



March 14, 2008

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison
United States Senate
284 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Hutchison:

As an organization dedicated to improving the lives of children, we are writing to ask for your support of the State Child Well-Being Research Act (S. 1482). This bill and the companion legislation HR 2477, would provide critical information on how Texas' children are doing, allow policy-makers to more effectively analyze how programs are working on the ground, and determine what steps are needed to improve them. Both bills have bipartisan support.

In order to make informed decisions about where we should invest our limited public resources, we need accurate, timely, and reliable data about Texas' children and whether or not current programs are providing them with the assistance they need.

As the home of the Texas KIDS COUNT Project, the most comprehensive source of data on the well-being of Texas children, we certainly recognize the necessity of valid, reliable, current, and relevant child data and, therefore, enthusiastically support S. 1482. This data collection must be supported at the national level both because states do not have the resources or technical expertise to carry out such a survey and because we must ensure that the data is comparable across states.

While there are currently some surveys that provide limited information on child well-being in states, major gaps exist in the data. A recent analysis by Child Trends shows that national surveys do not have adequate sample sizes for most state-level analyses, and that state-level surveys are patchy and inconsistent. You can find that analysis, along with other useful information about the bill, at www.childindicators.com.

The State Child Well-Being Research Act will help fill these gaps by expanding the existing National Survey of Child Health. Senators Rockefeller and Snowe introduced S. 1482 in order to provide much needed data on the condition of America's children in all 50 states, as opposed to the small number of states currently assessed on a narrow range of topics. Data would be collected on a rolling basis, with key information available every year and subgroup data every two years.

A small investment in this kind of data will enable states and the federal government to use their money more wisely and target resources where they are most in need. The proposed survey would fill in significant gaps, at both state and national levels, on data about children's social, emotional and civic development, peer influences, engagement in school and family well-being.

A state-level survey is a valuable and cost-effective investment for many reasons:

- **Federal policymakers will have better data to evaluate program impact and guide them in allocating increasingly scarce federal resources to improve child well-being.** The data will provide evidence of program successes, allowing decision-makers to adjust policies based on the data. Because the data will provide timely, meaningful data on the well-being of children in all fifty states, across a wide range of child indicators, federal policymakers will have a much better picture of how children are doing and where the most pressing needs are.
- **States and federal policymakers will have timely, accurate, state-specific information about child well-being.** The proposed survey would collect data every two years and would be accessible to state and federal policymakers just four months after data collection. And because data on many different indicators will be collected about the same child, for the first time policymakers will have a cumulative picture of how children are doing—which children are doing very well, or very badly, across all these indicators.
- **States will be able to make informed decisions on a number of programs.** Comprehensive state-level data on child and family well-being would help states monitor a variety of programs:
 - **Child Care** – Data on how parents perceive the quality of child care in different age groups can help guide policy decisions on investing in child care funding.
 - **Work Requirements** – Data on how much time children spend in child care can guide state policymakers in setting hourly work requirements that move parents into the workforce, while allowing them to be effective parents.
 - **Health** – Data on child health and health insurance will help state policymakers determine whether insured children in the state are healthier and/or receive more preventive care than uninsured children.
 - **Fatherhood** – Data on child contact with non-custodial parents could help improve fatherhood programs.
 - **Family Supports** – Data on family structure and child well-being can help inform proposals to support families.

If Congress adopts the state-level data approach we are supporting, a proposed public/private partnership will make it an even more valuable resource. The Annie E. Casey Foundation and others have offered to invest at least \$1 million a year to train and provide technical assistance to state officials and policy analysts. Their commitment will ensure that the data will be understandable, accessible, and will become an excellent tool to increase child well-being in Texas.

We appreciate the commitment you have shown in the past to ensuring a bright future for Texas' children. We urge you to continue this work by becoming a cosponsor the State Child Well-Being Research Act. If we can provide any additional information, please let us know.

Sincerely yours



F. Scott McCown
Executive Director



Frances Deviney, Ph.D.
Texas KIDS COUNT Director