



AN AGENDA FOR SOUTHWEST OHIO'S CHILDREN

2008-09 STATE BUDGET AGENDA

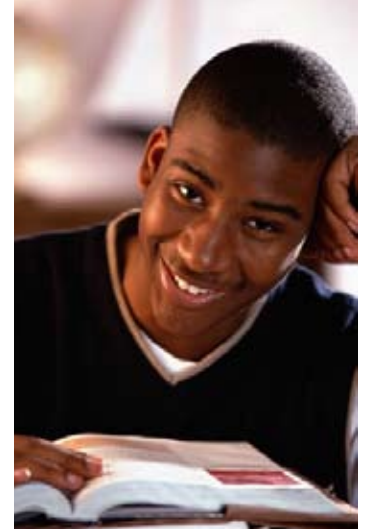


**Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit
this planet. We all breathe the same air.
We all cherish our children's future.
And we are all mortal.**

John F. Kennedy

**It is easier to build strong children than
to repair broken men.**

Frederick Douglass



INTRODUCTION

An investment in the health, safety, education and economic stability of a child is an investment in the future of Ohio. Research proves that children whose knowledge and skills are far behind those of their new classmates enter school at a disadvantage. If they are unable to catch up, they face greater challenges throughout their school careers.¹

Vulnerable children need extra support to succeed. These children live in every Ohio House and Ohio Senate district. As our elected officials, you take the role of representing these children seriously. This book is designed to assist you in understanding their needs and to make reasonable requests that will improve their quality of life. As you work to deliver a responsible 2008-2009 state budget, we hope you will make an investment in Ohio's children that will last a lifetime.

¹ Entwisle, D.R. & Alexander, K.L. 1993. "Entry into School: The Beginning School Transition and Education Stratification in the United States." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19, 401-423.





HEALTH:

All Southwest Ohio children and their families should have the opportunity to live a healthy life. Having a coordinated system of care that provides access to medical, mental and oral health services will allow us to accomplish this goal.

ACTION ITEMS FOR 08-09 BUDGET:

- * **Maintain current Medicaid benefit package for children and adults including current standards and no cost sharing requirements for children.**
 - o **Reason:** In any given month approximately 30% of Ohio's children rely on Medicaid for their healthcare needs. Furthermore, the percentage of people reporting lack of access to health care and/or being uninsured in Greater Cincinnati has increased considerably since 2002 and is still well above the Healthy People 2010 goal. ²

- * **Pass and fund legislation that provides for school nursing based on National Association of School Nurses standards.**
 - o **Reason:** School nurses are the primary identifier and source of maintaining treatment for children with chronic conditions such as diabetes and asthma. Currently 55 school districts in Ohio have no school-based health services.

- * **Increase Medicaid rates for dental services.**
 - o **Reason:** Nearly 45% of eight-year-old Cincinnati Public School students have visible, untreated dental decay. Fewer than 23% of children on Medicaid are getting regular dental visits. Data from Cincinnati Public Schools and the Cincinnati Health Department show 16% of children entering kindergarten in 2005 had moderate to severe dental decay.

² The United Way of Greater Cincinnati (2006) The State of the Community: A Report on the Socio-Economic Health of the Greater Cincinnati Region., Second Edition, November 2006.





CHILD WELFARE:

All Southwest Ohio children should be safe. Abused and neglected children must be protected and placed in care that is nurturing and supportive while receiving the necessary treatment. Southwest Ohio voters, to supplement state support, resoundingly passed Children's Services levies in Butler, Hamilton and Clermont counties proving they believe our children's safety should be a priority.

ACTION ITEMS FOR 08-09 BUDGET:

- * **Increase the Child Protection Allocation (line item 527) by \$10M annually**

- o **Reason:** Ohio's current investment to care for abused and neglected children is 10 cents on the federal dollar compared to the national state average of 37 cents on the federal dollar. Increasing this allocation will provide more resources for care of this vulnerable population.

- * **Increase funding for the Access to Better Care Initiative by 10% in each budget year.**

- o **Reason:** This funding helps ensure that parents will not have to relinquish custody in order to get the necessary services to help their child.

