



Children's Defense Fund-California

Policy Agenda 2021



Who We Are

Children's Defense Fund–California (CDF-CA) is the state office of Children's Defense Fund (CDF), a national child advocacy organization that has worked relentlessly for nearly 50 years to establish a level playing field for all children.

Born in 1973 out of the civil rights movement and under the leadership of our founder, Marian Wright Edelman, CDF challenged the country to raise standards and institutionalize equity, rather than racism, in policies and programs that affected poor children, who were predominately children of color. CDF's efforts have helped millions of Black, Indigenous and other children and youth of color fulfill their potential and escape the generational grips of poverty by helping them and their families receive the health care, child care, proper nutrition, nurturing and education they rightfully deserve.

Children's Defense Fund works towards and envisions a nation where marginalized children flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being and communities wield the power to assure they thrive.

Our Purpose

Guided by the experiences, voices and leadership of children, youth and families most impacted by racial and economic inequities, Children's Defense Fund–California addresses institutional policies and practices that cause disparities through research and advocacy. We develop, promote and enforce policies and programs that lift children and young people out of poverty, prevent their criminalization, and ensure their access to a quality and equitable education, and critical health and mental health care. CDF-CA works every day to change the systems, laws and practices that are historically racist and serve to perpetuate ruinous outcomes for poor Black, Brown and Indigenous children in California.



What's at Stake?

- 1 in 5 of California's children live in poverty (1.6 million). In addition, Black, Indigenous and other children of color experience poverty up to 3.2 times higher.
- Unpaid caregivers are overlooked by our systems and are not compensated for caring for young children. They are no-wage to low-wage earners and deserve to be compensated for their efforts.
- Approximately 40% of families cannot afford a \$500 emergency and approximately 53% of US households do not have savings for any emergency.*

What Are We Fighting For?

- The creation of a child allowance payment that provides economic resources to families with a more targeted approach for low-income families.
- The expansion of the Young Child Tax Credit from \$1 earnings to \$0 earnings so families who have dependents who are 5 years old and under can claim the credit.
- The distribution of unconditional direct cash payments to families who are in poverty or falling deeper into poverty. This would stabilize their incomes and support them by covering basic needs.

How Are We Doing It?

- Examining government systems that can distribute monthly payments, such as the Social Security Administration or our tax systems.
- Co-leading the California Earned Income Tax (CalEITC) Coalition to advocate for changes to the Young Child Tax Credit.
- Calling for the California State Franchise Tax Board to explore and create a mechanism to distribute recurring cash to individuals and families, including monthly disbursements of all state income support.

* Amy Castro Baker, Stacia Martin-West "Universal Basic Income is a Path to a More Just Economy," *The Appeal*, May 4, 2020, <https://theappeal.org/universal-basic-income-stockton-pandemic/>

What's at Stake?

- High-need students in public schools are not receiving the improved and increased services and interventions to which they are entitled. Public education is not yet fully and equitably funded, and the role of parents and families as partners has been neglected and dismissed.
- Armed law enforcement and security personnel make many students—especially Black students and other students of color—feel unsafe. Schools that serve Black and Brown students are more likely to have school-based police who can cite and arrest them rather than support staff who provide positive youth development programming.**
- Justice-involved students and others pushed out of school face barriers to learning such as trauma, exposure to violence, discrimination and education instability. Just one school change during high school can double a student's risk of dropping out.†

What Are We Fighting For?

- To democratize the development of school budgets and decision making processes by expanding the role of students, parents and community leaders to have greater power and oversight to determine spending.
- Divestment from school-based law enforcement activities that criminalize student behavior and result in citations, referrals or arrests. Redefine safety by investing in staffing and programming that promote the humanity and healing of students and racial justice.
- To strengthen local and state accountability mechanisms for county offices of education. Transform the alternative learning space into a robust process for youth to transition to comprehensive schools that have the capacity to serve them.

** Amir Whitaker et al "Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students," *ACLU*, 2021, https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf

† Joseph Gasper et al "Switching Schools: Revisiting the Relationship Between School Mobility and High School Dropout," *American Educational Research Journal*, June 1, 2012, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0002831211415250>

How Are We Doing It?

