



VOICES & CHOICES for children

Voices and Choices for Children Coalition 2017 Legislative Agenda

Voices and Choices for Children is a coalition that works closely with Minnesota's Children's Cabinet, state ethnic councils, state agencies, early childhood funders, non-profits, community-based organizations, early childhood advocates and parents representing communities of color and American Indian communities across the state. Our coalition focuses on developing strongly engaged cultural communities of learning, organizing and advocacy for their, input, and impact in shaping more equitable practices and policies that will support better outcomes for children of color and American Indian children prenatal to 8 years old across the state. We believe that people of color and American Indians must be at the table as policies are created and decisions made about and for our children.

The coalition prioritizes the voices of organizations, advocates and parents of color and American Indians working across early childhood sectors to more meaningfully engage and empower communities of color and American Indians—many of whom have traditionally been under-served by the existing early childhood education and child-development infrastructure.

Working with the Voices and Choices for Children full coalition, the Voices the Choices for Children Steering Committee has endorsed the following three issues as our lead legislative priorities for the 2017 Minnesota State Legislative Session.

Increased Investments in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

Affordable, accessible child care helps advance opportunity for communities of color and American Indian communities. It is a two-generation approach to broader family economic security because it helps parents to work and children to succeed. More than half of Minnesota's increase in child poverty can be accounted for by the increase in black child poverty. In addition to the rising level of poverty for children of color in Minnesota, children of color and American Indian children disproportionately represent the majority of children enrolled in CCAP— more than 60%.

To address these child care accessibility and affordability issues, the Voices and Choices for Children Coalition recommends the following:

1) Increasing the CCAP provider reimbursement rate to the 75th percentile, to allow parents access to identify child care that's culturally responsive, meets their needs and is within their budgets. Increasing reimbursement rates also allows providers to better afford to serve CCAP families.

2) Fully funding/forecasting the CCAP Basic Sliding Fee to ensure every eligible family can access it, including the 5,000+ families currently on the waiting list.

3) Improving our child care system and making it more family friendly by implementing and funding the Child Care and Development Fund Re-authorization provisions.

No Mandatory BA Degree Requirements for Early Childhood Teachers and Providers

Our coalition believes that mandatory BA degree requirements for early childhood teachers and providers, without the appropriate infrastructure supports, will create a systemic barrier for both teachers and providers of color and American Indian teachers and providers. This measure will hurt efforts to diversify the early childhood education work force by driving these providers out of the field. This requirement would lead to decreased options for families of color and American Indian families to have providers that reflect their ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity.

This requirement will create a systemic barrier because: salaries in early childhood education have not gone up, commensurate to the cost of the educational requirement proposed; for many teachers and providers of color, who have a degree in a country other than the US, it may leave their experience and previous educational background out; it assumes that providers have family configurations or life circumstances that can support them and this educational requirement – particularly subsidizing the cost of the education through family and economic support. It would also put providers in greater Minnesota at a distinct disadvantage due to the geographic challenges providers will face in attending an institution of higher learning within a reasonable distance from their work, community and home.

To address the systemic barriers that requiring licensure and a BA degree for early childhood teachers and providers would cause, the Voices and Choices for Children Coalition recommends:

1) To ensure no mandatory BA or licensure degree requirement for early childhood teachers and providers is included in any Minnesota state legislation.

2) To focus on creating targeted support and preparation programs ready and able to help teachers and institutions working with early childhood students and professionals of diverse backgrounds.

Establish Community Solutions Fund for Healthy Child Development

For decades, organizations who are from and serve communities of color and American Indian communities have been underfunded, restricting the ability of these communities to self-

determine their needs. This is a crisis of racial equity for our youngest Minnesotans and their families. Our state must increase support for the healthy development of children of color and American Indian children from prenatal to 3rd grade. Each community is unique and will require different solutions to move them forward, and this innovation will come from the creativity, knowledge, and passion of the community, rather than a one-sized fits all, cookie cutter approach.

Currently, the state does not possess mechanisms to support initiatives that are smaller scale, innovative, and community driven. Communities need access to flexible funding streams to disperse funds of varying sizes that they can use to build upon what they see working. Many of these programs will not have been formally evaluated, and while we need to invest in evidenced practices, we also need to invest in practice based evidence. That is why the Community Solutions Fund for Healthy Child Development represents more than money, it is also recognition that communities have invaluable knowledge, and must be active and valued participants within the creation of solutions for themselves.

To address underinvestment in community driven solutions, the Voices and Choices for Children Coalition recommends the following:

- 1) Establish a Community Solutions Fund for Healthy Child Development administered by the Minnesota Department of Health in consultation with a Community Solutions Advisory Council comprised of early childhood professionals, advocates and parents of color and American Indians from across the state. The purpose of the funds will be to improve measures of well-being for children and families of color and American Indians. The resources will be used to fund community based solutions for issues that are identified by and for the affected community.