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Executive Director**Date: December 11, 2008****From: Generations United****To: Obama Transition Team****Re: Intergenerational Policy Priorities in 2009**

Generations United (GU) welcomes President-elect Barack Obama and the incoming 111th Congress. We are pleased to submit our recommendations for public policies that improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults. These recommendations focus in four priority areas: **maximizing tax dollars through intergenerational shared sites and resources; supporting intergenerational caregiving and family structures; engaging children, youth and older adults as resources to communities and families; providing access to quality health care coverage for all people in the U.S.**

We believe policies should meet the needs of all generations, and resources go further and are more wisely used when they connect generations rather than separate them. Reform efforts which frame issues in a way that pits young against old serve only to harm our larger community and the unity of our nation. Intergenerational public policies are especially important in the current economic environment when they can have a positive relationship to economic growth and value creation. Wise investments in people at every stage of their lives yield short- and long-term benefits that are critical for the recovery and growth of our economy.

GU recommends three overarching strategies to promote intergenerational approaches to public policy:

- Require that every public policy abide by a set of core principals which recognize that:
 - The lifetime wellbeing of every person in the U.S. is the highest priority; public policy must make investments in every generation, while providing critical support for the most vulnerable members of our society.
 - Investments are maximized when they connect generations to strengthen families and communities and build shared and enduring economic security.
- Convene a summit which brings together administering agencies and key stakeholder organizations who represent the interests of children, youth, and older adults to establish goals and objectives that further the priorities of a mutually shared social and economic agenda for individuals of all generations and their families.
- Establish a White House office or appoint an individual to the Office of Public Liaison to lead efforts to promote and protect intergenerational solidarity and develop, examine, and implement public policies using an intergenerational approach.

GU recommends action on the following key intergenerational policy priorities:**Maximize Tax Dollars through Intergenerational Shared Sites and Shared Resources**

Intergenerational shared sites are programs where people of different generations are engaged at the same site and interact through planned activities and informal interactions. By delivering services to children, youth, and older adults under one roof, communities can save precious resources while also investing in people of all ages. Research has shown shared sites have substantial benefits for children and older adults. Preschool children involved in intergenerational programs had higher personal/social developmental scores (by 11 months) than preschool children involved in non-intergenerational programs.



In schools where older adults were a regular fixture (volunteers working 15 hours per week) children had improved reading scores and fewer behavioral problems than their peers at other schools. Older adults who regularly volunteered with children burned 20% more calories per week, were more optimistic, experienced fewer falls, were less reliant on canes, and performed better than peers on a memory test.

- Give priority to communities that commit to build facilities that serve both young and old in a stimulus plan that includes funding for schools and child care centers.
- Facilitate the communication of different agencies with regulatory authority over services to young and old so that regulatory barriers to shared sites can be eased.
- Provide funding incentives for schools, head start centers, senior centers and others to create facilities that serve both young and old together.

Consider the case of the new Swampscott High School and Senior Center in Swampscott, Massachusetts. Instead of having to decide between building a new senior center, or high school the community decided to place the two together. The results according to Principal Larry Murphy, “have been a blessing.” The students volunteer at the senior center by performing at senior-functions and helping seniors learn to use their cell phones and ipods. When Swampscott, like many communities across the country was faced with budget cuts last year it was the older adults at the senior center that volunteered to keep the library open on its regular hours.

Support Intergenerational Caregiving and Family Structures

Caregiving of many kinds unites the generations. Whether a grandparent is raising a grandchild or an adult child is caring for an aging parent, the well-being of two, and sometimes three or more, generations is inextricably linked. According to the 2000 U.S. Census there are nearly 4 million multigenerational households in the U.S. Approximately 6 million children in the U.S. live in grandfamilies, or families headed by a grandparent or another relative. In about one third of these families neither parent of the child is present. Nearly a fourth of the children in foster care are cared for by relatives, and the vast majority of these children are being raised by grandparents. These trends cut across racial and class lines and are evident in both rural and urban areas. While research demonstrates significant value in bringing together younger and older family members, multigenerational families and grandfamilies face distinctive challenges.

