



The Independent Voice for Kentucky's Children

KENTUCKY
YOUTH
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*Rep. Davis -
We - along with other
many NKY partners -
appreciate your long standing
commitment to children.
Jy*

Wednesday, April 13, 2011
Representative Geoff Davis
1119 Longworth
House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
By Fax (202) 225-0003

Dear Representative Davis:

As executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, an organization dedicated to providing a strong, powerful voice for children, youth and families in Kentucky, I am writing to ask for your support on an important bill that would significantly improve access to critical information about the condition of Kentucky's children. Obtaining this information would allow policymakers 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.

Representative Chaka Fattah is planning to introduce The State Child Well-Being Research Act of 2011, which would expand the National Survey of Children's Health. In the last two Congresses, the bill had a number of sponsors from both parties. Rep. Dave Camp was the leading Republican co-sponsor in the past but has declined to introduce the bill this year because of his new role as Chairman of Ways and Means. I urge you to cosponsor this legislation and to consider including it in bills that come before you. Senators Jay Rockefeller and Olympia Snowe are expected to introduce companion legislation in the Senate.

As you know, beginning with the creation of TANF in 1997 the federal government has given the states far greater power to administer programs for children and families. In order for Kentucky policymakers to make informed decisions about where limited resources should be invested, they need accurate, timely and reliable data about Kentucky's children and whether the current programs are providing them with the assistance they need and delivering anticipated outcomes. Moreover, the U.S. government needs this information in order to assure our scarce federal dollars are spent effectively.

We rely heavily on the National Survey of Children's Health for our work on child obesity, physical activity, child safety in schools and neighborhoods, and child mental and oral health. The biggest challenge for our organization is not having timely data and citing four-year-old data instead. This makes it difficult to gauge the extent of issues facing Kentucky children and to monitor whether conditions are improving. It also leads to policymakers and communities understandably being skeptical of problems, since we do not have current data to analyze and share. In addition to health data, program administration data for programs such as Medicaid, SCHIP, TANF or child care provides information only on children in those programs - the data do not capture children who are eligible for but not enrolled in those programs, nor children in families who need assistance but fall just outside eligibility thresholds.

This bill would build upon an effective existing survey, the National Survey of Children's Health, to provide the data that state policymakers need. Currently, that survey is conducted every four years and primarily focuses on children's health. It does provide statistically significant data on every state, including Kentucky. The State Child Well-Being Research Act would expand the National Survey of Children's Health. 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 six months to a year after collection. In Kentucky, this data would be based on the experiences of about 1,800 families. This study would cost \$20 million a year.

Furthermore, if Congress adopts the state-level data approach we are supporting, it will be made even more useful because of a proposed public/private partnership. The Annie E. Casey Foundation and other foundations have offered to invest significant funds in order to train and provide technical assistance to state officials and policy analysts, thus ensuring the data will be understandable, accessible and, most importantly, utilized as a tool to increase child well-being in our state.

The information collected would guide Kentucky decisions not just on programs for low-income residents, but also on a wide range of other programs serving Kentucky'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 could be gathered includes:

- Identification of the characteristics 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; and
- A direct survey of adolescents (with parental permission), providing the kind of information that parents do not have about their teens.

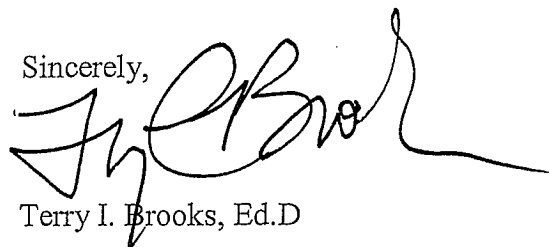
The growing federal debt and nationwide state funding shortfalls make it essential that policymakers have access to timely, high quality data to help ensure that every dollar spent goes to effective programs that provide real support to our most vulnerable populations.

The National Conference of State Legislatures recently unanimously endorsed this bill, which would help hard-pressed state policymakers and administrations across the nation.

We are hopeful you will support The State Child Well-Being Research Act. More information about the bill can be found at www.childindicators.com, or you can contact Tara Grieshop on my staff at 502-895-8167 or tgrieshop@kyyouth.org. Elizabeth King, in Representative Fattah's office, is responsible for managing new sponsors. She can be reached at Elizabeth.King@mail.house.gov or 202-225-4001. We look forward to continuing to work with you on behalf of our state.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Terry I. Brooks, Ed.D

Executive Director
Kentucky Youth Advocates