



CELEBRATING IMPROVEMENTS IN INFANT-TODDLER POLICY: TOP 10 POLICY ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2009

Throughout 2009, ZERO TO THREE worked to keep you informed of important and innovative policy developments happening throughout the country. This past year included many historic ups and downs – new and energetic faces arrived in the White House, Congress, and state governments ready to move our nation forward, and we entered an economic recession that presented challenges for us all. 2009 also saw the birth of more than 4 million new babies in the United States, each of whom needs good health, a strong family, and positive early learning experiences to succeed. Despite the tight budgets in Washington, DC and state capitals, we all successfully worked together to advance and preserve policies that improve the lives of infants, toddlers, and their families.

This article highlights those policy achievements that recognize the role that we all play in supporting our nation's youngest children. We celebrate the accomplishments of Big Voices for Little Kids across the country and look forward to continuing our work in 2010!

Early Childhood Issues Make it to the Top of the Presidential Agenda

Beginning on the campaign trail, President Obama made his intentions to invest in our nation's youngest children very clear. Obama's [Zero-to-Five Plan](#), introduced originally as a campaign pledge and now a feature in the Administration's policy plans, focuses not only on increasing funding for early childhood services, but also increasing the quality of those services. Proposed reforms include improving the coordination of federal, state and local policies for young children, quadrupling the federal funding for the Early Head Start program, expanding home visiting programs for vulnerable families with young children, and providing challenge grants to states to improve early care and education programs. Less than a year into his term, President Obama's administration is actively working with the Congress to see these proposals come to fruition. Using vehicles such as the economic stimulus package, health care reform, and student loan reform, they have worked together to increase federal support for Early Head Start, child care, and early intervention, as well as challenge states to improve the quality of early learning settings for very young children. Additionally, the administration has created new positions dedicated to early childhood in both the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education, aiming to increase coordination of early childhood development programs and create a seamless transition for young children as they enter the K-12 school system.

California Voters Defeat Propositions to Reduce Early Childhood Funds

When faced with a proposition to significantly reduce state funds dedicated to early childhood and mental health services in May, Californians resoundingly voted in favor of very young children. Proposition 1D, which would have redirected a portion of the [First 5](#) early childhood

development funds to the state's general fund for 5 years, as well as make permanent programmatic changes, was defeated by a vote of 66% to 34%. Proposition 1E, which would have temporarily redirected mental health funds to the general fund, was defeated by the same margin. Both propositions were included in the state's budget agreement in an effort to close to the gap of a growing deficit. While budget cuts were seen in other services and programs that support young children and their families, voters made it clear that early childhood development remains a priority.

Economic Stimulus Package Includes Significant Funding for Infants and Toddlers

Recognizing that investing in young children is one of the best ways to improve our nation's economic health and ensure a brighter future for all, Congress included an unprecedented investment in [early childhood services](#) in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The legislation, signed into law in February, included significant funds targeted for infants and toddlers. Helping to fulfill President Obama's pledge to quadruple Early Head Start, the ARRA authorized \$2.1 billion for Head Start, \$1.1 billion of which was designated specifically for the expansion of Early Head Start. In addition, the package provided \$2 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), including \$255.2 million for quality purposes, \$93.6 million of which is dedicated to improving the quality of infant and toddler care. Finally, the ARRA included \$500 million for Part C early intervention services for infants and toddlers.

Illinois Passes Law to Increase Set-Aside for Infants and Toddlers

Even during a budget year that required a 10% cut to early childhood services, in August Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed a bill into law that will increase the portion of state early childhood funds dedicated to infants and toddlers. The [Illinois Early Childhood Block Grant](#), created in 1997, provides early, continuous, intensive and comprehensive evidence-based child development and family support services and preschool to help families prepare their young children under age five for later school success. The block grant has a mandatory funding set-aside for services for infants and toddlers, which will increase from 11% to 20% by FY 2015 as a result of the new law. This financing strategy links funding for children under the age of 3 to preschool funding, creating a more cohesive early childhood financing structure and enabling funding for infants and toddlers to grow as preschool funds grow.

Bipartisan Leaders Form Congressional Baby Caucus

To help ensure that infants and toddlers receive much needed policy attention at the federal level, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Congressman Denny Rehberg (R-MT) formed a [Congressional Baby Caucus](#) in May. The goal of the caucus is to educate members of Congress and their staff about the role federal policymaking plays in the healthy development of very young children, and advance federal policy change on behalf of infants, toddlers, and their families. The Baby Caucus, which currently consists of 37 Members of Congress, hosts regular briefings and public events on these issues, as well as works to secure broad co-sponsorship of infant-friendly policies and legislation. The Caucus's inaugural briefing was held in July and focused on the impact of military deployments on infants and toddlers. They hosted a second briefing in November to highlight how states are supporting the healthy development of very young children by providing comprehensive, coordinated systems of high-quality services. This briefing featured a keynote address by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, who spoke about the Administration's early childhood priorities and her experience in advancing early childhood initiatives as Governor of Kansas.

