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

Action for Children North Carolina
2012 Legislative Agenda for Children

North Carolinians have long recognized that children are one of our state's most valuable resources and their success is our success. Investing in the health, safety, education and financial security of our children are among the most important duties of our society. As the recession continues to stress North Carolinians, it is critical that policymakers focus on preserving services for children and families. Further large cuts to child and family 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 continued balanced approach to the budget crisis, are essential to ensure positive outcomes for North Carolina's children and families.

HEALTH

Preserve 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, (2) improve children's health outcomes, while saving the millions currently spent on administrative costs to operate two separate programs and (3) support implementation of the Affordable Health Care Act. There are currently more than 900,000 children enrolled in Medicaid, and just over 150,000 children in Health Choice. With the looming $149 million cuts to Medicaid, it is imperative that public health coverage for children is not diminished, while not jeopardizing coverage for other vulnerable populations.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Raise the Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction--for youth who commit low-level offenses (H632/S506) Support and advocate implementation of the Youth Accountability Planning 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 incrementally 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. Ensuring that adequate funds are available to meet the needs of 16- and 17- year-olds is critical to fully implement this policy change and the success of all youth served in the juvenile justice system. 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.

Adequately Fund the Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) As a result of historical underfunding and significant budget cuts, additional funding to the DJJDP is necessary to meet the service needs of all court-involved youth, while allowing the DJJDP to better monitor and support a service delivery continuum. Since court involved youth enter the juvenile justice system with unmet educational, health and mental health needs, it is imperative that the DJJDP have adequate staffing and resources to effectively address the complex needs of this population.

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EDUCATION

Preserve Funding for all Early Childhood Programs Fully fund N.C. Pre-K without cutting other early childhood programs. N.C. is facing a significant shortfall in serving the thousands of four- year- olds eligible for pre-kindergarten. The debate between the courts and the executive branch may pit N.C.'s early childhood programs against one another. The legislature appropriated $128 million last year to provide education to 24,750 four-year-olds in the program formally known as More at Four. There could be more than 55,000 additional at-risk preschoolers who are eligible but currently not receiving services. Research has shown that children enrolled in early childhood programs are better prepared for early learning than their peers without formal education. Likewise, it has been shown that children enrolled in early childhood programs learn quicker than children not enrolled in these programs.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Preserve the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for low-income, working families

In 2009, income families were able to receive a refundable, state earned income tax credit (EITC) for the first time, which is estimated to potentially put $14 million back in the pockets of low-wage working households. The N.C. EITC, currently 5 percent of the federal credit, pumps up local economies by annually helping over half a million working North Carolinians make ends meet in every part of the state. The EITC has proven to be one of the most effective tools at moving working families out of poverty.

For More Legislative Information: www.ncchild.org Brandy Bynum: brandy@ncchild.org, 919-834-6623 x234