



In partnership, we come together both in-person and virtually today to share with legislators and staff, data and information to make impactful investments to end child poverty, increase access to child care, feed California’s children and lift up the needs of whole families.

California is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world. However, we also have over 5 million living in poverty with not enough income to meet basic needs. Child poverty has risen from 9% in 2021 to 13.8 % in 2023. Now is the time to continue building on the progress started during the pandemic to lift the very poorest amongst us by continuing to support them with meaningful access to child care so that parents can work, tax credits to help families pay for their barest of essentials, health care screenings and interventions so that resources can be delivered sooner to babies and children, and funding to address food insecurity so that no child ever has to go to be hungry. During the pandemic, progress was made to shore up some safety net programs with infusions of one-time federal and state dollars. However, there needs to be a strategic plan to protect the previous investments, replace one-time federal dollars with state dollars, make sure California is pulling down its full share of federal dollars, and invest more dollars to end the cycle of poverty. Therefore, we support the following:

**Poverty** is best addressed by the following proposals:

- **End Deep Child Poverty:** Ensure CalWORKs grants are at least 50% of the current year federal poverty level for all families.
- **Safety Net:** Continue to expand on the California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC) the Young Child Tax Credit. Get families the money they need so they don’t have to choose between keeping the lights on, putting gas in the car, or paying for food. Families are striving to escape extreme poverty; they know how to best spend their money; we can provide the boost for them to do it.
- **Comprehensive Housing Supports:** Increase overall housing availability and reduce evictions so that children and families don’t face the trauma and stress of homelessness, exacerbated by the pandemic.
- **Health Care Expansion:** Strengthen and expand community based and school-based health care clinics to meet families where they are so that they can get the comprehensive health care they need. Within an equity framework provide COVID vaccines in high needs communities and ensure health access for ALL families and children regardless of immigration status.
- **Coordination of Services:** Continue to improve the cost-effectiveness of programs that support families, focusing on community-based, collaborative, research-based solutions. Ensure that services can be easily accessed by families by streamlining systems. Within an equity framework, accessing comprehensive anti-poverty services should be made readily and easily available to families who have been struggling to navigate complex public service systems.
- **Support Guaranteed Income:** All California families should have the basic income needed to house and feed their children.

**Child Care and Early Learning:**

- **Child Care Provider Rate Reform:** Honor the promise and commitment to develop a single rate structure and an alternative methodology that more adequately and equitably pays family child care providers and centers amounts that cover the true cost of providing care.
- **Fund Family Child Care and Centers:** Provide financial support to the full system of care – from birth through school age care – to support the mixed delivery child care system, inclusive of Family Child Care Providers, Head Start, California State Preschool and Community Based Centers, all of which offer full day and full year services that meet the diverse needs of families in California’s 24-hour seven days per week economy.

- **Fund a Robust Pipeline of New Child Care Workers:** Provide multi-year planning and funding to incentivize individuals to choose a vocation of providing child care in community base family child care homes and centers.
- **Honor promise of realizing 200,000 new additional child care slots** – Continue working to fully fund 200,000 new child care slots by 2026-27.
- **Support Stable and Continuous Child Care for CalWORKs Families:** Fund 24-month eligibility for families in CalWORKs in parity with other parts of California’s subsidized child care system.
- **Build Child Care Capacity:** Increase multi-year funding of the California Infrastructure Grant Program for minor and major renovations that support the build-up of the capacity to meet the needs of California’s families.

**Food insecurity:**

- **Every child should have access to nutritious food.** Ensure every eligible child is able to access CalFresh, school meals, and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). School meals should continue to be free for all students, and be served at times that students can access them, with enough time to eat, and with healthy food choices that are a cultural fit for the student population.
- **Access to nutritious meals.** Invest in a three-year backfill to continue providing meals to vulnerable families at summer meal sites and allow caregivers who are also food insecure access to meals.
- **Maximize Summer EBT benefits and grab-and-go meal options in the summer meal program to reach as many eligible children as possible.**
- **Strengthen School Meals for All by ensuring children have adequate time to eat and flexible options for schools to provide one meal on half days.**

**Other:**

- **No Wrong Door:** Support established Community Based Programs with funding and also flexibility to thread and blend partnerships focused on strengthening families, supporting families with supports wherever they access.
- **Voluntary Evidence-Based Home Visiting:** Continue to expand voluntary evidence-based home visiting programs statewide, so that these effective programs reach a greater share of eligible families.
- **Paid Family Leave:** California must put families first by ensuring leave is affordable and accessible for all types of families.
- **Stable Homes & Enduring Relationships:** California policymakers must ensure children and youth in foster care and their caregivers have access to the resources, supports, and services they need to build and maintain strong family relationships. The State must also work to ensure children and youth in foster care can remain safely with relatives and in their communities whenever possible. Policies must be implemented that maximize placement stability, avoid institutionalization, increase access to trauma-informed supports, and meet the needs of children in foster care in family-based settings, especially children with more intensive needs

Although we are nearing the end of the pandemic, California’s lowest income working moms and dads continue in a downward spiral unable to meet the most basic of needs for their children. Prior to the pandemic, poverty in California was in decline. However, since that time more Californians are living in or near poverty. Many of our lowest income families which are mainly headed up by single women and women of color have been unable to return to stable employment due to the uncertainty and inability to access child care. The above priorities make a meaningful investment in *human infrastructure*. To continue to weather the uncertainty of the future and to position families to either rise above the threat of poverty or to break through the cycle of poverty, it is critical that there be a commitment to protect the progress made as well as develop a longer-term strategy to permanently break the cycle of poverty.

***“A budget is more than just a series of numbers on a page; it is an embodiment of our values.”***