- * **Maintain and increase TANF funded independent living services.**

- o **Reason:** Most Americans today don't consider a person an adult until age 26, or until she or he has finished school, landed a full-time job, and begun to raise a family. Foster children who have less preparation and resources are often expected to be financially free at age 18. Funding for their transition to adulthood will prevent additional taxpayer expense for homelessness, unemployment and incarceration.³

- * **Consider and fund the foster care recommendations and reforms as issued by Ohio Department of Job and Family Services as a result of the Marcus Fiesel investigation.**

- o **Reason:** On occasion the system fails our most vulnerable children like Marcus Fiesel. This incident provides the community and the state with the opportunity to make reforms.

³ 2003 study by National Opinion Research Center.





EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION:

All Southwest Ohio children should be prepared to enter kindergarten. A failure to do so will cost Ohio more in the long-term. Studies show that high quality early learning experiences cost \$10-12,000 per year per child, whereas a high school dropout costs society \$243,000-\$388,000 and a career criminal cost \$1.3 - \$1.5 million.

ACTION ITEMS FOR 08-09 BUDGET:

- * **Increase the payment for child care providers to pay in the 75th percentile of the known cost.**
 - o **Reason:** 22,000 of the 68,000 children ages 0-5 in Hamilton County are at risk of not being ready for kindergarten. Ohio's current child care payment rate of 50% of the true market rate, buys only low-quality care and education - a poor investment in the future.

- * **Regulate all Home-Based Child Care Businesses.**
 - o **Reason:** Ohio ranks 45th in the nation in the provision of health and safety protection for the hundreds of thousands of Ohio's children in unregulated home-based child care.

- * **Adequately fund Step Up to Quality and TEACH (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) to increase the quality of early learning for all children.**
 - o **Reason:** The early years set the foundation for all future learning, yet Ohio requires only a high school diploma to teach children before they enter kindergarten. Step Up to Quality and TEACH will lead to increased education and quality in child care programs.

- * **Strengthen the quality of Help Me Grow by increasing the number of visits per child for at-risk families while adequately funding the program to meet current targets.**
 - o **Reason:** Intense quality home visitation can produce remarkable outcomes including 95% of children are developing normally in terms of language skills and 86% of mothers are involved with work and/or school.



ECONOMIC SECURITY:

All Southwest Ohio working families will be able to make ends meet and provide adequate food, clothing and shelter for their families. In our region, poverty is concentrated in rural and urban pockets. Poverty in the City of Cincinnati is alarmingly high with one in four below the federal poverty line.⁴

⁴ The United Way of Greater Cincinnati (2006) The State of the Community: A Report on the Socio-Economic Health of the Greater Cincinnati Region., Second Edition, November 2006.

ACTION ITEMS FOR 08-09 BUDGET:

- * **Increase the monthly TANF cash assistance grant so, when combined with an increase in the Earned Income Disregard, no TANF recipient will lose assistance until their income rises above the poverty level.**
 - o **Reason:** 18% of Ohio's children live in poverty. In 2001 the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Ohio was \$591 per month. A typical family of three receives \$410 a month in cash assistance.
- * **Institute a 15% state refundable Earned Income Tax Credit.**
 - o **Reason:** In 2002 the average state and local tax burden on the poorest fifth of married, non-elderly families was 11.4% of their income. By contrast, the average burden on the wealthiest 1% of such families was 7.3% of their income.⁵



⁵ Every Child Succeeds Year End Report 2005

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS:

United Way of Greater Cincinnati
Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center
Success by 6
Talbert House
4C for Children
Center for Families and Children
Cincinnati Health Department
Winton Hills Medical and Health Center
Voices for Ohio's Children
Hamilton County Educational Service Center Early Learning Program
Hamilton County Job and Family Services
Greater Cincinnati Oral Health Council
Central Clinic



Child Policy Research Center
Family Service of Cincinnati Area
Every Child Succeeds
NORCEN Behavioral Health Systems