

2020 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Focus: Policy priorities that will support our state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

NC Child urges state legislators to act swiftly to enact policies that will ensure the well-being of our state's children and their families, and help us all to recover as quickly as possible once the crisis is over.

While our state has certainly experienced challenging times before, we have never been asked to rise to a challenge of this magnitude. We are in a time of unprecedented danger, to our health and economy. Our state's legislative actions should be proportional to the dire challenge before us.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Recommendation: Enact a \$125 million *Child Care Emergency Economic Support Package*, put forth by the NC Early Education Coalition, to assure the availability of emergency child care and prevent the collapse of North Carolina's early education system.

Child care is an essential service for thousands of children and families, and is particularly crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding is needed now to ensure that (1) emergency child care can operate safely, and (2) the child care sector survives intact, so that North Carolina's parents are able to get back to work when this crisis passes.

HEALTH CARE

Recommendation: Cover North Carolina's uninsured quickly and efficiently by accepting the federal funds to expand the NC Medicaid program.

COVID-19 is unlike any health crisis our state and country has experienced before. Over a million people in North Carolina are facing a pandemic with no health insurance whatsoever. The financial impacts may be devastating for families, and for our hospitals and health systems.

The NC General Assembly has the power to cut the number of uninsured in half immediately, using federal funding. Expanding Medicaid now will bolster our health systems and families against this pandemic, and create a glide path towards economic recovery when this crisis is over. **This action would immediately unlock billions in federal funding to North Carolina's health systems to fight COVID-19 and promote economic recovery.**

HUNGER AND NUTRITION

Recommendation: Ensure that children and families are not hungry by appropriating emergency funding for food relief programs during this public health crisis.

Our state must ensure that pregnant women, infants, children, and parents with young children at home – have ready access to critical health and nutrition programs. Before this pandemic hit North Carolina, one in five children faced hunger on regular basis, and more than 800 babies died before their first birthday each year. Without access to nutritious food, the lives of tens of thousands of infants and children in North Carolina are at risk.

- **We urge the NC General Assembly to appropriate at least \$6 million to Feeding Carolinas and the state farmer's markets to ensure food banks can meet increased need.**

TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE

Recommendation: Enhance North Carolina's technology infrastructure to enroll and provide relief services virtually and efficiently. During this public health crisis, when person-to-person contact endangers the lives of children, families, and public employees, North Carolina's public agencies must be able to provide services virtually, including application and enrollment in life-saving programs. To achieve this goal, we urge the NC General Assembly to:

- **Allocate funding for NCDHHS** to strengthen the online application process for public benefit programs, by upgrading the NC FAST system.
- **Pass the FIBER NC Act.** Increase access to broadband internet by eliminating existing state restrictions on local government investments in broadband infrastructure.

FOSTER CARE

Recommendation: Allocate emergency funding to ensure the safety of the 12,000 children in the state's foster care system. Social distancing and school closures have increased stress and isolation for children in foster care, putting them at significantly increased risk of harm.

For each of the recommendations below, the NC General Assembly should direct NC DHHS to estimate the amount needed, and then to provide funding as quickly as possible.

- **Allocate funding to enable virtual child welfare visitation and virtual court hearings, including tools for social workers, children and families (including foster families).**
- **Keep children in stable foster care homes by allocating direct cash assistance for foster families who may be unemployed or unable to work due to school closures.** Federal stimulus checks are based on past tax filings, and foster families may not receive financial assistance reflecting the actual number of children in their care.