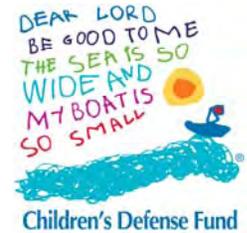


Children's Defense Fund

Children's Defense Fund's Priorities for America's Children:

What Are President-Elect Barack Obama's Plans to Make Them a Reality?



November 2008

CDF's Priority: End Child Poverty.

President-Elect Barack Obama's Plans to Fight Poverty

Overview: President-Elect Obama introduced legislation to modify the Child Tax Credit to benefit more low-income families, co-sponsored a bill to ensure funding to promote responsible fatherhood initiatives, and a bill to fund affordable housing to low-income individuals. A summary of his poverty reduction plan is below.

- **Regarding Income and Taxes:**
 - **Expand EITC for families with 3 or more children**, increase the number of working parents eligible for EITC, increase benefit to parents paying child support and reduce the EITC marriage penalty.
 - **Create a refundable tax credit of up to \$500 per person or \$1,000 per working family to offset payroll tax**, which would completely eliminate income taxes for 10 million Americans. He will also eliminate income taxes for seniors with incomes less than \$50,000 per year.
 - **Raise the minimum wage** to \$9.50 by 2011 and index it to inflation.
- **Regarding Child Care:**
 - Will provide affordable high-quality child care to working families.
- **Regarding Child Support/ Responsible Fatherhood:**
 - "Crack down" on men avoiding child support payments and ensure that collected funds go to children.
- **Regarding Job Training for Disadvantaged Youth:**
 - Create "5-E" Disconnected Youth Service Corps for disadvantaged youth in energy efficiency related areas. Create a new American Opportunity Tax Credit which provides the first \$4,000 of a college education, and cover two-thirds the cost of tuition at the average public college or university and make community college tuition completely free for most students. **He also offers to fund \$1 billion over 5 years for transitional jobs and career pathways programs.**
- **Regarding Economic Development:**
 - Double federal Jobs Access and Reverse Commute program to direct transportation dollars to highest-need communities with low access to public transportation and increase access to capital in underserved communities by 1) **Strengthening Small Business Administration programs** that provide capital to minority-owned businesses, 2) **Supporting outreach programs that help minority business owners apply for loans**, and 3) **Working to encourage the growth and capacity of minority firms.**
 - Fund \$250 million per year to create "**Public-Private Business Incubators**" to support entrepreneurship in disadvantaged communities. He plans to establish 20 "**Promise Neighborhoods**" in areas of concentrated poverty, which he states possibly, would be modeled after Harlem Children's Zone. He plans to ensure investment resources in every urban community by providing additional funds to Community the Development Financial Institution Fund, SBA, and other federal agencies, and address rural poverty through investing in infrastructure, rural technology, and implementing public-private partnerships that could bring new jobs to rural America.
- **Unionization:** Sign Employee Free Choice Act.

CDF's Priority: Ensure Every Child and Pregnant Woman Access to Affordable Comprehensive Health and Mental Health Coverage and Services.

