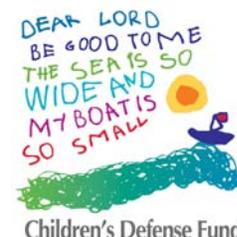


# Children's Defense Fund Ensuring Every Child a *Safe Start* through Common Sense Gun Safety Laws, Strengthened Mental Health Resources, and a Commitment to Counter the Culture of Violence



## Federal Policy Agenda

January 3, 2013

### 1) **Keep guns out of the hands of children and those who would use them against children through sensible gun safety measures.**

- **Require consumer safety standards and childproof safety features for all guns.** Subject guns to the same consumer product safety regulations that cover virtually every other consumer product. Currently the production and manufacture of guns is exempt from oversight by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Every gun made in this country should be childproof and equipped with child safety locks and authorized user identification technology. Federal law also is silent on child access prevention. Congress should provide incentives for states to require gun owners to store their firearms and ammunition in a manner in which children and teens cannot access them.
- **Ban assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines.** Enact a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines and fix the loopholes in the 1994 federal Assault Weapons Ban (which ended in 2004) that undercut its effectiveness.
- **Require background checks on anyone purchasing a gun.** Close the private sales loophole. Federal law currently requires federally-licensed gun dealers to conduct background checks on every sale. A loophole in the law allows private dealers to sell guns without a license and allows buyers to avoid background checks. More than 40 percent of all guns in this country are sold with no background checks.
- **Provide resources that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and other federal agencies need to keep our children and communities safe.** Establish a national federal gun registry to help officials track guns when they are produced and purchased. Get rid of legislative barriers that prevent data collection on firearm ownership by law enforcement officials. Eliminate restrictions on the research of gun violence prevention by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal agencies.

### 2) **Strengthen support for children facing violence in their communities and families, and for children with unmet mental health needs.**

- **Restore and increase funds for the prevention and treatment of mental health problems in children and young adults.** Target increased funds for the early identification and treatment of emerging mental health problems and the provision of 24-hour crisis response services for children and families that include in-home care, mobile units and wraparound services. Families need to have options other than calling the police when a child or adult is in need of mental health treatment.
- **Expand the reach of quality programs to address children's social and emotional needs and train teachers, counselors and others to address these needs.** Increase investments in the federal *Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative* to enable more school districts to form partnerships to offer behavioral, social and emotional support and mental health services for children in communities. Encourage the use of early childhood mental health professionals to offer training to staff and appropriate support for children in child care, Head Start and other

early care and education settings. Increase investments in approaches such as the federal *Positive Behavioral and Intervention Supports (PBIS) Program*, which have provided an alternative to zero tolerance policies. Expand incentives in PBIS to help schools adapt these approaches to better serve students with the greatest needs through wraparound services and other family and community-based supports.

- **Strengthen the capacity of publicly-supported health programs for children to better address children’s mental health needs.** Require all states as a condition of funding under Title V of the Social Security Act to establish partnerships between state Medicaid and Title V agencies to assure better access for children to the full range of screening, diagnostic, and treatment services that include mental health. Clarify that screening, diagnosis and treatment for mental health needs must be part of Medicaid’s Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit and require all states to provide mental health services to children under the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
- **Fund initiatives to increase the number of well-trained child psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, school counselors and specialized community advocates.** Shortages in all of these areas jeopardize the well-being of children most in need and deprive parents and other caregivers the help they need to address children’s needs. Offer special training to these professionals to recognize and respond to children exposed to violence and those with serious emotional disorders.

### 3) **Offer parents and children the resources, support and tools they need to survive and work against the culture of violence, in which family violence is epidemic, child abuse and neglect are widespread and children are exposed to television, movies and video games that glamorize guns, bloodshed and brutality.**

- **Build on the Department of Justice initiatives designed to address community and gun violence.** Increase investments in the *Safe Start Initiative* to expand access to evidence-based programs that mitigate the harms done to children exposed to violence and provide interventions for at-risk children. Increase funding for the *Safe Neighborhoods Program* and the *Defending Childhood Initiative* dedicated to reducing gun violence across the country.
- **Implement nonviolent conflict resolution skills as a part of school curricula.** Invest federal funds in evidence-based approaches that can help children learn to resolve conflicts non-violently. Conflict is a part of life, but violence as a response to conflict is optional and learned. Conflict-resolution skills are an essential component of educating children in a culture where they are inundated with the imagery of violence.
- **Educate parents on the impact of violent games by requiring that producers of violent “mature-rated” video games include a clear and visible warning about their negative impact on children.** Studies have linked children’s exposure to violent games to negative mental health and developmental outcomes. An additional explicit warning should be added to the rating label already required by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB).