


*It's only fair
that each child
be cherished*  *Coritz*

Massachusetts Citizens for Children

BY FACISIMILE

July 10, 2009

Representative James McGovern
438 Cannon Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative McGovern:

Massachusetts Citizens for Citizens, our state's oldest child advocacy organization and the site of Massachusetts Kids Count, is writing to ask for your support on an important bill that would significantly improve access to critical information about the condition of Massachusetts 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 the quality of life for the children in our state.

Representatives Chaka Fattah and Dave Camp have introduced **H.R.2558 - The State Child Well-Being Research Act of 2009**, which would expand the National Survey of Child Health. We urge you to co-sponsor this legislation. Senators Jay Rockefeller and Olympia Snowe have introduced a companion Senate bill, S.1151.

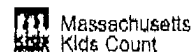
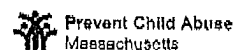
As you know, over the past decade the federal government has given the states far greater power to administer programs for children and families. In order to make informed decisions about where our limited resources should be invested, we need accurate, timely and reliable data about Massachusetts children and whether current programs are providing the assistance they need. Moreover, the U.S. government needs this information to assure that our scarce federal dollars are spent effectively.

14 Beacon Street
Suite 706
Boston, MA 02108
p: 617-742-8555
f:617-742-7808
www.masskids.org

Ron White Ph.D.,
President
Katharine Kane, M.Div., Th.
*Vice President for Income
Development and Finance*
Ilana Lescohier, Ph.D.
Vice President for Program
Carmen Durso, Esq.
Secretary/ Treasurer

Board of Directors
Frank Bashore, B.S.E.E.
Debbie Bing, M.A.
Laura Gold, Esq.
Richard A. Goodman, Ph.D.
Gordon Harper, M.D.
Claudia Iarbas, M.S.W.
Carole Kamin, Ph.D.
Beth Kassiola, J.D.
Diane Levin, Ph.D.
Michelle-Marie Mendez, Esq.
Charles Morin, M.D., M.A.
Thomas N. Trkla, M.A.
Charles Welch, M.D.

Jetta Bernier, M.A.
Executive Director



-2-

Unfortunately, for the most part, that data does not currently exist. Child Trends, the nation's only national research and policy center that conducts research and analyses data focused *exclusively* on improving outcomes for children, has conducted 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 on small- or medium-sized states such as ours. 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 policymakers four to six months after collection. We estimate that this study would cost \$20 million a year.

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 guide our decisions not just on programs for low-income residents, but also on a wide range of other programs serving Massachusetts 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:

- 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.

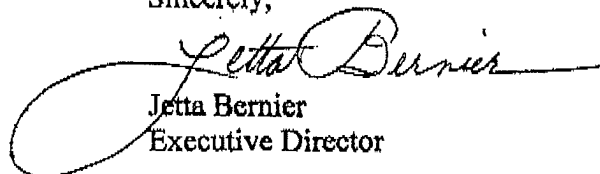
-3-

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.

We are hopeful you will support the State Child Well-Being Research Act. 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.

Many thanks for your consideration and for all your many efforts on behalf of Massachusetts children.

Sincerely,



Jetta Bernier
Executive Director