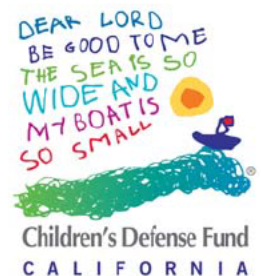




LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR CALIFORNIA'S CHILDREN

2017 POLICY AGENDA



WHO WE ARE ...

The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor children, children of color and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by individual donations, foundation, corporate and government grants.

The Children's Defense Fund – California (CDF-CA) is a state office of the Children's Defense Fund. CDF-CA was established in 1998 to meet the needs of underserved children in the state of California. With offices in Los Angeles, Oakland, and Long Beach, CDF-CA champions policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, ensure all children have access to health coverage and care and a quality education, and invest in our justice-involved youth.



INTRODUCTION

All California children deserve the opportunity and support to reach their full potential. Unfortunately, the path to success for many children is frustrated by historical and present-day inequality and discrimination. The Children's Defense Fund-California (CDF-CA) works to level the playing field and build a better future – where a child's ability to lead a healthy and successful life is not dependent on skin color, zip code, family income or legal status.

In the face of new political threats, we remain vigilant in protecting and championing programs and policies that safeguard children's essential right to well-being, including their rights to health, education and justice. We continue to fight for policies that lift children out of poverty, ensure all children have access to affordable health coverage and a high-quality education, and transform the juvenile justice system to focus on education, youth development and healing. Our work to transform systems is grounded in the experiences, voices, and leadership of children, youth, and families most impacted by inequities.

PROVIDE EVERY CHILD ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Every child needs comprehensive, affordable, quality health coverage to survive and thrive. After decades of progress, 97 percent of California children have health coverage, with 5.7 million children covered by Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), together in California known as Medi-Cal. However, health coverage for millions of California children and their families is at grave risk from the proposed repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and rollback of Medicaid protections and funding.

Protect health coverage for California children and families

Defend against federal proposals to repeal the ACA and restructure Medicaid. Repealing the ACA would result in millions of Californians losing coverage and the loss of \$160 billion over ten years in federal funding for California. Additionally, Medicaid cuts in the form of per capita caps or block grants would result in further losses in coverage and services, accompanied by greater costs for children, families, local communities, and the state.

Ensure the enrollment of all income-eligible children, regardless of immigration status, in health coverage, particularly Health4All Kids.

The Health4All Kids expansion of comprehensive Medi-Cal coverage to undocumented children in 2016 was a critical step towards universal children's coverage. Outreach and education efforts, particularly in schools where children spend much of their time, are still needed to reach more than 300,000 California children who remain uninsured.

Guarantee children in Medi-Cal receive all medically necessary services

Maintain a strong health safety net for children.

Poor children and children of color often experience health disparities that limit their ability to succeed. All children, particularly poor children, children with special health care needs and children of color, need the full promise of the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit in Medicaid that guarantees them access to all medically necessary services. EPSDT must be protected for children without cuts, changes, or limits.

Improve screening and referrals to mental health services.

Many children with mental and behavioral health conditions are not receiving treatment they are eligible for, despite the fact that school districts, Medi-Cal managed care, counties, private insurance, and the child welfare and delinquency systems all have responsibility or funding to provide mental health services for children.



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Ensure children have access to dental services.

Recent state reports show that fewer than half the children enrolled in Denti-Cal receive annual dental screenings. One identified cause is low reimbursement rates for Denti-Cal providers, making it difficult for families to find dentists who will serve them. Increasing Denti-Cal reimbursement rates is a key strategy to improve dental health for children.

Incorporate trauma-informed approaches into child health and education programs.

Neuroscience research has demonstrated that untreated adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and toxic stress can cause adult chronic diseases, poor-

er education and employment outcomes, and greater risks of involvement in the criminal justice system. The state's health and education systems should use trauma-informed screenings and interventions to help promote healing, build on children's strengths, and foster resiliency in children.

ENSURE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT, DIGNITY AND EQUITY

Every child is entitled to a high-quality public school education with access to college and career readiness. Students should be protected and supported in school regardless of race/ethnicity, religion, immigration status, language, ability, gender, sexuality or involvement in the juvenile justice or foster care system. California policymakers and systems leaders should enact school climate, funding, and accountability policies that result in learning, dignity, and equity for all students, particularly vulnerable students who need additional investments and interventions to succeed in school.

