



Dear Representative Dean Heller:

As director of the Nevada KIDS COUNT project, which seeks to improve the lives and the futures of Nevada's children, we provide policymakers and citizens with the best available data on the educational, social, economic, and physical well-being of all children in our state. I am writing to ask for your support on an important bill that would significantly improve access to critical information about the condition of Nevada's children. Obtaining this information would allow policy-makers to more effectively analyze how programs are working on the ground and what steps are needed to improve quality of life for children in our state. It will greatly help us in the Silver State to implement data-driven improvements and avoid mistakes.

Representative Chaka Fattah is preparing to introduce The State Child Well-Being Research Act of 2009, which would expand the National Survey of Child Health. I urge you to cosponsor Congressman Fattah's legislation. Senator Jay Rockefeller will introduce companion legislation in the Senate. As a member of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, I am hopeful that you can lend your voice to this important issue.

As you know, 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 our limited resources should be invested, we need accurate, timely and reliable data about Nevada's children and whether the current programs are providing them with the assistance they need. Moreover, the U.S. government needs this information in order to assure that our scarce federal dollars are spent effectively.

A recent study of the available state level data on child well-being and studies of national surveys have shown inadequate sample sizes to provide statistically significant data on small- or medium-sized states such as Nevada. While some state level surveys do exist, the data they provide is very patchy, with large gaps. And program administration data for programs such as Medicaid, SCHIP, TANF or child care provides information only on children in the programs, not on all children.

The State Child Well-Being Research Act would expand the National Survey of Child Health and allow the collection and dissemination of important data in each and every state, rather than just the dozen or so feasible in the current SIPP program. Data would be collected on a rolling basis, so that key data would be available every year and subgroup data every two years. Data would be available to local, state, and federal policy-makers four to six months after collection. In Nevada, this data would be based on the experiences of about 1,800 families. It is estimated that this study would cost \$20 million a year.

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Furthermore, if Congress adopts the state-level data approach that we are supporting, it will be made even more useful because of a public/private partnership that has been proposed. The Annie E. Casey Foundation and other foundations have offered to invest at least \$1 million a year in order to train and provide technical assistance to state officials and policy analysts, thus ensuring that the data will be understandable, accessible and will become an excellent tool to increase child well-being in our state.

The information collected would serve Nevada's children and families. While the Maternal and Child Health agency experts would determine the actual questions included in the survey in consultation with other federal agency staff and outside advisors, some information that would be gathered includes:

- Children's health data, to help guide decisions on how to best invest in improving children's health outcomes;
- Identification of children who are eligible for public health insurance but are not covered in order to increase enrollment rates in SCHIP;
- Data on children's contact with non-custodial parents, which can be used to improve fatherhood programs;
- Family structure and child well-being data (which can be used to assess the effectiveness of marriage promotion efforts funded through TANF);
- Data on parental perceptions of child-care quality, accessibility, and affordability;
- Data on the amount of time children generally spend in child care, in order to guide decisions on hourly work requirements for families moving from welfare to work.

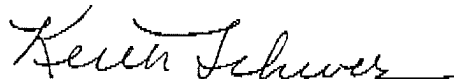
The growing federal debt and nationwide state funding shortfalls make it essential that policy makers have access to timely, high quality data to help ensure that every dollar spent goes to effective programs that provide real support to our most vulnerable populations.

Congressman Fattah's bill would help hard-pressed state policy-makers and administrations across the nation. A state-level cross-sectional survey would ensure samples sizes of about 1,800 households with children in each and every state, providing states with an invaluable resource to everyone concerned about the well-being of children and families.

I am hopeful you will support the State Child Well-Being Research Act. We look forward to continuing to work with you on behalf of our state, especially for children and youth who will inherit the future.

Thanks.

Sincerely,



Keith Schwer  
Director, Center for Business and Economic Research  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Home of Nevada KIDS COUNT