

CWLA Legislative Agenda—2004

FEBRUARY 2004

Dear Friend of Children:

During this election year, as the nation engages in debate regarding the role and functions of government, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and our nearly 1,100 member agencies believe that ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of all children is paramount. We know that shortchanging our children today endangers the long-term well-being of our nation. We invite you—we need you—to join us in the fight to make children a national priority.

Achieving our goal of making children a national priority will not happen without confronting many challenges and overcoming obstacles, but we are ready for the challenge. We have the vision. We are taking action. We are seeking results.

Reflective of our efforts to meet this challenge, CWLA's top legislative priority for 2004 is a call for real reform of the child welfare system. The child welfare system's thousands of dedicated workers and child-serving agencies in every state and community are on the front line every day battling to protect children and keep them safe. Yet they are struggling to do so without the tools and supports necessary for this vital work.

This past year, newspapers nationwide graphically depicted the breakdown in protecting our children from abuse and neglect and supported the case for immediate congressional action. CWLA is ready and willing to work with Congress on real reform of this nation's child welfare system.

Real reform and new investments will improve the lives of all children.

Real reform means providing reliable, flexible, responsive, and predictable guaranteed funding for a full range of essential services, from prevention and early intervention programs to the residential care and intensive treatment needed by many of the children and families we serve.

Real reform means rejecting efforts to cap funding available to the states and providing direct access to child welfare funding for tribal governments.

Real reform includes a consistent focus on safety, permanency, and well-being as outcomes for children; elimination of disproportionate representation of children of color involved with the child welfare system; rigorous standards with strong federal and state accountability; and recruitment and support of trained child welfare professionals, foster and adoptive parents, mentors, and community volunteers.

With direct input from our membership, this CWLA 2004 Children's Legislative Agenda is our blueprint for making children a national priority and achieving these goals. This year, CWLA will actively seek to advance legislation to better the lives of children and families by urging Congress to take immediate action on key legislation:

- Reform the child welfare system.
- Strengthen substance abuse and mental health prevention and treatment for children and families in the child welfare system.
- Create new opportunities for positive youth development.
- Expand access to child care.
- Improve supports for children and families under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

These and other critical legislative initiatives are outlined in the 2004 Children's Legislative Agenda. But this is not a comprehensive list of all the legislative issues we plan to address. Throughout the year, CWLA examines all legislative avenues and opportunities to ensure the needs of children, youth, and families are addressed nationally and internationally.

CWLA's mission to preserve, protect, and promote the well-being of all children is ambitious and challenging. But for those of us who are committed to making children a national priority, our vision of an America where every child is healthy, safe, and nurtured can be realized. By working together, we can have an America where no child is abused or neglected and every child achieves his or her full potential as a positive, contributing member of a family and community and of society.

Please contact Liz Meitner, Vice President of Government Affairs, at 202/942-0257 or emeitner@cwla.org, or visit CWLA's advocacy website at www.cwla.org/advocacy for more information.



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