President-Elect Barack Obama's Plans for Health Care

- **A Mandate for Coverage for Children: All children would be required to have health coverage.** President-Elect Obama would expand eligibility for Medicaid and SCHIP, and would allow young people to stay on their parents' health coverage until age 25.
 - *Eligibility in Medicaid and SCHIP:* President-Elect Obama's plan does not specify to what income level these programs would be expanded.
 - *Benefits:* The child mandate does not require private plans or SCHIP to cover all medically necessary services.
 - *Enrollment:* Though not calling for auto enrollment, his plan would simplify the process by enabling parents or guardians to enroll their children via tax returns, the Internet, forms from an employer, churches, libraries, motor vehicle bureaus and other sources. The government would assist parents in signing children up at birth, or through parents' employer-sponsored plans, Medicaid, SCHIP or other options. The government would also verify that children are covered, such as when children sign up for day care, school, etc.
- **Universal Coverage for All Americans: President-Elect Obama's health reform proposal envisions coverage for all Americans (undocumented immigrants are excluded) as the end goal.** He does not have an adult mandate because he expects his reforms to make coverage affordable enough for all people to buy private or public coverage voluntarily.
 - *Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP)-like public health plan:* A new public plan would offer benefits similar to what Congress and other federal employees receive under FEHBP. Small businesses and individuals without access to other public programs or employer-sponsored insurance could purchase coverage from the new plan. Federal income-related subsidies would be established to help individuals and families who don't qualify for Medicaid or SCHIP but who still need assistance to buy into the new public plan or to purchase private insurance.
 - *National Health Insurance Exchange:* The Exchange would help individuals purchase a private insurance plan or enroll in the new public plan. The Exchange would also act as a watchdog group to reform the private insurance market by creating rules and standards for participating insurance plans to ensure fairness, to promote competition, and to make individual coverage more affordable and accessible.
 - *Employer Mandate:* Businesses would have to contribute to the cost of their employees' coverage, either by subsidizing those benefits directly or by paying a fee to help subsidize the new public plan ("pay or play").
- **President-Elect Obama's Legislative Record on Children's Health:**
 - *Health Coverage:* Supported expanding SCHIP to cover additional uninsured children by co-sponsoring S.1364 "Healthy Kids Act of 2007", introduced by Senator Durbin, and voting in support of H.R.976, "The Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2007". This Act was the legislation first passed by both the House and the Senate and would have covered an additional 3.2 million uninsured children.
 - *Healthy Communities:* Introduced the Healthy Places Act on March 29, 2007 to help state and local governments assess the health impact of new policies or projects, whether a new highway or shopping center. Once the health impact is determined, the bill gives grant funding and technical assistance to help address potential health problems.
 - *Reducing Lead Exposure:* Introduced several pieces of legislation aimed at reducing children's exposure to lead, including, on July 18, 2007, a bill to amend the Toxic Substances Control Act to assess and reduce the levels of lead found in child-occupied facilities in the United States, and on May 3, 2007, a bill to direct the Consumer Product Safety Commission to classify certain children's products containing lead to be banned hazardous substances.

CDF's Priority: Provide High Quality Early Childhood Development Programs for All.

President-Elect Barack Obama's Plans for Early Childhood Care and Development

Overall Record on Early Childhood Development: In the Illinois State Senate, President-Elect Obama helped to create the state's Early Learning Council which recently launched the Preschool for All program. In his policy plan and speeches, President-Elect Obama often uses an economic argument citing Nobel Laureate James Heckman's research as a strong rationale for expanding and improving early childhood development programs, including the benefits of focusing investments on low-income children.

Early Childhood "Zero to Five" Plan: President-Elect Obama proposes investing **\$10 billion per year on early childhood care and development for infants and young children to prepare them for kindergarten.** The centerpiece of his plan is the creation of *Early Learning Challenge Grants* to help states create a high-quality early care and development system for all young children and their families.

- **Early Learning Challenge Grants** – Will provide funding for states to create or expand high-quality early childhood care and development programs for pregnant women and children from birth to age five. In order to participate, states will be required to match federal funds, meet quality standards, develop public/private partnerships and provide early learning and family support services.
- **Early Head Start (EHS), Head Start (HS) Improvements** – Will quadruple the number of children receiving EHS (for 0-3 and includes home-based services), increase funding for HS and improve quality of both EHS and HS through \$250 million in dedicated funds for regional training centers.
- **Increased Access to Pre-School** – Will allow states to use challenge grants to offer high-quality preschool programs to all four-year-olds or all three- and four-year-olds. The grants will enable states to adopt sliding-scale financing systems and still target children in greatest need.
- **Child Care** – Will make the child and dependent care tax credit refundable and make it a 50 percent credit for low-income families, increase funding for the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program, and improve child care quality by doubling resources for quality within the CCDBG to help states develop strategic plans and better coordinate among programs.
- **Support for Parents with Young Children** – Will expand evidence-based home visiting programs to all low-income first-time mothers (approximately 570,000 each year). President-Elect Obama cites the Nurse-Family Partnership as a model program and research by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis on economic savings.
- **Presidential Early Learning Council** – Will establish a Presidential Early Learning Council to increase collaboration and program coordination across federal, state, and local programs and to identify opportunities for expanding public/private investments.