Grow positive school climate policies and practices

Fund and require school districts to implement positive, student-centered, and trauma-informed approaches to school discipline. California schools issued more than 400,000 suspensions in the 2014-15 school year and Black students were three times more likely to be suspended than their White peers. Children who are suspended from school are less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to enter the juvenile justice system. Exclusionary discipline should be replaced with research-based strategies such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning.

Reduce school suspensions by eliminating “willful defiance” and “disruption” from the Education Code as grounds for suspension and expulsion for all students in grades K-12. Suspensions for disruption and willful defiance – a subjective, catch-all category for a range of minor misbe-

haviors – account for almost one-third of all suspensions in California and are most frequently imposed on students of color and students with special needs.

Invest in hiring more supportive school staff members rather than school-based police, probation and security officers. Counselors, mental health professionals, and school nurses improve the school’s learning environment, student wellness, and student outcomes by helping address root causes of behavior and preventing conflicts, without criminalizing youth behavior.

Protect students and families regardless of immigration status. California schools should adopt Safe Haven policies as part of their school climate practices to enable students to remain focused on their learning and encourage parent engagement – without fear of law enforcement involvement that could result in deportation or criminalization.



California must fulfill its promise to transform the way schools are funded by fully implementing the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

Ensure adequate and equitable funding and accountability for uplifting poor students, students with special needs, English learners, foster youth, justice-involved youth, and students of color

Require greater transparency from school districts. As California fulfills its promise to transform the way schools are funded through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), state and county educational agencies should ensure districts publicly disclose all areas of their budgets in detail for community review and input.

Maintain high performance standards for accountability. Districts should be held accountable to California's new public school evaluation system – the California School Dashboard – in the areas of student achievement, attendance, and school climate by including the relevant indicators to assess progress.

Promote meaningful stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the California School Dashboard, and districts' development of Local Control Accountability Plans. Ensure districts meet requirements for regular consultation and input from students, parents, and community-based organizations throughout the process, as these groups have been historically underserved and excluded from funding decisions.

Increase education access and improve post-secondary opportunities for current and former justice-involved youth

Improve education access and programming for youth in court schools. Justice-involved youth have the equal right to access engaging, comprehensive education that prepares them for college and career. County offices of education should increase students' access to credit-bearing, college-bound, college, and career-technical coursework and collaborate with county probation departments to eliminate truancy, classroom removals, and suspensions of students.

Increase re-enrollment rates and credit acceptance for formerly justice-involved youth in comprehensive high schools. From 2013 to 2014, 44 percent of justice-involved youth in California had not been enrolled in local schools within 90 days of re-entering the community. California must fully implement AB 2276 (2014), which requires county offices of education and probation departments to coordinate to ensure immediate school enrollment, timely transfer of school records, and uniform systems for awarding partial and full course credit.

Increase admission, retention, and graduation rates of formerly justice-involved youth in post-secondary education. Building pathways to post-secondary education for formerly justice-involved students bolsters their journeys towards educational achievement, career and economic success, and overall mental and physical wellness. Ensure institutions implement effective practices and programs to support formerly justice-involved students through their post-secondary education with access to financial aid, academic, career, and social-emotional services.

TRANSFORM JUSTICE SYSTEMS FOR YOUTH

Across the nation and in California, there is recognition that over-relying on punitive responses to youth crime has cost communities and the economy, and failed to improve public safety or youth outcomes. New research underscores that youth behavior and crimes should be understood in the context of their development, poverty, trauma and other circumstances. To better achieve both safety and youth well-being, youth contact with courts, probation and law enforcement should be prevented whenever possible; effective and fair treatment must be provided to youth when they are system-involved; and ultimately, resources must be shifted away from the court and law enforcement system into education, jobs, mental and public health systems and other essential supports that strengthen youth, families and whole communities.

Reduce over-criminalization of children, especially poor children and children of color

Prevent inequitable, ineffective contacts with youth by law enforcement. For example, in Los Angeles County, a growing number of youth – overwhelmingly youth of color – are being re-

ferred for voluntary supervision by probation officers, often merely for poor grades or school attendance. These youth deserve teachers, tutors, counselors and social workers, not law enforcement, for such school-based problems.

Divert youth into community-based alternatives. The juvenile justice system has too often



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proven to be ineffective at reducing recidivism and improving youth outcomes. Wherever possible, youth charged with crimes should be held accountable for their actions and have their underlying needs addressed in their communities through community-based diversion.

Challenge and shift narratives about youth that are deficit-based. Biases underlie many criminal and juvenile justice policies, which cast youth -- especially youth of color and poor youth -- as deficient and prone to delinquent and violent behaviors. Such biases inform decisions and lead to disparities at every stage of the justice process. Institutions and communities should support and nurture narratives that are focused on young people's strengths and capacities, as well as the conditions needed to support them in reaching their greater potential.

Divert resources into youth development

Direct funding for youth crime prevention into a range of effective community-based supports.

Such funding has disproportionately been awarded to renovating locked facilities and resourcing law enforcement, including police officers and probation units in schools. Federal, state and local funding should be diverted from surveillance and suppression efforts towards positive youth and community development, including education, jobs, restorative justice practices, mental health services and other essential supports.

Downsize and close facilities. California has dramatically reduced the number of youth arrested, charged, detained, incarcerated and supervised by its court and probation systems. Many facilities across the state are outdated and underpopulated, yet their budgets have stayed level or grown. State and counties should downsize or close facilities to avoid fiscal waste, and shift sav-

ings into the development and healing of youth in their homes and communities.

Ensure fair, proportionate and developmentally appropriate treatment of justice-involved youth

Transform secure facilities to be trauma-informed, child-centered and youth development-focused. Incarceration should be treatment-oriented and developmentally appropriate. Standards and practices in youth lock-ups should reflect updated research and information about youth development and the harms of incarceration.

Reduce adult criminal prosecution and sentencing of youth. Youth who are 14 years or older

may be transferred to and face prosecution in adult court, where they are exposed to extreme sentences, including life without parole. California should ensure that age and circumstances are fully and meaningfully considered when youth are transferred to adult court and when youth have been sentenced to die in prison.

Ensure appropriate treatment and protection of rights of youth during law enforcement contacts, including meaningful counseling during custodial interrogations. Youth are vulnerable when navigating and exercising their rights with police, especially in high-pressured contexts like interrogation. To protect youth and ensure the integrity of law enforcement and evidence, California should provide meaningful consultation with a lawyer during interrogations.

END CHILD POVERTY

Nearly 1 in 4 California children live in poverty. Almost 1 in 10 California children live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$470 a week for a family of four. Poverty and extreme poverty disproportionately burden children of color. Poverty has a devastating impact on child health and well-being, and undermines academic and future economic success. A combination of policy strategies and investments at the state and local level will help end child poverty and ameliorate its lifelong effects.

Boost employment, wages and income for families with children

Expand the newly implemented state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The state and federal EITCs are proven tools for reducing child poverty. The newly created state credit – which cur-

rently reaches 700,000 households with annual earnings below \$14,000 – should be expanded to benefit more working poor families. The state should also fund community-based outreach to ensure eligible families receive the credit.



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Expand the number of child care slots for low-income children. Investments in high-quality child care help enable parents to work, while also breaking the cycle of poverty in the long run by promoting the safe, nurturing and stimulating environments that foster children's development and build the skills for school success.

Strengthen the safety net to meet the basic needs of all children

Ensure CalWORKs benefits meets families' basic needs. Current CalWORKs benefits are not sufficient to lift families out of deep poverty or meet children's basic needs. CalWORKs grant levels should be increased to at least 50 percent of the federal poverty level and supplemented with other key family supports, such as home visiting.

Invest in affordable housing by providing dedicated resources to develop rental housing that is affordable for extremely low-income families. The high cost of housing in California is a significant contributor to the state's high poverty rate. Investments in addressing homelessness and expanding affordable housing should pay particular attention to the specific needs of families with children who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless.

Fund transportation for poor children. Many poor families cannot afford essential transportation, making it difficult for children to attend school. California should ensure children have transportation to get to and from school, and access after-school and summer enrichment opportunities and jobs.



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