



# THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE

**I**n the fall of 2007, CWLA called for a re-establishment of the White House Conference on Children and Youth in 2010. Despite being the oldest White House Conference (President Theodore Roosevelt presided over the first conference in 1909) no Conference on Children and Youth has been held since 1970. To be clear, we are not calling for a gathering at the White House, but a two-year process identical to previous Children and Youth's conferences and the White House Conferences on Aging.

With enactment of the Fostering Connections Act, the current recession, and the start of a new Administration and new Congress, this call is even more important.

Like the Aging conferences, the process begins with Congress passing legislation that sets up a policy committee. The President issues the call, which sets the date. The committee sets an agenda with public input. It holds a series of mini-conferences to address a range of key issues in the year before the actual conference. Most importantly, the policy committee sets the parameters for state and local groups to hold their own meetings to shape that agenda and address some of the most vital issues confronting their communities.

Some argue that a White House Conference on Children and Youth would be a show or a media event. Others argue that it could delay any new legislation; still others will say that the call is too narrow. It is none of these. It will involve serious discussions across the country involving key partners and stakeholders. It will encourage new legislation that can improve the lives of children and families, and it will bring to light all the challenges children and their families face every day: issues of neglect, poverty, and barriers to families and children.

Imagine bringing together key experts, partners, foundations, faith-based and nonprofit organizations, state and local governments, and families, children, and youth to address the problems in their communities and states. Topics would include:

- preventing child neglect and child abuse;
- improving access to needed health care and mental health services;
- navigating courts and the legal system;
- utilizing the nonprofit community and faith-based community;
- securing housing;
- combating poverty;
- receiving quality education;
- accessing critical family services like child care and early childhood education;
- implementing services that can begin to address disproportionality;
- intensifying teen pregnancy prevention;
- increasing collaboration between states, cities, and local community leaders;
- facilitating cooperation between agencies, and the involvement of foundations; and
- solving the biggest problem in your community, city, or state.

We call on the new President and new Congress to convene the next conference in 2010.