Cost: President-Elect Obama estimates that his early child development and K-12 plan package in aggregate will cost about \$18 billion per year and recommends paying for the early childhood development components by delaying the NASA Constellation Program, using purchase cards, etc., to reduce costs of standardized procurement, auctioning surplus federal property, reducing the erroneous payments identified by the Government Accountability Office, and closing the CEO pay deductibility loophole. The rest of his education plan will be funded using a small portion of the savings associated with ending the Iraq war.

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

President-Elect Barack Obama's Plans for Education

Overview: President-Elect Obama believes that providing a high-quality education is key to addressing many of our country's challenges, and that world-class public schools provide the path to global opportunity, high quality employment and strong local communities. President-Elect Obama's Education proposal is **estimated to cost**

\$18 billion per year on early childhood development and K-12 education, including costs for teacher training and retention.

Main tenets of his plan include to:

- **Ensure access to high-quality early childhood development programs and child care opportunities so children enter kindergarten ready to learn.**
- Work to **recruit well-qualified teachers** to every classroom in America, especially those in high-poverty, high-minority areas.
- Reward expert, accomplished teachers for taking on challenging assignments and helping children succeed.
- **Reform No Child Left Behind.**
- Make **science and math** education a national priority.
- **Close the achievement gap** and invest in what works.
- **Empower parents** to raise healthy and successful children by taking a greater role in their child's education at home and at school.
- **Reduce the high school dropout rate** by focusing on proven methods to improve student achievement and enhance graduation and higher education opportunities.

K-12 Education

Recruit, Prepare, Retain, and Reward America's Teachers: President-Elect Obama believes that **teachers need to be rewarded for excellence through higher salaries and more support and professional development.** To ensure a strong cadre of competent, effective teachers in schools that are well-organized for success, President-Elect Obama's K-12 plan will:

- Create new Teacher Service Scholarships that will cover four years of undergraduate or two years of graduate teacher education.
- Require all schools of education to be accredited.
- Create a national network of teaching academies to add 25,000 new teachers to high-need urban and rural schools.
- Create Teacher Residency Programs that will supply 30,000 exceptionally well-prepared recruits to high-need schools.
- Expand mentoring programs that pair experienced teachers with new recruits.
- Provide incentives to pay teachers for time expended on common planning so they can collaborate to share best practices.
- Increase teacher pay through Merit Pay programs that reward teachers if they:
 - Serve districts as mentors to new teachers
 - Teach in underserved areas or take on added responsibility
 - Learn new skills to serve students better
 - Consistently excel in the classroom.

Reform No Child Left Behind: President-Elect Obama believes that **the goal of NCLB was the right one, but unfulfilled funding promises, inadequate implementation and shortcomings in the design of the law itself have limited its effectiveness and undercut its support.** As a result, the law has failed to provide high-quality teachers in every classroom and failed to adequately support and pay those teachers. President-Elect Obama **plans to reform NCLB include:**

- Significantly **increase funding,**
- **Improve assessments** used to track student progress to also evaluate higher-order skills, such as readiness for college and the workplace. Assessment models will provide educators and students with timely feedback about how to improve student learning, and indicate whether individual students are making progress toward desired high standards.
- **Improve the accountability system** to support schools that need improvement, rather than punish them. Obama believes that schools should assess all of our children appropriately – including English language learners and special needs students. Such a system should consider measures beyond reading and math tests. It should also create incentives to keep students in school through high school graduation, rather than pushing out low performers or those at risk of low achievement to make overall school performance scores look better.

Make Math and Science Education a National Priority:

- Recruit high quality math and science teachers and support efforts to help these specialized teachers learn from professionals in the field.
- Ensure that all children have access to a strong science curriculum at all grade levels.

