

# Legislative Agenda for Children

2013-2014 Legislative Session



Brandy Bynum | [brandy@ncchild.org](mailto:brandy@ncchild.org)

Investing in the health, safety, education and financial security of our children are among the most important duties of our society. It is most imperative that our state preserve services and invest in programs that provide positive outcomes for children during these hard fiscal times. 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

### **Assure that ALL Children Have Access to Health Insurance**

To meet this objective, it is imperative that (1) Medicaid and NC Health Choice – the state's two public health insurance programs for children in low-income families – be fully funded; that (2) the federal Affordable Care Act be implemented in North Carolina in such a way that children – especially those with special health care needs – receive the best possible insurance coverage; and that (3) North Carolina take advantage of the provision in the Affordable Care Act that would expand Medicaid eligibility for adults to 138% of the federal poverty level.

## JUVENILE JUSTICE

### **Raise the Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction from 16 to 18 --for youth who commit misdemeanor offenses**

Support and advocate implementation of the Legislative Research Commission's, Age of Juvenile Offenders Committee 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.

### **Adequately Fund the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)**

As a result of historical underfunding and significant budget cuts, additional funding to the DJJ is necessary to meet the service needs of all court-involved youth, while allowing the DJJ 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 DJJ have adequate staffing and resources to effectively address the complex needs of this population.



## EDUCATION

### **Preserve and Expand Funding for ALL Early Childhood Programs**

N.C. continues to face a significant shortfall in serving the thousands of four-year-olds eligible for pre-kindergarten. Despite the legislature appropriating millions to provide education to the thousands of eligible four-year-olds in the N.C. Pre-K program, there remain thousands of 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.

### **Ban Corporal Punishment in all public schools**— *(Administrative policy change)*

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

### **Preserve the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and other Tax Credits for working families**

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit and Child & Dependent Care Tax Credit put money into the pockets of more than a million families, helping them make ends meet and provide for their children. The EITC has proven to be one of the most effective tools at moving working families out of poverty. State tax credits that effectively support work and promote healthy childhood development further expand opportunities for working families, therefore benefiting the state. In 2012, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was included as part of a comprehensive tax bill, HB1025 which extends certain tax provisions until January 1, 2014. Legislators plan to undertake major tax modernization during the 2013 session.

