

Action for Children North Carolina 2011 Legislative Agenda for Children End of Session Summary

Health

Improve Health Insurance Coverage for Children: The final budget ensures that Health Choice will have no cap (artificial cut-off in enrollment) in this biennium and mirrors the Governor's proposal to expand Community Care of NC (CCNC) to cover children enrolled in Health Choice, accomplishing our goals for this session.



Agenda Item ~ Consolidate Public Health Insurance Programs for Children: Our goals for health insurance this year were to: (1) insure more children under Health Choice, and (2) improve health outcomes for children by expanding CCNC to children enrolled in Health Choice (currently, only children enrolled in Medicaid have access to CCNC). We proposed to do that by consolidating Health Choice with Medicaid. The state currently runs and administers two separate health insurance programs for low-income children: Medicaid and Health Choice, North Carolina's Children's Health Insurance Program (or CHIP). Consolidating Health Choice with Medicaid would ensure that more of the 264,000 currently uninsured children receive insurance coverage, and improve children's health outcomes, while saving the millions currently spent on administrative costs to operate two separate programs. There are currently more than 900,000 children enrolled in Medicaid, and just over 130,000 children in Health Choice.

Juvenile Justice

Raise the Age: Action for Children secured strong bi-partisan sponsorship of bills to raise the age in both the House (HB 632) and the Senate (SB 506), including a very passionate and strong champion in Representative Marilyn Avila (R-Wake). Though HB 632 was not heard in committee this session, a compromise has been reached to keep the bill viable for next session, and we have a commitment that it will be heard in committee. During the interim, we will work to build even more legislative and stakeholder support.



Expunction: A bill to expunge the first, nonviolent offense from a 16- or 17-year-old's record passed! Action for Children has been working on this issue since at least 2004.

Agenda Item ~ Raise the Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction: Advocate for the implementation of the Youth Accountability Task Force's recommendations for the legal, programmatic and funding aspects of raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction from 16 to 18. Recommendations should present a comprehensive plan to phase-in 16- and 17-year-olds who have committed minor crimes into the juvenile justice system with adequate resources, so that youth can access a developmentally appropriate, research-based continuum of services. North Carolina is one of only two states in the nation that continue to automatically prosecute all 16- and 17-year-olds accused of a crime in the adult criminal justice system, regardless of the severity of the alleged crimes. Of the 31,000 arrests of 16- and 17-year-olds in 2007-08, 94 percent were for low-level offenses.

Juvenile Justice Funding: The Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) received cuts in the final budget, but the Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils (JCPCs) did not. The final budget cut DJJDP about the same percentage as Health and Human Services (10%) – considerably more than K-12 Education (5%), but less than some other child-focused departments (i.e., Child Development – 23%). Cuts were made mainly to Youth Development Centers, detention beds, and court counselors, and the Department was consolidated into a new Department of Public Safety, along with the Department of Corrections and the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety.



Agenda Item ~ Adequately Fund the DJJDP: Additional funding to DJJDP is necessary to provide a continuum of services to at-risk and court-involved youth. North Carolina's Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils (JCPCs) distribute state funds to community-based organizations who work to prevent juvenile delinquency. Community-based organizations are doing this work with less money than the legislature allocated in 2002. Additional funding is needed to keep up with inflation, meet the service needs identified by JCPCs and allow the JCPCs to better monitor and support local programs.

Public Education

Corporal Punishment: Senate bill 498 passed! The bill allows parents to opt out of corporal punishment for their children in public schools.



Agenda Item ~ Ban Corporal Punishment in the Public Schools: North Carolina law allows local school boards to permit corporal punishment. After years of local advocacy, 95 of the 115 local districts no longer use the practice. Numerous studies show that corporal punishment does not improve educational outcomes but does indeed negatively affect the social, psychological and educational development of children. It is time for North Carolina to join the 30 states that have banned corporal punishment in the public schools. A ban on hitting students with disabilities was passed by the General Assembly in 2010. Action for Children is calling for a full ban on hitting students in school in 2011.

Economic Security

Cuts to Children's Programs: Because of the decision to take a cuts-only approach, rather than extending the temporary sales tax or taking other revenue-raising measures, the final budget included drastic cuts in most areas of government, and children's programs were not spared. Though the final budget did reduce the public education cut from the Senate-proposed 8% to 5%, the cuts are still detrimental to our public school infrastructure.



Agenda Item ~ Prevent Further Cuts to Child-Serving Agencies/Programs: The slow recovery from the Great Recession continues to stress children and families. Demand has increased for government programs and services that protect the health, safety, education and financial security of our children. Child-serving agencies and programs have already been cut. Action for Children opposes further cuts to the programs that serve the basic needs of our children.