Close the Achievement Gap:

- **Expand High-Quality Afterschool Opportunities: Double the funding for the main federal support for high quality afterschool programs**, the 21st Century Learning Centers program, to serve one million more children.
- **Expand Summer Learning Opportunities:** Via the "STEP UP" plan, President-Elect Obama will **support summer learning opportunities for disadvantaged children through partnerships between local schools and community organizations.**
- **Support English Language Learners:** President-Elect Obama **supports transitional bilingual education** and will help Limited English Proficient students get ahead by holding schools accountable for making sure these students graduate.
- **Support College Outreach Programs:** President-Elect Obama supports outreach programs like GEAR UP, TRIO and Upward Bound to encourage more young people from low-income families to consider and prepare for college.
- **Support Charter Schools and Private Investment in Schools:** President-Elect Obama **does not support school vouchers that allow parents to use public school money for private school.** He believes that vouchers would reduce the options available to children in need and drain public schools of their fiscal support. Instead he supports charter schools working within the public school system as a vehicle to improve healthy competition among public schools.

Reduce the High School Drop Out Rate:

- President-Elect Obama's proposed "Success in the Middle Act" will improve the education of middle school students in low-performing schools. President-Elect Obama will address the drop out crisis by:
 - **Providing funding to school districts to invest in intervention strategies in middle school** - strategies such as personal academic plans, teaching teams, parent involvement, mentoring, intensive reading and math instruction, and extended learning time.
 - Establishing a competitive grant process for entities pursuing evidence-based models that have been proven to reduce dropouts in this high risk age group.
- **Redesigned Schools:** President-Elect Obama will support federal efforts to **encourage schools to organize themselves for greater academic success for all students by developing stronger relationships among adults and students, a more engaging curriculum, and more adaptive teaching.**
- **Competitive Grants for Evidence-Based Models:** These grants will decrease the dropout rate by **increasing the capacity of non-profits and community organizations to collaborate on improving graduation rates.**

Higher Education

Increase College Funding and Affordability:

- **American Opportunity Tax Credit:** This universal and fully refundable credit will ensure that the first \$4,000 of a college education is completely free for most Americans, and will cover two-thirds of the cost of tuition at the average public college or university and make community college tuition completely free for most students. It will also ensure that the tax credit is available to families at the time of enrollment; and use public instead of privately funded loan providers to free up more money for aid.
- **Simplify the Application Process for Financial Aid:** Eliminate the current federal financial aid application and enable families to apply simply by checking a box on their tax form, authorizing their tax information to be used, thus eliminating the need for a separate application.

CDF's Priority: Protect Children from Abuse and Neglect and Connect Them to Caring Permanent Families.

President-Elect Barack Obama's Plans for Child Protection and Permanent Families for Children in Foster Care

President-Elect Obama has not announced a specific plan related to child protection and permanency concerns for children in foster care, as he has in other areas. However, he does describe several recommendations and relevant policies in his Webpage on Family Issues and his Fact Sheet on Child Advocacy, which are summarized below.

- **Support Parents with Young Children.** President-Elect Obama would **expand programs like the successful Nurse-Family Partnership to all low-income, first-time mothers.** The Nurse-Family Partnership provides home visits by trained registered nurses to low-income expectant mothers and their families. The trained nurses help improve the mental and physical health of the family by providing counseling on substance abuse, creating and achieving personal goals, and effective methods of nurturing children. The Obama plan would assist approximately 570,000 first time mothers each year. This recommendation is part of Sen. Obama's Zero to Five Plan.
- **Address needs of Children without Fathers.** President-Elect Obama reintroduced the **Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act** in 2007 to remove some of the government penalties on married families, crack down on men avoiding child support payments, ensure that support payments get to families instead of state bureaucracies, fund support services for fathers and their families, and support domestic violence prevention efforts. As president, Obama will sign this bill into law and continue to implement innovative measures to strengthen families.
- **Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect.** President-Elect Obama is committed to preventing child abuse and **supports proven and effective means to combat the tragedy of child abuse.**
- **Reduce Domestic Violence.** President-Elect Obama will protect women and children from domestic violence. He introduced legislation in 2005 to combat domestic violence by **providing \$25 million a year for partnerships between domestic violence prevention organizations and fatherhood or marriage programs to train staff in domestic violence services, provide services to families affected by domestic violence, and to develop best practices in domestic violence.**
- **Protect Meth's Youngest Victims.** President-Elect Obama **sponsored legislation in 2005 providing assistance to the children of methamphetamine abusers** and as president he will continue to support meth's youngest victims.
- **Register and Restrict Sex Offenders.** President-Elect Obama helped create a **national sex offender database** through his co-sponsorship of Dru's law, which was made part of the Adam Walsh Child Protection Act, a measure President-Elect Obama also supported. He **co-sponsored the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act** which creates stiffer penalties for those who commit sex crimes against children under the age of 12. President-Elect Obama also supports the **KIDS Act, which requires sex offenders to provide their Internet identifiers for use in the National Sex Offender Public Registry.**
- **Support and Supplement Our Struggling Foster Care System.** President-Elect Obama proposes to address the failing foster care system in part by **increasing the quality of foster homes, improving training for foster parents and increasing coordination between law enforcement and child welfare officials so abuse can be stopped.** Recognizing the challenges facing young adults graduating from foster care, President-Elect Obama will invest in **innovative new job training and work development programs for youth in foster care.**

