



Children's Advocacy Institute

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CHILD ADVOCATES CHALLENGE THE GOVERNOR: MATCH THE INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN OF OUR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

The Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI), a non-partisan academic center and statewide advocacy group based at the University of San Diego School of Law, today released data revealing the percentage of personal income publicly invested in children by our parents and grandparents one generation ago. In 1980-81, Californians publicly invested 6.35% of their personal income in children; in the 1999-2000 budget, Californians are spending 5.37% on children, almost \$10 billion less than what would have been invested at the 1980-81 rate. CAI Executive Director and University of San Diego School of Law Professor Robert Fellmeth notes, "our parents and grandparents made a greater investment despite a much lower standard of living, a sacrifice largely responsible for our current affluence." During 2000-01, California will have to spend \$64.3 billion on children to match the commitment of our predecessors. CAI asks the Governor to do so, and to include CAI's "Children's Budget" recommendations in his January proposed state budget.

According to Fellmeth, "the disparity in these numbers represents the legacy of both Proposition 13-which favors older homeowners-and twenty years of tax credits and deductions, mostly for the middle class and wealthy, which have shredded the general fund upon which children rely. Unlike the spending on children, these sums, now at \$28 billion annually, are not examined each year, but rather continue automatically unless affirmatively ended, which only happens on a 2/3 vote of the Legislature."

CAI today re-released its Children's Budget 1999-2000 recommendations, which lists the major accounts and areas where serious additional investment is needed. Originally proposed by CAI in June 1999, virtually none of the recommendations were incorporated into the 1999-2000 state budget. CAI asks that these investments be included as part of the Governor's 2000-01 budget proposal. The recommendations deserving high priority include: (1) a substantial public campaign on the rights of children to be intended by two parents, and on the reality of child support obligation; (2) parenting education- including a campaign specifically aimed at young men; (3) measures to move the working poor into self-sufficiency, including seamless child care and a state earned income tax credit; (4) the genuine roll-out to scale of eight effective children's programs almost always funded at "boutique" public relations levels (e.g., foster care upgrade, adoptions reform, truancy prevention, school technology, and delinquency early intervention); (5) a "presumptive eligibility" format for Healthy Families coverage to assure success and the use of federal monies; and (6) the beginning of two major investments in education-one to reduce class size throughout K-12, and one to increase enrollment capacity for vocational, community college, and university education necessary for future jobs.

Fellmeth contends that "the California State Budget for 2000-01 will be a major test of this generation's commitment to its children. Nationally, the Republicans propose to take the \$1 trillion in projected budget surplus funds over the next decade, and lower inheritance taxes for the wealthy, and provide benefits for middle class adults. The President's counterproposal is to spend 88% of it on three accounts: medicare, social security, and private pension subsidies. Our senior citizens, today's adults in a few years, would take almost all of it." CAI Senior Policy Advocate Kathy Dresslar asked, "Will the 'bridge to the 21st century' the President refers to be open to our children to pass through?"

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California has been near the bottom of the nation in many indices of child commitment: classroom size, uninsured children, child poverty, test scores, child abuse reports. The state's record of private dedication to children includes a continuing 32% unwed birth rate (over 80% of which involves adult women) and the extraordinary child poverty associated with it. Male dedication remains at a low ebb. The 4 million children owed child support by absent fathers outside of family court receive an average of \$23 per month per child in assistance. Surveys have found that over half the children born today are not intended by their parents. Fellmeth contended: "That single change in adult private behavior, marrying and intending the children we create, would help children more than anything the state can do."

But CAI pointed to the state's role in carrying the message of private responsibility, its role as a backstop safety net and reliance on it for education opportunity. The group contends that the 1999-2000 budget failed to add appreciable new investment in children. Dresslar noted that "only ¼ of 1% was added to K-12 above the bare minimum required constitutionally in the current year; California remains in the bottom 10 in per pupil school spending; and the state is not moving strongly to reduce class in grades 4 through 12, notwithstanding evidence that it makes a difference." Fellmeth emphasized: "Perhaps most important, the state is not increasing higher education slots enough to accommodate the job demands of the next century. It is not even matching straight population increases from 1990. Our nation's niche is not on assembly lines or on farms, but in technical services. That means higher education for almost all of our youth, from vocational to university. But we are not shifting toward it."

CAI presented for the 2000-01 state budget a supplemental children's budget consisting of the additions which the legislature failed to add in the current year, including \$7.6 billion above last year's spending to invest in children. Fellmeth noted, "Due to population and inflation increases, that amount should be just over \$8 billion now."

The Governor has acknowledged the unexpected \$4.3 billion from the continuing recovery in May of last year. He suggested that we cannot afford increases which "add to the base" in case there is a downturn. Dresslar responded: "So let's be clear. If we do not have the funds to invest, we must sacrifice and children must wait. If we do have the money we cannot spend it because we may lose it in the future." Fellmeth added: "This timeless rationalization forgets a central fact: these children are our base. That rejoinder is not a catch-phrase, but a simple truth. The base of state resources comes from the taxation of our citizens, depending upon their health, skills, and employability. Our children will be feeding the base, or not, depending on our investment decisions now."

Reprinted below is the unadopted Children's Budget for 1999-2000. CAI asks that children be included in 2000-01 at least at the levels undertaken a generation past.