- Investigating the experiences of organizers and advocates working on local implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula to inform legislative changes to foster greater equity for high need students.
- Growing power and multi-racial solidarity through coalition-building with youth, parents and community groups advocating for racial justice and funding equity.
- Advocating to end funding for school-based law enforcement and security activities, and increase the staffing of counselors, social workers, nurses and transformative justice coordinators.
- Advocating for increased funding, monitoring and support for schools to provide high-quality and targeted learning interventions and wellness supports for Black students, English learners, system-involved students, students with disabilities and foster youth—especially during our COVID-19 recovery.
- Monitoring and enforcing students' education rights in comprehensive and alternative education through storytelling, data collection and improved government oversight.
- Supporting statewide legislation and local policies that further dismantle the school-to-jail track; collaborating with youth and parent leaders to shift the institutional culture of schools and districts toward promoting positive youth development and racial justice.



What's at Stake?

- California is experiencing widespread increasing mental health challenges for children and youth. COVID-19 has brought on extreme stress and social isolation and many children and youth are not getting the mental health care or preventative health care they need.
- Children of Incarcerated Parents (COIP) are largely unseen and their unique needs—including educational, health and emotional needs—are often overlooked. More than 500,000 children of incarcerated parents live in California.[‡]
- Between 2016 and 2019, the number of uninsured children in California increased by 30,000, and resources and services available to children on Medi-Cal have been threatened.

What Are We Fighting For?

- Access to high quality mental health services available to children and youth in their schools and communities, especially now during COVID-19 recovery. Families need culturally and linguistically competent health services in their neighborhoods and communities.
- Access to holistic trauma-informed services tailored to meet the needs of children of incarcerated parents and for government systems to create better mechanisms to identify and connect them to services.
- Improved access to health and mental health care needs for children—particularly poor, Black, Indigenous and other children of color—and assurances that children on Medi-Cal are provided quality services and without fear of deportation.

[‡] "Bay Area Children of Incarcerated Parents," accessed March 11, 2021 <https://www.baycipp.com>

How Are We Doing It?

- Advocating for programmatic efforts to integrate services, particularly mental and behavioral health for children and families in schools, head start/early head start and other community settings.
- Supporting the coordination of services and agencies working with children of incarcerated parents.
- Uplifting COIP children and families through convenings and meetings with policy makers and other leaders.
- Co-leading a statewide coalition on trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to encourage the development of policies and programs to prevent, screen and treat ACEs in children and youth.
- Working with local health navigators and assisters to address the increase of uninsured children and creating a climate of safety around Medi-Cal providers.



What's at Stake?

- Youth, particularly those who are Black, Indigenous and other children of color, are overcriminalized. In LA County, Black youth are 15 times more likely than white youth to be referred to the probation department for possible prosecution. Latinx youth are three times more likely.
- For far too long, state and local governments have prioritized funding of law enforcement in the name of public safety and divested from communities. LA County currently spends \$398 million to incarcerate approximately 450 youth.
- Conditions of confinement and law enforcement supervision have produced harm and trauma for decades. With minimal transparency and accountability, the system and its infrastructure have historically resorted to violence, neglect and dehumanization to “rehabilitate” our youth.

What Are We Fighting For?

- Creation and implementation of a new model rooted in youth development and healing and where incarceration, court sentences and supervision are no longer synonymous with justice.
- To redefine public safety and redirect taxpayer dollars to what we know works: healing centered supports provided by community-based organizations and access to quality educational, employment and other developmental opportunities.
- To hold the system accountable until it can be dismantled and push for policies and practices developed by system-impacted young people that value their humanity and potential.

How Are We Doing It?

- Collaborating with stakeholders to fulfill the recommendations within LA's Youth Justice Reimagined report.[§]
- Advocating with LA Police Commission to create accountability and processes to allow for the equitable diversion of youth from formal system contact.
- Partnering with LA's Department of Youth Diversion & Development.
- Implementing successful 2020 bill protecting the confidentiality of diversion records.
- Developing recommendations and mobilizing community for LA County meetings to reduce probation's budget and influence allocation of Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA), Division of Juvenile Justice realignment and Measure J funds.
- Statutorily amending the JJCPA to require equitable community representation in decision-making and the majority of funds go to non-law enforcement entities.
- Involvement in state legislation for realignment funds and advocacy around Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC)-administered funds.
- Advocating to ban chemical spray in juvenile facilities.
- Legislative and administrative advocacy for appropriate resourcing of the new California Office of Youth and Community Restoration and stronger oversight by the BSCC.
- Serving on LA's Probation Oversight Commission.
- Advocating for protections for incarcerated youth, including release and COVID-19 safety protocols.
- Eliminating financial barriers like program fees and phone calls while incarcerated that perpetuate system involvement.

[§] "Los Angeles County: Youth Justice Reimagined," *Hayward Burns Institute*, October, 2020, <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/150726.pdf>

DEAR LORD
BE GOOD TO ME
THE SEA IS SO
WIDE AND
MY BOAT IS
SO SMALL



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