

Voices
for Vermont's Children

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



2012 Legislative Agenda

CHILD WELFARE AND PROTECTION

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

ECONOMIC SECURITY

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

HEALTH

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CHILD WELFARE AND PROTECTION

In July 2009, the state adopted a new system of response when reports of child abuse and neglect are received by the state. If the state determines that the children are 'at-risk' but cannot substantiate abuse or neglect, it can offer services to children and their families on a volunteer basis. Under the new system, called differential response, services are designed to strengthen parents and keep them and their children out of the child welfare system. At the same time, intake for child abuse and neglect reporting was centralized. The new system favors the placement of children with kin when parents are unable to retain custody. Voices will monitor legislative oversight of the centralized intake and differential response systems for reporting and handling of child neglect and abuse. This will include determining if families in the assessment track and kin caregivers are receiving necessary services.

Voices will work to maintain and improve funding for the system of care for children in the custody of the state, including foster parent stipends, funding for residential treatment programs, and kinship guardianship stipends.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Voices will work with the Kids Are Priority One Coalition in a Campaign to Improve the Quality of Early Care and Education in Vermont. We will request that the 2012 Legislature do the following:

- Expand access to professional development opportunities for the early childhood and afterschool workforce by amending Vermont's Workforce Education and Training Fund (Act 46, 2007) to allow for inclusion of the early education/afterschool workforce as a priority area.
- Increase the number of child care licensors employed by the state's Child Development Division.

Collective bargaining for child care providers:

Voices will support H.97, a bill to allow for collective bargaining between the State of Vermont and child care providers caring for children whose parents are eligible for or receive the child care subsidy. The bill passed the House in 2011 and awaits action in the Senate.

Tropical Storm Irene

Voices will monitor funding and reparations for child care facilities damaged or destroyed in Tropical Storm Irene.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Paid Sick Days:

Voices will lead a coalition working for passage of H.356, a bill allowing Vermont workers to accrue one of 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 legislation calls also for safe days for victims of domestic violence.

Nutrition:

Voices will support Hunger Free Vermont's effort to pass H.234, a bill to expand free school lunch to all low-income children. Currently, based on family income, low-income students receive either free lunch or pay a reduced price of 40 cents, with the federal government reimbursing schools for the remainder of the cost. Under this proposal, the state would pay schools 40 cents for each reduced price lunch, allowing schools to provide free lunch for all low-income students.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

As a member of the Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Vermont, Voices will work to support 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.

HEALTH

Oral Health:

Full dental coverage for all pregnant women on Dr. Dynasaur. Currently, in the state of Vermont, pregnant women 18 and over enrolled in Dr. Dynasaur receive dental coverage up to the adult Medicaid cap of \$495 per year (with the exception of very low-income pregnant women up to the age of 21 who qualify for Medicaid – that group receives comprehensive coverage).

Under Medicaid law, the state can take the option to provide full dental coverage (no cap) for all pregnant women on Dr. Dynasaur. As a part of the Oral Health for All Coalition, Voices will request that the state of Vermont provide a guaranteed, comprehensive dental benefit to all pregnant women covered by Dr. Dynasaur.

Licensed Dental Provider

Voices will support H.398, a bill adding a new dental provider to the dental team. The scope of practice for this licensed dental provider includes both restorative and preventative care.

The provider (as outlined by proposed amendments to the bill) will:

- work under general supervision,
- be licensed by the Board of Dental Examiners,
- be required to pass a comprehensive competency-based clinical exam before practicing and complete continuing education courses each year,
- work in public and private settings,
- supervise dental assistants and dental hygienists,
- attend a three-year accelerated bachelors degree program with 400 hours clinical practice.
- Complete a one-year training program if he/she is a licensed dental hygienist.

Dr. Dynasaur – Vermont's Children's Health Insurance Program:

Voices will work with the Campaign for Health Care Security to implement 12-month continuous enrollment for Vermont children who receive Dr. Dynasaur.

Gun Safety:

Voices will support Citizens for Safer Vermont Children in its effort to pass a safe storage law mandating that firearms be securely stored to deny children access. Citizens for Safer Vermont Children (CSVS) is a group of more than 600 Vermonters calling for child access protection for gun safety.

Sugar-sweetened Beverage Tax:

Voices will be part of a coalition advocating to enact a penny an ounce sugar-sweetened beverage excise tax. The funds raised will be used to combat childhood obesity and provide funding for programs that help low and middle-income Vermonters lead healthier lives.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Education Equity and Community Schools:

Voices will continue its commitment to preserving equal educational opportunity through the current equitable funding system we have for our K-12 education. Voices will join in efforts to prevent restructuring of our education finance system in ways that will rely more heavily on the property tax and undermine support for local schools.

In this difficult fiscal environment, as the state looks for ways to cut spending, we will join with others to resist damaging our education system and eroding support for small community 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.

Improving Outcomes for Low-Income Students:

Voices will seek legislative opportunities to strengthen and empower our education system to better meet the needs of low-income students.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Voices will support the development of juvenile justice policies by the legislature and the Department for Children and Families that appropriately address delinquent behavior by children. Such policies should reflect the principals of balanced and restorative justice and examine both alternatives to court involvement and the appropriate jurisdiction of such cases when there is court involvement.

STATE BUDGET

Voices will continue its advocacy for a balanced approach to the economic crisis facing our state. We will monitor proposed cuts to state supports and services for children and youth and advocate for raising revenue or using rainy day funds to keep our state's essential services in place.

Voices will monitor budget items for line item cuts to nonprofit services for children. Voices will oppose across-the-board cuts to human services programs in the 2012 budget.

Voices for Vermont's Children

Staff

Carlen Finn
Executive Director

Sheila Reed, J.D.
Associate Director

Lindsay M. DesLauriers
Public Policy Associate

Nancy Kaplan
VT Kids Count &
Social Media Coordinator

S. Beth Nolan
Outreach &
Project Coordinator

Deborah Wetmore
Membership & Development
Coordinator

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Harry Frank

Damon Kinzie

Jane Pincus

Robert Sheil, J.D.

Ellen Taggart

K.C. Whiteley

Voices
for Vermont's Children

PO Box 261, Montpelier, VT 05601

802-229-6377 • vtkids@voicesforvtkids.org

www.voicesforvtkids.org