

FLORIDA CHILDREN'S SERVICES COUNCIL

2008 STATE POLICY PACKAGE

Advancing the Children's Agenda



COMMON PURPOSE

The Florida Children's Services Council (FCSC) is a collaborative of Children's Services Councils that supports primary prevention and early intervention programs that promote healthy and productive children and youth, and promote family well-being and self-sufficiency.

By partnering with key stakeholders, agencies and officials, Children's Services Councils (CSCs) advocate for children and provide innovative leadership and vision to community, state and national initiatives. Most of the CSCs throughout the State of Florida are a dedicated source of funding, funded by property tax, as approved by voter referendum. Sixty-four percent of Florida's children live in a county in which a CSC is working to improve the lives of children and families by making strategic investments in their future.

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PRIMARY LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

QUALITY CHILD CARE

ENSURE that working families are assured needed child care services by providing funding for infants and toddlers who are on the child care waiting list.

PROMOTE an adequate and equitable school readiness formula, using new dollars to achieve equity. Continue to provide matching funds to communities through the Child Care Executive Partnership Pool.

DEVELOP a voluntary statewide quality rating improvement system (QRIS) with opportunities for local input and quality incentives.

UNIVERSAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN

SEEK demographic data on the children enrolled (e.g., economic status, race and/or national origin, primary language, mother's education) and their educational settings (e.g., teacher credentials, form of accreditation if any, what curricula used) so that good policy can be made **to ensure that the program meets the constitutional mandate of "high quality."** **INVEST** more dollars per child – no fewer than \$3,000.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

KIDCARE

REMOVE barriers to enrollment and streamline the program.

ASSURE local entities do not overpay the local contribution for non-Title XXI eligible children by maintaining in proviso language the return of local funds that exceed expenditures during any fiscal year.

IMPLEMENT consistent statewide community outreach efforts that provide families face-to-face assistance during the enrollment and renewal process, as well as local grassroots marketing efforts.

ENSURE full funding for all children eligible for the KidCare Program.

MEDICAID REFORM

MONITOR Florida's Medicaid Reform efforts to ensure that any changes to Florida's Medicaid program **do not result in limiting access or the capping of needed benefits** for families, including pregnant women and children. In particular, monitor the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment benefit of the Medicaid program. **ENSURE** that implementation in additional counties occurs only after careful and independent evaluation of the existing pilot programs, and explicit legislative approval.

OTHER ISSUES

EARLY STEPS

SUPPORT the Early Steps intervention program to provide critical assessment and case management services for young children ages birth to 3 who may have a physical, speech or other developmental delay.

HEALTHY START

SUPPORT the development of an equitable funding formula by the Department of Health for distribution of Healthy Start funds.

HEALTHY FAMILIES

SUPPORT adequate funding for the Healthy Families Florida (HFF) program, a proven child abuse prevention program.

CHILD SAFETY

SUPPORT a mandatory requirement that **an approved child restraint device (booster seat plus seat belt) be used for children ages 4-8** while riding in motor vehicles to close the gap in existing child safety law.

211 NETWORKS

SUPPORT legislation that **funds and establishes a statewide 211 network**. The building of the capacity of this system is essential in order to provide streamlined access to health and human services, as well as proper disaster response and recovery efforts.

CHILD WELFARE INDEPENDENT LIVING/FOSTER CARE

ENSURE that all eligible youth receive Road to Independence program support through adequate funding, inclusive eligibility requirements and expanded needs assessment, so that foster children are able to enter society as healthy and capable adults. Fully provide the support options for the foster care system available under the Federal Independent Living Act, including optional extended foster care placement, comprehensive planning for independent living and Medicaid services for the entire post-18 foster care population, until age 21.

PROMOTE an adequate and equitable formula for distribution of Community Based Care (CBC) funding, using new dollars to achieve equity. **ENSURE** that all CBCs are held harmless from reductions in funding.

ENSURE that children with developmental disabilities who are in state custody continue to receive priority status for obtaining services from the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD).

JUVENILE JUSTICE

ENSURE the Department of Juvenile Justice provides front-end prevention programs that have proven track records and "best practice" results. **PRESERVE funding for Juvenile Assessment Centers (JACs)** in areas with high need and utilization, and preserve funding for effective girls' programs.

MODIFY current zero tolerance policies to provide for school suspensions and evidence-based diversion in lieu of mandatory expulsions for youth exhibiting non-threatening behavior.

SUPPORT efforts that **remove barriers to continuing education and employment.**

THE FLORIDA CHILDREN AND YOUTH CABINET

WORK with state leaders and members of the new Children's Cabinet as it develops a cohesive vision and plan that ensures a long-term commitment to children and youth issues, aligns public resources serving children and youth, and promotes increased efficiency and improved service delivery by all governmental agencies that provide services for children, youth, and their families.

SPECIAL STUDIES

MONITOR property tax developments and the House interim project on special taxing districts.

MONITOR and participate in the OPPAGA study on after school programs.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

LOCAL FLEXIBILITY

OPPOSE any effort to impose restrictions on the ability of local communities to determine their own use of resources and to develop, implement and administer programs that address the needs of children and families.

QUALITY PROGRAMMING

SUPPORT appropriate levels of funding for evidence-based policies and programs that incorporate best practice models in order to ensure healthy children, stable families and safe and supportive communities.

ADEQUATE & EQUITABLE FUNDING

SUPPORT funding formulas and streams for programs affecting children and families that are adequate and equitable, and which respect regional economic differences. **PROTECT** funding for existing children's programs. **SUPPORT** efforts to increase Florida's revenue streams, particularly programs that leverage new dollars for children's programs.

UNFUNDED MANDATES

OPPOSE legislation requiring local jurisdictions to perform services or to fund programs not funded by the state and not approved by local jurisdictions.

PUBLIC POLICY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Together with other child advocacy organizations and state government partners, the FCSC has advanced public policy on behalf of Florida's children and families in the following areas:

Advocated for the creation of a Florida Children and Youth Cabinet, a direct outgrowth of the 2006 Children's Summit, which FCSC helped organize and underwrite.

Organized a major collaborative around children's health that has restored community outreach, begun the restoration of funding for the Healthy Kids program and the development of administrative changes to the KidCare program to allow additional children to be enrolled.

Prevented major reductions in child care funding proposed through a new funding formula.

Supported funding increases/prevented funding reductions for community based care organizations.

Supported the prioritization of children from the child welfare system receiving services from the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD).

Supported funding increases for the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) program.

Supported improvements to the independent living program for youth aging out of the foster care system.

Supported the development of a thorough study and analysis of current funding and need for before and after school programs.

Established itself as a credible source of information, and as a participant in initiatives on children's issues.

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