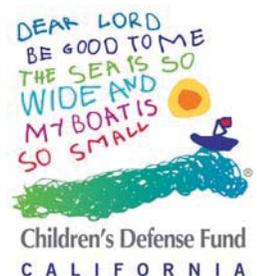




LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR CALIFORNIA'S CHILDREN

2018 POLICY AGENDA



WHO WE ARE ...

The Children's Defense Fund-California (CDF-CA) is the 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. CDF-CA was established in 1998 to meet the needs of underserved children in 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 health coverage and care and a high quality education, and transform the juvenile justice system to focus on youth development and healing.

INTRODUCTION



California is strongest when all of our children can unleash their talents and reach their full potential. Unfortunately, California’s policies create, sustain, and exacerbate barriers to success for many of our children – barriers that perpetuate historical discrimination and inequality.

The Children’s Defense Fund—California (CDF-CA) works to ensure that a child’s ability to lead a healthy and successful life is not determined by race, ethnicity, family income, zip code, gender, sexuality, home language, ability, health needs, immigration status, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice system.

We believe every child deserves:

- A life free from poverty with enough family income to meet basic needs;
- Comprehensive health coverage and care to maximize health and development;
- A high quality public education with pathways to college and career; and
- Justice systems built on youth development and reintegration of young people.

California – the sixth largest economy in the world – has the resources to provide every child with the foundation they need to thrive but policymakers have not made California’s children a priority. By giving our children a healthy and fair start today, we set them up for better outcomes tomorrow.

We are vigilant in protecting and championing policies and programs that safeguard children’s rights and well-being. Because we recognize that children do not come in pieces, we advocate for systems and policies that uplift the *whole* child and their families and communities.



END CHILD POVERTY

Eliminate deep child poverty by increasing CalWORKs basic needs benefits

Growing up in deep poverty (equivalent to less than \$850 per month for a family of three) undermines a child's health, education and future.

- Raise CalWORKs grant levels above 50 percent of the federal poverty line for all families
- Provide home visiting services to high-needs families who wish to participate

Strengthen the California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC)

The EITC is a proven tool to reduce child poverty and provide an income boost to working families who are struggling to make ends meet.

- Increase the size of the credit for working poor families
- Ensure that the CalEITC reaches working Californians who are currently excluded, such as young adults, immigrant families, and seniors
- Fund outreach and free tax preparation assistance to maximize CalEITC participation

Ensure children's basic and developmental needs are met

Children living in poverty lack the basic necessities and opportunities that would increase their chance of reaching successful, productive adulthood.

- Strengthen food and nutrition programs to end child hunger
- Fund transportation for poor children to get to school, extracurricular activities and jobs
- Invest in affordable housing for extremely low-income families
- Expand the number of quality child care slots for low-income children



FOSTER EDUCATIONAL EQUITY, DIGNITY, & ACHIEVEMENT FOR HIGH NEED STUDENTS

Fulfill the promises of the Local Control Funding Formula & California Data Dashboard

California must adequately fund all public schools. State and local education agencies must continue working to equitably fund public schools serving high need students, and to meaningfully engage community in the process.

- Make school- and district-level per-pupil funding information and performance data public and accessible
- Maintain school climate and chronic absenteeism indicators as measures of progress and success on the Dashboard
- Create a statewide evaluation system for all alternative education settings
- Require all education agencies to demonstrate how increased funding for high need students is improving services and outcomes

Increase quality education opportunities & post-secondary pathways for justice-involved youth

Youth who are or were justice-involved have equal rights to an engaging, comprehensive education. Post-secondary education and vocational pathways advance the educational, career, and economic success, and mental and physical wellness of justice-involved youth.

- Implement effective practices related to student assessments, credit accumulation, transition planning, and re-enrollment into community schools
- Enable students to access rigorous coursework and post-secondary opportunities—with support for financial aid, college and career transitions, and social-emotional needs

Eliminate harsh school climate practices that push students out of school

Suspensions for “willful defiance” and “disruption” – a subjective, catch-all category for a range of minor misbehaviors – account for 20 percent of all suspensions in California and are most frequently imposed on students of color and students with special needs.

