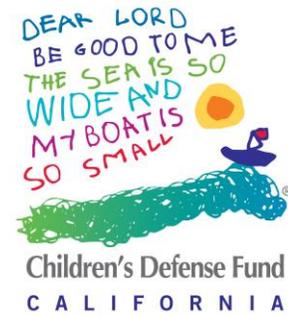


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State Legislators Join Children's Defense Fund–California (CDF-CA) In Calling for Action to Level the Playing Field for California's Children

CDF-CA's 2016 Policy Agenda Provides Roadmap for Policymakers to Ensure All Children Have the Opportunity to Thrive

(Sacramento, CA) Joined by state legislative champions for children, Children's Defense Fund – California (CDF-CA) released a 2016 policy agenda that provides a roadmap of policy changes to end child poverty, ensure educational equity, provide access to health care, and transform justice systems for youth.

“Too many children in California – especially poor children, children of color, and children with special needs – face odds stacked against their success,” CDF-CA Executive Director Alex Johnson said. “We must come together to fight for policies that lift children out of poverty, connect families to quality health care, ensure fairness and equity in our schools and build a juvenile justice system that focuses on prevention and rehabilitation.”

The policy agenda reflects CDF-CA's whole child approach – reflecting the understanding that children don't come in pieces – and includes priorities that are centered around four pillars.

End Child Poverty: More than 1 in 4 children (approximately 2.2 million) in this state live in poverty. Research shows that poverty has a devastating impact on child health and well-being and undermines academic and future economic success. The policy agenda outlines a comprehensive strategy to end child poverty by boosting family income and wages and strengthening the safety net to meet children's basic needs.

“So long as there are children in California who live in want, who grow up with too little hope and whose families face too many obstacles, the task before us remains clear and demanding,” said Senator Holly Mitchell, D – Los Angeles. “I have proposed a strategy for a 25% reduction in childhood poverty over the next 5 years through targeted investments – starting with ending the Maximum Family Grant Rule, which endangers the health and wellbeing of babies born into poverty by denying families the minimum CalWORKs benefit needed for infant care.”

“The fact that about half of children in California live in or near poverty is unacceptable. Especially when taking into account that the brunt of it falls disproportionately on children of color,” said Assemblywoman Nora Campos, D – San Jose. “The bills I have proposed this year will help disadvantaged children by helping provide them free transportation to school and ensuring that they can access the safe environments of our state's afterschool programs.”

Ensure Educational Equity: The policy agenda calls on policymakers to enact robust school discipline, school funding, and accountability policies that result in justice and equity for all students, particularly poor students, students of color, and students with special needs who need additional investments, and interventions to succeed in school.

Provide Every Child Access to Health Care: Unmet health and mental health needs can result in children falling behind developmentally and having trouble catching up physically, socially and academically. The policy agenda recommends providing health coverage to all California children and families and ensuring access to quality preventive, specialty, and dental health care for children. Particular effort is needed to prevent and address the effects of childhood trauma and chronic adversity by increase trauma-informed mental health services for children and youth.

“AB 1644 will help combat one of the greatest public health crises of our time: adverse childhood experiences and trauma,” said Assemblymember Rob Bonta, D – Oakland. “As Chair of the Assembly Health Committee and the Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color in California, I have authored legislation and highlighted innovative programs to help children exposed to abuse, neglect, and other traumatic experiences, including gun violence. As a part of this ongoing effort, I’m proud to author AB 1644 with the support of Attorney General Kamala Harris and a stellar group of advocates, including the Children’s Defense Fund, to provide children suffering from trauma with the healing services they need to survive and thrive.”

Transform Justice Systems for Youth: Juvenile justice systems have failed youth, families and communities by focusing on punishment rather than rehabilitation. The policy agenda recommends California shift resources away from incarceration, invest in the development and healing of youth, and end the practice of solitary confinement for youth.

“Today’s children grow up to become tomorrow’s leaders, and that’s why I feel strongly that we must nurture California’s youth and make sure they have the support and resources they need to succeed,” said Sen. Bob Hertzberg, D-Van Nuys. “SB 882 is common sense legislation that rolls back an overly harsh punishment for youths who are cited for evading public transit fares and allows them to continue taking public transportation to get to school and jobs – instead of pulling the rug out from under them.”

The agenda will be distributed statewide and available online at <http://www.cdfca.org/policy/agenda>.

“We are committed to ensure all children have the opportunity to live healthy and successful lives,” Johnson said. “In order to make that a reality, we must continue to build a movement that protects and invests in our children, especially poor children and children of color. This policy agenda is a pathway toward that goal.”

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The Children’s Defense Fund-California (CDF-CA) is a state office of the Children’s Defense Fund, a national child advocacy organization founded by Marian Wright Edelman that has worked relentlessly for over 40 years to ensure a level playing field for all children. With offices in Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento 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.

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