



*Working to make North Carolina
the best place to be and raise a child*

Action for Children North Carolina 2011 Legislative Agenda for Children

North Carolinians have long recognized the importance of protecting the public assets that drive our state's prosperity. The investments lawmakers and citizens have made in the health, safety, education and financial security of our children are among the most important of those assets. Now, a recession is stressing North Carolina's families and children, and policymakers need to focus on what is most important when making funding decisions. Further large cuts to children's services would undermine the health and safety of our children, jeopardizing our past investments and future prosperity. The public policy recommendations made below, combined with a balanced approach to the budget crisis, are essential to ensure positive outcomes for North Carolina's children and families.

Health

- 1) **Consolidate Public Health Insurance Programs for Children:** The state currently runs and administers two separate health insurance programs for low-income children: Medicaid and Health Choice, North Carolina's State Children's Health Insurance Program (or SCHIP). Consolidating Health Choice with Medicaid would (1) ensure that more of the 264,000 currently uninsured children receive insurance coverage, and (2) 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

- 2) **Raise the Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction:** Support and advocate implementation of the Youth Accountability Task Force's recommendations for the legal, funding and programmatic aspects of raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction from 16 to 18. The recommendations should present a comprehensive plan to phase 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 nonviolent offenses.
- 3) **Adequately Fund the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention:** 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.



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Public Education

- 4) **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

- 5) **Prevent Further Cuts to Child-Serving Agencies and 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.