



## Leveling the Playing Field for California's Children

### 2019 Policy Agenda

#### Transform Justice Systems for Youth

*Over-reliance on punitive responses to youth behavior through the juvenile and criminal justice systems has harmed communities and cost too much, while failing to improve public safety or youth well-being. Youth behavior and crimes are best addressed by providing youth with holistic youth development supports and services in their own communities.*

#### **Ensure the implementation of the new minimum age of 12 of juvenile court prosecution.**

Last year, SB 439 was passed to end prosecution of children under 12 in delinquency court. Effective implementation is critical to avoid alternative forms of criminalization like suspensions and expulsion in schools, and should recognize that the vast majority of youth should not have any law enforcement contact.

**Reduce the number of youth in and size of the probation system.** Los Angeles County has the largest probation system in the world with a juvenile budget that has increased over time, even as the numbers of youth have plummeted in recent years. Keeping youth out of the probation system and shrinking its size, including closing outdated, half empty juvenile halls and camps, are central priorities in the effort to build youth, families and communities.

**Divert youth out of the justice system pre-arrest and at the earliest points possible.** Los Angeles County should meaningfully implement its plan to divert youth pre-arrest, while continuing to facilitate additional pathways out of the justice system after arrest.

**Ensure a meaningful, comprehensive overhaul of the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).** Ensure that the state youth prison system is transformed meaningfully away from a corrections framework towards a holistic youth development approach that is better for youth and public safety. Reform of DJJ, which incarcerates some 600-700 youth, must be connected to a broader agenda to reform county probation systems that supervise and incarcerate over 40,000 youth, the vast majority of whom are youth of color.

**Increase resources for and capacity-building of youth diversion and development opportunities.** Los Angeles County can further increase investments and capacity-building supports for community-based service providers to ensure the success of diversion efforts by the new county Youth Diversion and Development division of the Office of Diversion and Reentry. The county should redirect Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) funds away from law enforcement and towards youth and community development, including education, jobs, health services, and other supports that strengthen youth, families and communities. The state should also continue to create, improve and redirect funding from punitive responses to youth crime.

**Increase effective state and local governance over juvenile justice issues.** The success of systems serving youth depends on governance that is transparent, inclusive, accountable and research-informed. Data collection should be robust and transparent, and should drive youth policy and practice. Monitoring and advocating for greater diversity in leadership at the Board of State and Community Corrections remains a top priority in

ensuring that local juvenile justice systems are held accountable to serving youth and their families well.

**Create robust probation oversight.** Los Angeles County continues to engage diverse stakeholders in development of a new Probation Oversight Commission to ensure transparency, accountability and the effective implementation of comprehensive reforms to a probation department that has too often failed individuals under its care.

**Create robust juvenile justice oversight.** Los Angeles' Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council only recently strengthened its work and composition, including adding 10 community representatives and adopting bylaws to ensure its effective governance. Ensuring a process for regular, diverse input, cross-system collaboration, transparent and effective data collection, and evaluation and program improvement are critical moving forward.

### **Provide Every Child Access to Affordable Health Coverage and Care**

*Every child needs comprehensive, affordable, quality health coverage and care to survive and thrive. We must take action to protect, expand and improve health and mental health coverage for all California children to ensure they are able to grow and learn, and help California prosper.*

**Protect and improve current child health coverage and expand enrollment.** Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) must be protected against cuts or harmful changes to ensure that coverage is kept strong, even as improvements are sought. Today, 97% of children in California have health coverage for at least some portion of the year, although up to one in four children may experience gaps in coverage. Putting in place express lane enrollment between Medi-Cal and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), as AB 526 would do, could help enroll more than 100,000 eligible low-income uninsured women and children under age 6 in health coverage during a period of critical development.

**Improve affordability of coverage for children and families.** To be effective and universal, health coverage premiums and cost sharing must be affordable. Many of the solutions under discussion

would use state dollars to enhance premium subsidies for those who are eligible for assistance under the ACA, but would provide no assistance to the 820,000 Californians in the same income group (children between 267 percent and 400 percent of the federal poverty level and adults between 139 and 400 percent of the poverty level) who are currently ineligible for federal premium subsidies due to a glitch in the ACA. Affordability assistance to Californians with state funds should not unfairly exclude children and spouses who fall into this "family glitch."

**Take steps toward health for all.** CDF-CA has long supported expanding Medi-Cal to all income-eligible Californians regardless of immigration status. Currently, undocumented children are covered only through age 18. Without coverage, individuals forego the care they need, jeopardizing their health and ability to work and care for their families. California can take additional steps towards Health For All by using state funds to provide full-scope Medi-Cal to adults who are currently excluded due to their documentation status. Expanding Medi-Cal to income-eligible young adults to age 26, for instance, would be consistent with coverage for higher income young adults under the ACA.

**Ensure children share in future improvements to the health care system.** Children are not little adults. They need developmentally appropriate care from pediatric providers to ensure a focus on prevention that will help guide their future trajectory. In California, 56 percent of all children are covered by Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program in Medi-Cal, which guarantees children coverage for all medically necessary services with virtually no cost sharing. Any changes to the existing system or creation of a new one must recognize the unique health needs children have and the strong protections they currently enjoy. Use of the Health Care Principles for California Children can help guide health system reform and waiver discussions to ensure that children share in future gains and never lose ground.

