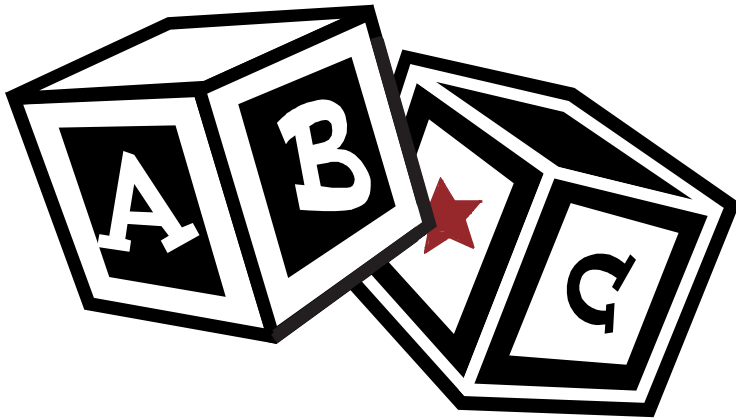


2006 CHILDREN'S Legislative Agenda



Building blocks for a better future

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing ensures families spend a fair amount of their income for housing while allowing sufficient resources for other basic needs such as food, clothing, child care and transportation. For lower-income families priced out of the housing market, affordable housing prevents homelessness.

Education

Good schools ensure all children reach their full potential and become productive citizens. A quality education paves the way for low-income children to fulfill the dream of a college education.

Health Care

Expanding health care access ensures that families get medical treatment in a timely fashion – before conditions worsen and become more expensive and difficult to treat. Timely health care ensures the healthy development of low-income children by shielding them from the risks that come with poverty.

Violence Prevention

Quality after-school programs keep children safe, provide academic enrichment and promote social development.

affordable housing

The City of Bridgeport faces an affordable-housing crisis. The fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Bridgeport area is \$966 per month. Families need to earn over \$18.58 an hour, two and one-half times the minimum wage, to rent a two-bedroom apartment in Bridgeport. More than 25% of Bridgeport renters pay more than half of their income for rent alone, which leaves little for other basic necessities.

BCAC Supports

- Increasing funding to expand housing information and referral services, housing search assistance, landlord/tenant mediation and fair housing monitoring.
- Increasing the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) budget to \$21.9 million.

child care and early childhood development

In Bridgeport there is only enough licensed child care for 60% of the 7,550 Bridgeport children below the age of six with working parents. Child care is expensive and can cost as much as one-third of a family's income. Children who participate in quality early care and education programs show better academic and socio-emotional outcomes. A study conducted by the Bridgeport Public Schools Early Childhood Program found 47% of children with no pre-school experience repeated first grade, compared to only 1% of children who had preschool preparation.

BCAC Supports

- Restoring funding and keeping Care4Kids open to new, low-income working parents.
- Increasing infant and toddler child care by providing higher state subsidies to support the development of programs modeled after Early Head Start, and which include early education, as well as social services for families.
- Ensuring continuity of services by developing a system of case management and family support to facilitate the transition from the Birth-to-Three Program to the public schools for 3-to-5-year-old children with complicated medical needs.

children's mental health

One in ten Connecticut children has a mental health disorder. Left untreated, mental health disorders can get worse and be more expensive and difficult to treat. It is particularly important to target prevention and intervention to at-risk children. Bridgeport has been chronically underfunded by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), impeding the development of critically needed community-based children's mental health services, including prevention, assessment and intervention services.

BCAC Supports

- Correcting the huge inequities in state funding for prevention programs and children's mental health that have shortchanged Bridgeport's children.
- Increasing funding for mental health services, particularly prevention, assessment, intervention and treatment services, which are family focused and address the needs of young children.

education

Bridgeport students face many challenges. Ninety-five percent of students are economically disadvantaged. One out of three kindergarteners has no preschool experience. One out of four high school students drops out prior to graduation. These challenges are exacerbated by a school system plagued by high teacher turnover, lack of support services, overcrowded classrooms and chronic under-funding by the city and state.