- Ensure policies are in place that will help to guarantee that children and their relative caregivers will fully benefit from the services and protections in the newly enacted Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351).
- Work with states’ to address challenges related to access to education of children in relative care such as enrollment issues and the ability to participate in special education services and parental activities.
- Support access to affordable housing by ensuring that grandfamilies are not inappropriately excluded from appropriate government-assisted housing because of their family structure and by supporting housing demonstration projects specifically designed for grandfamilies.
- Expand and increase the availability of supportive services to grandfamilies such as those provided at state option through the National Family Caregiver Support Program: information and referral services, respite care, counseling and caregiver training, and other supplemental services.



- Maintain the U.S. Census Bureau's collection of data on children in relative care and grandparents raising grandchildren and expanding data collection to include information on aunts, uncles and other non-parent relatives raising children.

Engage Children, Youth and Older Adults as Resources

Policies should focus on ways to engage younger and older people as resources for each other, their communities and families rather than viewing these groups simply as populations to be served.

Research indicates that retiring baby boomers are seeking ways to stay engaged in their communities. Four out of five people over 50 say they will work in retirement, whether full time or part time, whether for money or enjoyment. Of those 45% say they are interested in working in a youth program. At the same time young people today are volunteering at record rates, more than any generation in history, but structured programs are needed to facilitate effective interventions.

- Ensure the inclusion of the broadest possible spectrum of participants in federally supported state and local service programs, particularly those populations that are not traditionally targeted for civic engagement including older adults, out-of-school youth, non-college-bound youth and youth from both needy and non-needy circumstances.
- Reauthorize the Corporation for National and Community Service with emphasis on intergenerational services and activities and the inclusion of intergenerational pilot or demonstration programs.
- Provide incentives where youth or older adults who volunteer for a particular amount of time receive a stipend or education award which could be used for themselves or, when applicable, could be transferable to their children, grandchildren or the child they are tutoring or mentoring. Successful models include involving older adults as mentors to young children in disadvantaged schools and students interning in senior care facilities.
- Explore projects which involve older adults as advocates for children such as retired social workers or health professionals advocating for immunizations for children in their community.
- Support innovative options, such as flexibility, part time options and training, for older adults transitioning from the workforce that facilitate increased involvement in intergenerational civic engagement programs.
- Widely adopt and implement quality service-learning practices to advance student achievement and civic engagement.

Reform the U.S. Health Care System to Address the Physical and Mental Health Needs of People Across the Lifespan

Access to affordable, high-quality health care coverage has critical implications for children, youth, individuals with disabilities, families, and older adults. Strategic investments in the health and well-being of all generations not only improve the lives of individuals, their families, and communities; such investments yield very high returns related to increased worker productivity, lower cost medical interventions at all stages of life, and a stable public health infrastructure better prepared to handle health emergencies.

- Expand health care coverage to every person.
- Reform the health care system in a way that addresses health care inefficiencies and recognizes that the quality of care can improve while decreasing per patient expenditures.
- Invest in prevention strategies across the lifespan. For example ensure regular prenatal care and pediatric care for children and chronic disease management for older adults, both of which



reduce future incidences of costly emergency interventions involving surgical procedures and expensive medications.

- Increase in the Federal Medical Assistance (FMAP) Percentage under Medicaid to help states support critical health care services, the demand for which has dramatically increased in this difficult economic environment. A targeted and timely FMAP increase stimulates local economies and ensures the continuity of vital services for the most vulnerable people and prevents state from being forced to make decisions between providing critical care for children or older people.
- Ensure access to vital mental health services that lay the groundwork for positive social and emotional development in children; meet the needs of the increasing number of children and youth who are homeless, at risk, and/or in the child welfare system; assist older adults with mental health issues arising out of failing physical health and other difficult life events; and caregivers living in stress, sadness, and isolation as they care for their disabled loved ones.

For more information about Generations United and intergenerational approaches to public policy, visit www.gu.org or contact Jaia Peterson Lent at 202-289-3979 or jlent@gu.org.