Kentucky Creates Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education

Seeing a need for increased coordination among services for young children birth through age 5, in February Kentucky Governor Steven Beshear established the [Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education](#) by executive order. The new task force is responsible for creating a unified vision for the state's system of early childhood development services. Specifically, they are working to make recommendations for coherent state-level management of the system, identify barriers to coordination among the state agencies and providers, and analyze the standards for early learning and assessments. The task force consists of 27 members from both public and private entities, including representatives from child care, advocacy organizations, state agencies, universities, school systems, and Head Start. It is co-chaired by the Secretary of the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet and the Secretary of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

The Early Learning Challenge Fund Seeks to Strengthen State Early Childhood Systems

Federal legislation to promote state early care and education systems for children birth to age 5 is currently moving its way through Congress. If passed, the [Early Learning Challenge Fund](#) (ELCF) would provide funding to help states reform standards for early learning programs, establish a high standard of quality across early learning settings, fund and implement quality initiatives, increase the number of disadvantaged children entering kindergarten ready to learn, and increase parents' ability to access comprehensive and high-quality early learning programs. Advocates and professionals across the country helped the legislation successfully clear many hurdles in Congress, resulting in its passage by the House of Representatives in September as part of the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2009. It now awaits further action in the Senate. The ELCF builds on President Obama's Zero-to-Five Plan that was put forth originally during his campaign and in his FY 2010 Budget Request.

Oklahoma Public and Private Partners Invest \$30 Million in Early Learning

In August, Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry demonstrated his commitment to his state's youngest children when he announced that he will dedicate \$15 million in stimulus funds to a new early learning initiative. Citing a desire to invest in projects that would have the greatest short-term and long-term benefits for the state, Governor Henry will use the new funds to create three high-quality early care and education centers for very young children in the Tulsa Public School district, serving as a model for future expansion in other areas of the state. The stimulus funds are drawn from the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, part of which allows governors to designate education funds at their discretion. The George Kaiser Family Foundation will provide matching funds, creating an initial \$30 million investment in the early learning initiative. Tulsa Public Schools will also allocate an additional \$2 million for operating costs. The new centers will deliver services similar to those of Educare, a comprehensive program model that aims to ensure that at-risk children arrive at school ready to learn, and will serve an estimated 600 at-risk infants and toddlers.

Congress Expands the Children's Health Insurance Program

Early in the year, Congress passed the Children's Health Insurance Program Act of 2009, which expanded the [Children's Health Insurance Program](#) (CHIP) to serve an additional 4 million children. The expansion is a step in the right direction in ensuring that the 1.4 million infants and toddlers without health insurance in our country get the coverage they need.¹ CHIP is a joint federal-state program that helps states provide health insurance coverage to uninsured children whose family income is up to 200 percent of the federal poverty line, or above that level with federal approval. The reauthorization of CHIP, signed by the President in February, also includes provisions for dental and mental health benefits for children, increased outreach and enrollment, and an option that allows states to remove the 5-year ban on the participation of legal immigrant children.

Washington Defends Funding for Evidence-Based Home Visiting Programs

Despite unprecedented budget challenges, including budget proposals that would eliminate all funding for child abuse and neglect prevention services, the Washington state legislature took a stand by preserving the [Council for Children and Families](#) (CCF) in the 2009 legislative session. Although the agency suffered a 30% decrease in overall funding, they will maintain their capacity to fund a diverse portfolio of home visiting programs proven to achieve outcomes related to child abuse and neglect prevention and early school readiness. In order to minimize the impact on communities, much of the funding cuts will be absorbed by the agency itself, allowing programs to continue to deliver services through a lesser 5% decrease in funds. In addition to the legislature's commitment to prevention, the preservation of CCF was also due to the work of the statewide Home Visiting Coalition. The coalition, consisting of providers, funders, advocates, and supporting agencies, worked with other family support and early learning partners to successfully maintain CCF and minimize funding cuts in 2010-2011 for families with young children.

CONCLUSION

Looking back, 2009 has clearly been a year to celebrate! The policies highlighted here are only a few of the many things achieved by Big Voices for Little Kids this year, yet they demonstrate our ability to bring about meaningful change for very young children when faced with significant challenges. There is much to be learned from these accomplishments as we look toward the new year and prepare for the opportunities and challenges it will undoubtedly bring. In 2010, we look forward to working together to continue improving policies for infants, toddlers, and families!

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¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Table H108: Health Insurance Coverage Status and Type of Coverage by Selected Characteristics for Children Under 18: 2007." In *U.S. Census Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement*. U.S. Census Bureau, 2008, www.census.gov.