- Ban school suspensions and expulsions for willful defiance/disruption for all students in grades K-12
- Limit classroom removals for willful defiance/disruption to maximize students’ instructional time
- Equip schools with positive youth development and trauma-informed approaches to school discipline



PROVIDE EVERY CHILD ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH COVERAGE & CARE

Preserve decades of progress in children's health coverage

California's progress in achieving coverage for 97% of children is under threat from federal efforts to dismantle existing health coverage and protections.

- Protect Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and the Affordable Care Act against cuts or harmful changes
- Ensure that any policy proposals or changes do no harm to children's health coverage or services

Secure access to affordable, comprehensive health coverage and quality care

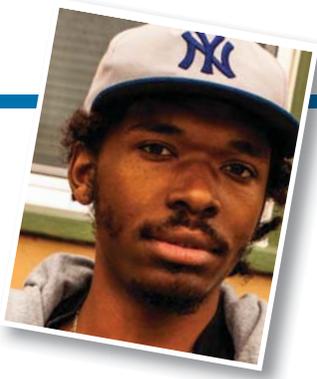
All children need access to regular screenings and the full range of developmental, pediatric-appropriate health services.

- Improve continuity of health coverage for children by making it easier to get and keep coverage
- Ensure coverage translates into timely access to appropriate pediatric and specialty providers for all children regardless of race, zip code, income or immigration status

Improve access to mental health for all children

More than 500,000 California children with identified mental health needs go without care each year, despite the fact that every child in California is entitled to services through Medi-Cal, private insurance, or the public schools.

- Increase access to trauma-informed mental health services, particularly in schools and communities with concentrated need
- Support communities to offer a full-range of services in schools to address students' health and mental health needs



TRANSFORM JUSTICE SYSTEMS FOR YOUTH

Reduce criminalization of poor children and children of color

Over-reliance on punitive responses to youth behavior has harmed communities and the economy while failing to improve public safety or youth outcomes.

- Prevent and reduce inequitable, ineffective contacts with youth by law enforcement
- Divert youth out of the justice system and into community-based alternatives wherever possible – including establishing a minimum age for prosecution and limiting when youth can be locked up
- Change narratives about youth to focus on their strengths and capacities instead of perceived risks and deficits

Divert resources into communities with a focus on youth development

Youth behavior and crimes are best addressed by providing youth with quality supports and services in their own communities.

- Direct funding for delinquency prevention away from law enforcement towards youth and community development, including education, jobs, health services, and other supports that strengthen youth, families and communities
- Downsize and close outdated and under-populated facilities and invest the savings into the development and healing of youth in their homes and communities

Ensure fair and developmentally appropriate treatment of justice-involved youth

The rights of youth who remain system-involved should be protected.

- Transform standards and practices of secure facilities to be trauma-informed, child-centered, and treatment-oriented
- Promote secondary and post-secondary education access and stability for justice-involved students

Increase effective state and local governance over juvenile justice issues

The success of systems serving youth depends on governance that is transparent, inclusive, and research-informed.

- Increase representation of system-impacted youth and community members on state and local juvenile justice governing bodies
- Promote data collection and evaluation to drive youth policy and practice



MAKE FUNDING DECISIONS THAT PRIORITIZE PREVENTION & CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

State and local budgets are moral statements of what we value as a community. Funding decisions should reflect a commitment to ensuring that all children have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. Yet state and local policymakers underinvest in the preventive services and community supports needed for children and families to thrive. As a result, we spend more later on costly and ineffective responses through our criminal justice systems and emergency rooms.

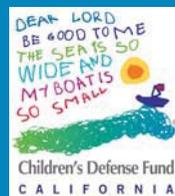
State and local resources should be devoted to meet our children's health, developmental, and educational needs. All children deserve nutritious food, stable housing, high quality education, health and mental health care, and safe, clean spaces to develop through sports, arts, music, employment and other pro-social activities.

Funding decisions should focus on preventing sickness, violence, and injury before they occur rather than treating poor outcomes later. Resources must be shifted away from law enforcement and incarceration into investments in diverse programming, strong supports, and positive youth development in our communities.

Resources and supports should advance equity by targeting children and families who live in communities where barriers continue to generate poverty, exacerbate trauma, under-resource schools, and criminalize youth behavior.

California's Golden Opportunity to Level the Playing Field for Children

Guided by the experiences, voices, and leadership of the children, youth, and families most impacted by racial and economic inequality, we can – and must – eliminate the barriers to success for California's children and together build a foundation for all children to fulfill their potential.



Los Angeles • Oakland • Long Beach

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