



Michael Brennan for Congress

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Every Child Deserves a Home

The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough to those who have too little.” - Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Second Inaugural Address

While most children in America live in safe, loving, supportive homes, many others live in settings that call their safety and well-being into question. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, for example, estimates that a child is abused or neglected in the United States every thirty-six seconds. The primary responsibility for identifying and protecting those children falls to the states, but the Federal government must establish standards of performance for state and local child welfare programs. Oversight is necessary to ensure that state courts act decisively in child protective cases and serve best interests of children and families. The courts must also provide resources to help reduce the number of families and children at risk of abuse and neglect.

Different families rely on different kinds of support. Our task is to see that Federal law and policy acknowledges this crucial reality. I fully support the consortium of eight diverse organizations that have joined forces to articulate and demand a new and more effective federal-state partnership. The National Child Abuse Coalition, the American Public Human Services Association, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Catholic Charities, the Children’s Defense Fund, Voices for America’s Children, the Child Welfare League of America and the Center for Law and Social Policy have all united to speak with one voice and demand specific changes in federal law and policy that would amend the Federal IV-E Statute toward that end.

These changes would:

- Promote investments in a broad continuum of services for children and families by enabling states that offer services that safely reduce foster care caseloads to retain Title IV-E funds and re-invest them in a broader range of services that prevent child abuse and neglect;
- Assure federal and state financial support for all children placed in foster care by eliminating the income eligibility criteria currently applicable, so long as state funds designated for foster care are re-invested in prevention and treatment services for at risk families;
- Assure that Title IV-E funds can be used to support children who are placed permanently with relatives, are adopted from foster care, or who require assistance in transitioning from foster care to adulthood;
- Assure that children placed permanently with legal guardians (often blood relatives) receive Federal as well as state support by amending IV-E to allow funds to be used for subsidized guardianships when either returning children home or adoption are not viable options;
- Assure that children living with relatives while in foster care have access to Title IV-E support so long as these relatives meet state licensing standards that assure child safety;
- Assure that Native American children have access to Title IV-E funding.

The consortium also recommends that Title IV-E funds be made available for training on every issue relevant to child safety, permanency and well-being. Moreover, the funds should be directed to court personnel and workers linked to those public and private agencies and organizations which have meaningful contact with children at risk and their families—including those engaged in mental health services, substance abuse and domestic violence prevention. Title IV-E matching funds would also be increased to improve the quality of safety assessments and the development of permanency plans while supporting the recruitment of licensing and supervision of foster and pre-adoptive families.

These recommendations are thoughtful, comprehensive and responsive; I fully intend to support them as your representative in Congress. I also think it is crucial that whenever possible, Federal and state policy promote the ongoing interactions between children from the same families when they are separated in out-of-home care.

This year marks a full decade since Congress last acted to establish major nonpartisan child welfare reform. The above recommendations reflect the lessons we have learned and strategies for the future; the time has come to act on them.

Child Development

An effective child and family policy addresses the physical, social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual health of our children and our families. In an effort to promote national progress, my policy advocates for the best interests of our children and families through the provision of health care, child care, educational opportunities and family support services.

Currently, poverty, hunger, inadequate health care, the limited availability of quality childcare, limited educational opportunities and unemployment threaten the welfare of our children and families and, by extension, the welfare of our society. Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health notes that after a decade of decline, the proportion of young children living in low-income families began to rise again in 2000. According to the School's research, "between 2000 and 2005, the number of children of all ages who were poor increased by 11%. During the same period, the number of children under age 6 who were poor increased by 16%."

The care of our children from pre-natal through high school is largely haphazard and often substandard. According to the Children's Defense Fund, only 12% of the eligible children can access subsidized care because the system is simultaneously underfunded and overloaded with requests. Indeed, too often families with limited financial support must stretch beyond their means in order to find quality childcare. This is simply unacceptable. National priorities – such as the war in Iraq – leave too many schools with too few resources to invest in the wide range of services that our children need to succeed. Left unattended, this imbalance in education will provoke an increased financial burden on our taxpayers as they struggle to support those who lack skills. On the other hand, proper funding of and investment in public education will produce the next generation of American innovators and leaders. Since remediation costs many times the price of innovation, and inertia many times the cost of initiative, there is no time to lose.

The 2006 report *The Economic Costs of Poverty* (Holzer, Schanzenback, Duncan, Ludwig) estimates that childhood poverty each year reduces productivity and economic output by 1.3 percent of GDP while raising the costs of crime by 1.3 percent of GDP. The report further suggests childhood poverty raises health expenditures and reduces the value of health by 1.2 percent of the GDP. These estimates omit the costs associated with poor adults who, as children, were above the poverty line as well as environmental costs and the suffering of the poor themselves. "In the richest nation in the world," the Center for American Progress (CAP) states, "37 million Americans live below the official poverty line and millions more struggle to get by every month." One out of every five children is poor; this statistic is at the core of what CAP estimates to be a \$500 billion annual cost to our economy in lost adult productivity and wages, increased crime, and higher health expenditures. Moreover, the Department of Education estimates that only 75 percent of our high school students are graduating, and that in comparison with other developed nations, the United States is near the bottom in high school graduation rates and student performance in math and science. We can and must do better.

The first step in policy development is to recognize that current conditions are unacceptable and require immediate change. The quality care and education of our children is not a privilege but a right. In turn, the viability of our families is not luxury but a fundamental condition for the integrity of our social structures and democratic institutions.

My policy regarding children and families will focus on the following principles:

- Quality childcare and [education](#) must be universally available and affordable in support of family efforts to raise children.
- Housing must be made affordable and accessible for all our families.
- High school graduations rates must rise to ensure sustained economic and social progress.
- The United States must commit to [insured health care for all its citizens](#), especially its most vulnerable.

Cooperative federal, state, and municipal initiatives must build on what is working and correct what is not in these areas. Previous neglect of these societal foundations demands aggressive repairs to ensure the integrity of the whole.

Developing and implementing the necessary innovations and initiatives will involve all segments of our government and society. Our goal can only be achieved through an informed, involved citizenry cooperating with the local, state and federal government. Our initiatives are necessarily far reaching, at once promoting the dignity and welfare of all our citizens, the vitality of our economy, and structural accountability in our communities for the welfare of our children and families. The days of tearing down what is good about and useful to the American people are over. The day for building upon what is best about and of most use to the American people is at hand. National progress requires no less.