BCAC Supports

- Correcting the huge inequities in state education funding among Connecticut's largest cities.
- Increasing state funding to districts to improve failing schools under the No Child Left Behind legislation.
- Creating incentives such as hiring bonuses, tuition assistance, out-of-state recruitment assistance and mortgage assistance to attract quality teachers and reduce teacher turnover in severe need districts.

family self-sufficiency

The federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is successful in lifting working families out of poverty and has been more successful than any other single federal program in reducing the number of poor children. In 1999, the EITC helped lift 4.7 million people out of poverty, including 2.5 million children. It also brings money back into the local economy. It is estimated that more than 50,000 households in Connecticut may be eligible for the federal EITC but fail to apply. Connecticut has not yet implemented a state EITC although 18 states have done so, including five Northeast states.

BCAC Supports

- Implementing a state Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Supporting outreach measures for households eligible for a federal EITC but fail to apply.

health care

Twenty-five percent of Bridgeport children live in poverty. Children living in poverty are at risk for poor health, including asthma, lead poisoning and obesity. Over 71,000 children in Connecticut lack health insurance. Families without health insurance are more likely to delay medical treatment and forego preventative health care until there is an emergency, which often requires a higher level and more expensive care. Community health centers, school-based health centers and hospital clinics need state support to continue to provide critically needed affordable health care for low-income and uninsured families.

BCAC Supports

- Restoring self-declaration of income and continuous eligibility to simplify the HUSKY application process and increase enrollment.
- Allowing small businesses to buy into HUSKY and creating a state fund with fees charged to large businesses that do not provide health insurance coverage for their employees.
- Increasing state funding for school-based health centers, community health centers and hospital clinics providing health care to the uninsured.
- Restricting food sold in school vending machines to water and 100% fruit juices and mandating a minimum 20-minute daily recess in all grades K-5.

substance abuse

The positive benefits of substance abuse treatment have been well documented. Spending \$1 on substance abuse treatment can save nearly \$7.50 in health care and criminal justice costs. Substance abuse treatment can decrease criminal activity 80%, increase employment by nearly 20%, decrease welfare assistance 11%, and decrease homelessness 43%. Many low-income substance-abusing women experience trauma in their lifetime, including child abuse, sexual abuse and domestic violence. As a result, there is a high rate of women with co-occurring disorders – mental health and substance abuse.

BCAC Supports

- Expanding services for substance abusing women, especially pregnant and newly parenting women, and women who are dually diagnosed (substance abuse and mental health). Services should include early identification, treatment, case management, outpatient treatment and residential detoxification services, as well as transitional and supportive housing.

violence prevention

Quality after-school programs provide a safe place for children and can bolster school attendance, academic performance and social-emotional development. Statistics show juvenile crime triples between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., the hours immediately following school dismissal. After-school programs can reduce juvenile crime by 25% and reduce illegal drug use by as much as 50%. With \$1 million in federal grant funding ending for after-school programs in Bridgeport, as many as nine city-run programs serving up to 900 children may be forced to close.

BCAC Supports

- Increasing state funding for after-school programs.

welfare

In Bridgeport 4,630 residents, of which 1,250 are children under the age of five, are on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the state's welfare program. Many parents on welfare have severe barriers to employment, including high rates of learning disabilities and low literacy skills that affect their ability to get and keep a job. Ninety-four percent of Bridgeport parents on welfare are unable to pass the competency tests needed to receive job-training vouchers under WIA (Workforce Investment Act). Parents who have a learning disability and are on welfare cash assistance need a comprehensive employability assessment to determine their literacy, social service and educational needs.

BCAC Supports

- Adopting flexible time limits for TANF recipients with identified barriers to employment.
- Dedicating \$3 million in federal welfare block grant funding to conduct a pilot program providing basic skills to people in the Jobs First Employment Services program.
- Requiring appropriate assessments of literacy skills, learning delays and other barriers for each welfare recipient, followed by the development of individualized plans to remove these barriers to employment.



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