



# LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR CALIFORNIA'S CHILDREN

## 2017 POLICY AGENDA SUMMARY



All California children deserve the opportunity and support to reach their full potential. Unfortunately, many children face obstacles such as poverty and mistreatment by systems that should work better to help them grow and thrive. 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.

## ENSURE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT, DIGNITY AND EQUITY

**Why It Matters:** All students have a right to be educated in a positive, safe, and supportive learning environment.

### **What Must Be Done:**

- Fund and require school districts to use positive approaches to school discipline.
- End school suspensions for “willful defiance” and “disruption” for all students grades K-12.
- Spend more on supportive school staff such as counselors and mental health professionals and less on school-based police, probation and security officers.
- Protect students and families regardless of immigration status with Safe Haven policies at schools to reduce fear of deportation or criminalization.
- Ensure poor students, students with special needs, English learners, foster youth, justice-involved youth, and students of color have additional resources to support their learning at school by fully implementing the Local Control Funding Formula.
- Help current and former justice-involved youth graduate from high school and attend college.

## PROVIDE EVERY CHILD ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

**Why It Matters:** Health coverage helps children access preventive care, live healthier lives and perform better in school.

### **What Must Be Done:**

- Protect health coverage for children and families against federal efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and cut Medicaid that would result in millions of people losing coverage.
- Make sure that every children is enrolled in health coverage, particularly Medi-Cal – which is now available to all low-income children, regardless of immigration status.
- Fix the children’s mental health system to better connect children with the services they need.
- Ensure children can get dental care by increasing the number dentists that accept Medi-Cal.
- Address child trauma through programs that promote healing and foster resiliency in children.

## TRANSFORM JUSTICE SYSTEMS FOR YOUTH

**Why It Matters:** Relying on punishment for youth crime costs communities hundreds of millions and fails to improve public safety or youth outcomes.

### **What Must Be Done:**

- Prevent youth from having any contact with courts, probation and law enforcement whenever possible.
- Spend less on the court and law enforcement systems and more on education, jobs, mental and public health systems and other essential supports that strengthen youth, families and communities.
- Treat children in the juvenile justice system like children by focusing on trauma-informed practices and youth development.
- Keep youth in the juvenile system and stop trying them as adults.

## END CHILD POVERTY

**Why It Matters:** Nearly 1 in 4 California children live in poverty, which hurts child health and school success.

### **What Must Be Done:**

- Put more money in the pockets of working poor families by expanding the new state Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC).
- Increase child care for low-income families so parents can work and children can learn.
- Raise CalWORKs benefits to meet families’ basic needs and provide key supports like early home visiting.
- Fund more affordable housing for low-income families.
- Provide transportation to school for poor students.

View the full 2017 Policy Agenda at:

[www.cdfca.org/policy/agenda](http://www.cdfca.org/policy/agenda)