

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Support Child Well-Being and Data Driven Policy

June 18, 2009

Dear Colleague,

Every state needs timely, accurate information on the well-being of children. In too many cases, however, this data does not currently exist. To address this need, we have introduced H.R.2558, the State Child Well-Being Research Act of 2009. We encourage you to cosponsor this important legislation.

This bill directs the Maternal and Child Health Bureau to expand its current National Survey of Children's Health to include a comprehensive range of child well-being indicators, including education, development, health and family composition. The data would be statistically reliable for every state, would include children from birth to 21, and would be collected and released annually, enabling policy makers to react promptly to developments such as the impact of our current recession on children in their state.

Over the past decade, the federal government has given the states far greater power to administer programs for children and families. In order to make informed decisions about where limited resources should be invested, states need accurate, timely and reliable data about their children, and whether or not the current programs are providing them with the assistance they need. We, as federal legislators, need this data in order to assure that we target our federal programs effectively and hold states accountable. The data collected through this legislation would help identify state and federal programs that are achieving great results, as well as show those where changes need to be made. It would help us better manage scarce federal and state resources.

Child Trends recently completed a study of the available state level data on child well-being. Their analysis shows that national surveys do not have adequate sample sizes to provide statistically significant data for most states, especially small states such as West Virginia, Maine, Rhode Island and Hawaii. While some state level surveys exist, the data they provide is very patchy, with large gaps. Program administration data for schools and programs such as Medicaid, SCHIP, TANF or child care provides information only on children in these programs, not on all children.

This new bill also includes an important study from the GAO which will help target state and federal programs to prevent children from falling through the gaps. The provision also requires GAO to investigate the alarming rate of death among unadopted children, information which will help us prevent future tragedies

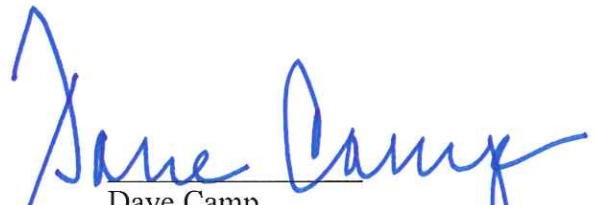
We know from both experience and research that children fare very differently by state. In order to ensure that states can make the best policy for children in their states, we need statistically significant data by state, comparable across states.

Please do not hesitate to contact Liz King in Congressman Fattah's office at Elizabeth.King@mailhouse.gov or 5-4001 or Brian Sutter in Congressman Camp's office at Brian.Sutter@mail.house.gov or 5-3561 if you have any questions or would like to be added as a cosponsor. In addition, information about this legislation and the need for statistically meaningful data at the state level is also available at www.childindicators.com.

Sincerely,



Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress



Dave Camp
Member of Congress