to get us through this recession and lay the foundation for our economic recovery.”

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