CDF's Priority: Stop the Criminalization of Children at Increasingly Younger Ages and Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention.

President-Elect Barack Obama's Plans for Crime and Law Enforcement

Disproportionality:

- "The criminal justice system is not color blind. It does not work for all people equally, and that is why it's critical to have a president who sends a signal that we are going to have **a system of justice that is not just for us, but for everybody.**"
- "The teenagers and college students who left their homes to march in the streets of Birmingham and Montgomery; the mothers who walked instead of taking the bus after a long day of doing somebody else's laundry and cleaning somebody else's kitchen — they didn't brave fire hoses and Billy clubs so that their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren would still wonder at the beginning of the 21st century whether their vote would be counted; whether their civil rights would be protected by their government; whether justice would be equal and opportunity would be theirs. . . . **We have more work to do.**" — *Sen. Barack Obama, Speech at Howard University, September 28, 2007*

Crime Reduction:

- **End the Dangerous Cycle of Youth Violence:** President-Elect Obama supports innovative local programs, such as the CeaseFire program in Chicago, that have been proven to work. Such programs implement a comprehensive public health approach that adopts a community-based strategy to prevent youth violence. He will also **double funding for federal afterschool programs** and invest in 20 Promise Neighborhoods across the country to ensure that urban youth have meaningful opportunities to succeed.
- **Address Gun Violence in Cities:** President-Elect Obama proposes repealing the Tiahrt Amendment, which restricts the ability of local law enforcement to access important gun trace information, and gives police officers across the nation the tools they need to solve gun crimes and fight the illegal arms trade. Sen. Obama also **favors commonsense measures that respect the Second Amendment rights of gun owners, while keeping guns away from children and from criminals who shouldn't have them.** He **supports closing the gun show loophole and making guns in this country childproof.** He also supports making permanent a federal Assault Weapons Ban (presently expired) as such weapons belong on foreign battlefields and not on our streets.

Law Enforcement:

- **Support Local Law Enforcement:** President-Elect Obama is committed to fully funding the COPS program to combat crime and help address police brutality and accountability issues in local communities. He also supports efforts to encourage young people to enter the law enforcement profession, so that our local police departments are not understaffed because of a dearth of qualified applicants.
- **End Racial Profiling:** President-Elect Obama co-sponsored federal legislation to ban racial profiling and require federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to take steps to eliminate the practice. He introduced and passed a law in the Illinois State Senate requiring the Illinois Department of Transportation to record the race, age, and gender of all drivers stopped for traffic violations so that bias could be detected and addressed.
- **Expand Hate Crimes Statutes:** President-Elect Obama will **strengthen hate crimes legislation**, expand hate crimes protection by passing the Matthew Shepard Act¹, and reinvigorate such crime's enforcement at the Department of Justice's Criminal Section.

¹ **The Matthew Shepard Act** (formerly known as the *Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2007*), is an response to the unrelenting and under-addressed problem of violent hate crimes committed against individuals based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and disability. The Act would strengthen existing federal hate crime laws in three ways: (1) Expand the law to authorize the Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute certain bias-motivated crimes based on the victim's actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability. Current law only includes race, color, religion or national origin. (2) Eliminate a serious limitation on federal involvement under existing law which requires that a victim of a bias-motivated crime was attacked because he/she was engaged in a specified federally-protected activity such as voting, serving on a jury or attending school. (3) Add "gender" and "gender identity" to the *Hate Crimes Statistics Act*.