

Voices for Vermont's Children

Promoting public policy that enhances the lives of children and youth in Vermont



2010 Legislative Agenda

Child Nutrition

Child Welfare

Early Care and Education

Environmental Health

Health

One Vermont Coalition

Paid Sick Days

Public Education

State Budget

CHILD NUTRITION

Voices will support child nutrition legislation introduced in 2009 that will:

- Put into statute promises made by the Douglas Administration to expand eligibility for the 3SquaresVT (Food Stamp program); and
- Improve three separate child nutrition programs, the Simplified Summer Food Program the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the School Lunch Program.

CHILD WELFARE & PROTECTION

- **Foster Care and Residential Programs**

Voices will oppose cuts to stipends for foster parents and to the budgets of residential programs that serve children and youth.

- **Kinship Care and Guardianship**

Voices will work to pass a bill allowing for subsidized guardianship for kin taking custody of children who are unable to remain with their parents.

- **Reach Ahead**

Voices will advocate for the immediate implementation of the Reach Ahead program, a newly designed food assistance program for low-income employed families. Implementation of this program, which will provide food assistance to the family for one year, was delayed already due to funding limitations. The Administration has proposed not funding this program.

- **Reach Up**

Voices will oppose proposals by the Administration to implement full family sanctions in the Reach Up program. Currently when a parent fails to comply with work requirements the parent loses her portion of the grant; however, the children continue to receive a reduced payment. Under full family sanctions the entire family will be terminated if the parent fails to comply.

- **SSI and Reach Up**

Voices will oppose any effort of the Administration to count the SSI payment of an aged, blind or disabled family member when determining the family's eligibility for Reach Up. In the past that money was disregarded.

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Voices will continue to lead the legislative work of the **Kids Are Priority One** early childhood coalition.

Work on early childhood issues will include:

- **Child Care Subsidy Program** - Voices is committed to increasing access to quality child care. Since the upcoming fiscal year is so challenging, we may not be able to add to the current investment in the child care subsidy program which pays a portion of the cost of child care for children from low- to moderate-income families. If not, we will work to maintain current investment and avoid deep cuts in spending for early care and education.

- **Infrastructure for a system of early care, health and education**

Voices supports enabling legislation for the development of a unified, coordinated early childhood system to connect families, services, and programs to better serve children efficiently and effectively, identify gaps in services, plan for improvements, and identify new resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

As a member of the Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Vermont, Voices will work to address children's exposure to environmental toxins in Vermont. Voices supports:

- Green cleaning legislation that will require Vermont schools to use environmentally preferable cleaning products. These products are safer for human health and the environment than conventional cleaning products. The use of "green" cleaning products by both state buildings and participating schools has demonstrated that switching to these products is cost neutral.
- Legislation that will limit exposure to bisphenol A (BPA), a chemical used to make epoxy resin and polycarbonate plastic, by banning the sale of such products as plastic baby bottles, infant and baby food containers, and water bottles with BPA.

HEALTH

Voices will monitor the effect of federal health reform legislation on Vermont's health coverage for children and families. Our goal will be to maintain or expand the protections of Vermont's Dr. Dynasaur program, especially our seamless protections for children (called Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment or EPSDT).

ONE VERMONT

Voices will continue its work as chair of the One Vermont coalition and support the legislative agenda being developed by the Coalition. (website at www.onevermont.org)

PAID SICK DAYS

Voices will lead a coalition working for passage of H.382, a bill allowing Vermont workers to accrue one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked, up to a maximum of 56 hours per year for full-time employees and a pro-rated amount for part-time workers. The bill calls also for safe days for victims of domestic violence. The outbreak of the H1N1 virus and the resulting closure of schools in the state have dramatized the need for Vermont workers to have the option of staying home to care for a sick child or to recover themselves without the fear of losing pay.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

- **Education Equity and Community Schools** - Voices will continue to monitor the work in the legislature on education funding. We remain committed to a system that provides equal educational opportunity for all children, and acknowledge the importance of small community public schools for our children and our state.

- Voices will join in efforts to prevent the use of education fund dollars in ways that will shift cost to the property tax and undermine support for local schools. We support a positive, collaborative approach to addressing the costs of education and will work for policies that help school districts address the factors that are driving school budget increases.
- **High School Completion Rate** - Act 44, passed in 2009, makes it a “priority” of the Legislature and the Department of Education to “take all necessary measures” to increase the high school completion rate to 100 percent by 2020. The legislation itself does not outline specific benchmarks for policymakers to measure progress towards the goal. Voices will develop and advocate for clear benchmarks to assess progress towards an improved graduation rate by 2020.

STATE BUDGET

Voices will work for a balanced approach to addressing the FY11 budget shortfall, including use of new revenues, maximizing federal funds, and possible debt. We will work to avoid additional deep cuts to the budget that will do further harm to the services and public structures that protect children and families.

Voices
for Vermont's Children

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