**Integrate mental and physical health services in schools and community-settings.** California needs effective strategies to improve children's mental and physical health where they are: in schools. In the 1990s, The Healthy Start Initiative improved

immunization rates, math and reading scores, reduced drug use, and increased graduation rates. With a coordinator in schools or in community settings, families received the services they needed to be successful without overburdening teachers to meet students' physical, mental health, and social service needs. Modernizing and restoring Healthy Start to include trauma-informed care and updated funding strategies could restore these gains, with councils and coordinators integrating services at the local level, improving access and follow-up, improving health outcomes, and building a mental health system for children based on addressing adversity, building resilience, and ensuring that health coverage translates into health care.

### **Ensure Educational Achievement, Dignity and Equity**

*Public schools need full funding to help ensure high need students access the appropriate academic and social emotional support and staffing they need to be college and career ready at their high school graduation.*

**Analyze the state budget and advocate for increased funds for K-12 education.** California is the fifth largest economy yet is behind most other states when it comes to per pupil funding. CDF-CA will build on the modest increases to K-12 education that have been proposed to advocate in the long-term for the billions more that are needed to support sustainable investments in school districts. Full funding helps ensure schools are fully staffed, class sizes are low, and continuous improvement in the quality and access of services and instruction.

**Improve district accountability, transparency, and equity.** The Local Control Funding Formula has not lived up to its promise of increased and improved services for high need students, and budget information still lacks transparency. Many local communities struggle to hold school districts accountable for spending. It is critical to make budget information accessible to students, parents, and community based organizations to facilitate the process of partnering with and consulting school districts on how to best serve high need students. This includes work to build the capacity of school districts and community stakeholders to foster dialogue about the needs of students and the interventions that ensure student success for those

subgroups who have historically been affected by the achievement gap.

### **Ensuring equity for justice-involved students.**

It is important to assess whether alternative schools' have the capacity to adequately prepare students, many of whom have been pushed out of school and sometimes into the justice system, for college and career. Many times these schools have the highest concentration of high need students, but a lower per pupil funding. Closely monitoring the implementation of the Alternative Schools Accountability Model to track the progress of and support for continuation and other schools commonly attended by students who have been pushed out of school and/or are involved with the juvenile justice system is important and necessary.

**Divest in law enforcement at school sites, and invest in support staff.** The cost of giving young people everything they need to learn and succeed in school is far less than the costs associated with policing, arresting, and incarcerating students. Many schools that serve high need students who are more likely to be criminalized for school discipline lack adequate staffing of support positions—especially counselors, psychologists, and nurses—who often build a supportive, positive, and healthy school culture.

**Reduce youth criminalization at schools.** The bill to eliminate suspensions for disruption/defiance in middle and high school will support thousands more students by permitting them to stay in class as the school uses positive alternatives to address a low level misbehavior. The bill to limit the use of “voluntary probation” programs will prevent unnecessary oversight of young people by law enforcement in schools and in the community.

**Invest in targeted supports and linkages for justice involved youth.** Implement effective practices and accountability mechanisms that promote education stability: accurate credit accrual, efficient transfer of records, transition planning and services, student and family-centered decision-making, and the prioritization for students to remain enrolled in their schools of origin and in community schools.

**Improve college readiness for justice involved youth.** Enable students to access rigorous coursework and post-secondary opportunities with support for financial aid, and college and career transitions. Center students' holistic development and pathways towards post-secondary opportunities with access to extracurricular activities, college and career readiness, and social-emotional wellness.

### **End Child Poverty**

*Children remain the poorest age group in California, with 1.6 million living in poverty, putting them at risk of hunger, homelessness, and toxic stress. A combination of policy strategies and investments at the state and local level will help end child poverty and its lifelong effects.*

#### **Extend California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC) to all low-income working families.**

The CalEITC is a proven tool for reducing child poverty and provides much-needed assistance to working families and individuals who are struggling to make ends meet. Currently the CalEITC is granted only if every claimed person in the household has a Social Security Number (SSN), yet many California households are not eligible for the credit because they use a federally assigned Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to pay taxes and file their tax returns. Nearly three in four workers with ITINs who would otherwise be eligible for the credit have children in their households.

**Expand the number of child care slots for low-income children.** Investments in high-quality child care help enable parents to work and increases young children's kindergarten readiness. Disparities in learning and development start at birth, fueled by the opportunity gaps and toxic stress caused by poverty, inequality and adverse experiences. Research shows high-quality child care mitigates these disparities.

**Ensure CalWORKs benefits meets families' basic needs.** CalWORKs provides cash assistance to families with children who need help with housing, food and other necessary expenses. The monthly assistance helps hundreds of thousands of low-income children but grant amounts are not enough to meet basic needs. CalWORKs grant 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.** The high cost of housing in California is a significant contributor to the state's high poverty rate. Housing costs leave families with little left over for other essential needs. Affordable housing lowers the risk of families becoming homeless and can improve health by freeing up money so that it can be spent on food, health care or utilities.

**Implement End Child Poverty California's recommended foundational investments** that include guaranteeing access to early care and education for children 0-8 who are living in poverty; expand voluntary home visiting programs to support pregnant women and families with young children; add 20 state-funded Promise Neighborhoods offering coordinated, community-driven support services; and fully-fund transitional housing programs and supports for foster care youth up to the age of 21. AB 167 will help close the early learning opportunity gap by strengthening and expanding child care programs for vulnerable infants and toddlers based on the proven, high-quality Early Head Start model.