



TO: Secretary of HHS Designee Thomas Daschle

FROM: Marian Wright Edelman

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RE: Child Priorities for 2009

**Priority: End Child Poverty.**

- Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for low and moderate income families with 3 or more children
- Make the Child Tax Credit fully refundable and index it for inflation
- Raise the minimum wage and index it to inflation
- Restructure provisions of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to provide adequate support to the most vulnerable families and create new avenues to economic security for those with major obstacles to work, including setting work requirements to allow maximum flexibility to achieve the job skills and training necessary to find and maintain well-paying jobs, providing TANF recipients facing employment barriers, including those who are unable to work due to disability, illness or domestic violence, with greater support, allowing longer participation time in education and training programs, and increasing funding for child care so that all eligible families receive the child care for which they are eligible
- Reform the Unemployment Insurance system so that it treats vulnerable workers more fairly by counting all of a worker's earnings up to the time when he or she became unemployed, allowing parents who become unemployed due to family considerations such as a lack of child care, domestic violence, or a family illness to retain eligibility for benefits, and allowing unemployed workers who seek part-time employment to retain eligibility for benefits if they otherwise qualify
- Reform the Child Support Enforcement Program so that children receive the income support they are entitled to, while strengthening the ability of non-custodial parents to contribute to child support
- Enact legislation to expand the Family and Medical Leave Act to cover more workers, provide paid sick days for workers, and establish paid FMLA leave programs.
- Enact legislation to increase employment, education and training opportunities to help parents find and keep good paying jobs, with special attention to especially vulnerable families who need extra help to join the workforce
- Address housing needs of low-income families by authorizing 2 million new housing (section 8) vouchers, enhance opportunities for families to live in safer neighborhoods with better schools, services and access to jobs, and pass legislation to preserve and upgrade federally-subsidized affordable housing units
- Reauthorize the child nutrition programs to improve access for low-income children, improve the nutritional quality of school meals and food sold outside school meals, expand participation in the school breakfast program, broaden eligibility for the Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP) to allow more family child care and after-school programs to participate, and expand the Summer Food Service Program by eliminating administrative and other barriers to participation.



- Extend Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp program) eligibility to more struggling low income families, including legal migrant families, and revise the formula for SNAP benefits to more realistically measure what poor families need for an adequate diet.
- Provide the WIC program with sufficient funds to ensure services for all eligible children, infants and pregnant women and continue adequate funding for federal food commodity programs.
- Expand initiatives to increase savings, build assets, and increase financial education among low-income families

**Priority: Ensure Every Child and Pregnant Woman Access to Affordable, Comprehensive Health and Mental Health Coverage and Services.**

- Enact comprehensive, affordable child health and mental health legislation that includes critical core elements such as covering **all** children and pregnant women and provides enrollment simplification, benefits that will cover all medically necessary services, and adequate provider reimbursement to help ensure access to health care.

**Priority: Provide High Quality Early Childhood Development Programs for All.**

- Pass legislation that would ensure child care services for families below 200 percent of poverty and encourage states to improve the quality of child care services
- Make the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit fully refundable, increase the amount of expenses covered by the credit and the percentage of expenses allowed under the current law at increased income levels, and index both the amount of expenses and income levels for the credit to inflation.
- Increase funding for Early Head Start and Head Start and provide access to more children, including quadrupling the number of children receiving Early Head Start services, as well as measures to improve the quality of both Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- Enact legislation to assist states in establishing an early childhood development system from birth to age 5, including increasing access to high quality preschool programs for 3 and 4 year olds.

**Priority: Ensure Every Child Can Read at Grade Level by Fourth Grade and Guarantee Quality Education through High School Graduation**

- Enact educational reform measures to ensure the resources needed to help all children achieve and close the achievement gap between poor and minority children and their peers by establishing effective individualized measure for assessing children's abilities and strengths and following up with the extra help they need, ensuring smaller class sizes and higher quality teachers, and repairing crumbling school building.
- Take steps to encourage more young people, especially more youths of color, to see teaching and educational administration as urgent callings.
- Support quality after-school and summer enrichment programs to retain and bolster academic gains during out of school time, including doubling funding for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Centers, to serve one million more children.

**Priority: Protect Children from Abuse and Neglect and Connect Them to Caring Permanent Families**

- Expand quality parent-child home visiting programs
- Enact legislation to increase federal investments in prevention, early intervention, specialized treatment, and post-permanency services for children at risk of maltreatment



or who have been abused or neglected and their families by modifying federal funding streams

- Create incentives to promote permanent family or other adult connections for older youth who are in group care or institutional settings and need these connections as they leave foster care.
- Improve the quality of the child welfare workforce, including public and private agency and court staff, attorneys and other representing children to improve outcome for children through enhanced training, comprehensive workforce demonstrations, loan forgiveness and improvements in tracking and monitoring.
- Increase accountability for improved outcomes for children who are at risk of placement or already in foster care.

**Priority: Stop the Criminalization of Children at Increasingly Younger Ages and Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention**

- Reauthorize the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act to strengthen its core protections for youth in the juvenile and adult criminal justice
- Enact the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education (Youth PROMISE) Act
- Increase funding for a range of juvenile justice programs that have been cut or frozen over the past six years
- Enact legislation to provide new job training opportunities for disadvantaged and disconnected youth.