EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS

HEALTHY KIDS, FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES
Advocates for Children and Youth believes that Maryland’s children are the greatest gift it can give to the future. For this reason, our mission is to build a strong Maryland by advancing policies and programs to ensure children of every race, ethnicity, and place of birth achieve their full potential.

We gather and analyze data to understand the scope of inequities that our children and youth face. We are continuously invited into communities to get a proximate view by folks who experience inequities and negative policy outcomes the most. Oftentimes, these inequities have far reaching effects as they are caused by issues that interconnect and intersect. Therefore, our advocacy will reflect this reality and allow us to effectively address these issues as we introduce and support policies that ensure that every young person in the State has equitable access to resources and opportunities they need to thrive. Hence our theme, Equity for All Kids.

**WHY ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH MATTERS:**

We are the only statewide child advocacy organization that works to effectively address multiple interconnecting and intersecting issues through a racial equity lens. We will continue to do so in Maryland's 2020 General Assembly as we focus on legislation that promotes the following:

- **FAIR, UNBIASED TREATMENT**
  
  We will push for equitable treatment of all children and provide them with an opportunity to rebound.

- **ACADEMICALLY PREPARED YOUTH**
  
  We will advocate to ensure that all young people get the resources, education and supports they need to thrive.

- **POSITIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES**
  
  We will advocate for keeping childhood a positive experience as we address trauma and the fulfillment of the basic needs in life.

- **HEALTHY KIDS, FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES**
  
  We will push for policy and programs that support healthy and safe living, learning and working environments in all communities.
Removing the Poison: Eliminating the Exposure to Lead Paint

Even low levels of lead in the blood (3-5 µg/dl) “can damage the brain, leading to impaired memory and executive functioning skills.” Children of color are more likely to experience lead poisoning than white, non-Hispanic children.

Impact: Surveys from 2016 estimate that 15 to 22 million people across the country have lead water pipes. According to the Center for Disease Control, in 2016, approximately 500,000 children, ages 1 to 5 had blood levels at or above µg. However, as Child Trends points out, “no level of lead in the blood is considered safe.”

Need for legislation: Children who are lead poisoned are 7 times more likely to drop out of school and 6 times more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system. Given the racial disparities in who experiences lead poisoning, this is another driver of the racial disparities in educational outcomes and criminal justice system involvement.

What the legislation will do: ACY supports efforts to reduce our children’s exposure to lead and hold accountable the entities that are failing to ensure clean, healthy environments for our children.

Securing the Safety Net

Too many families do not have the supports they need to balance providing for their family with taking care of their family.

Impact: SNAP participation in FY2018 was 339,411 households in Maryland. In FY2016, that equaled 744,343 individuals. Sick and Safe Leave: prior to the legislation passing more than 700,000 workers and their families were forced to work when they were sick, send an ill child to school or daycare, or stay home and sacrifice much-needed income or worse, risk job loss. Paid Leave - Nationally, just 35% of private sector working women and 11 percent of private sector working men have paid leave. Across all employment types, nationwide only 22 percent of women and 9 percent of men are employed at worksites that offer paid maternity leave to all female employees. While FMLA might provide some guaranteed leave for employees at larger employment sites, because the leave is unpaid it does not guarantee that parents can afford to take advantage of the time.

Need for legislation: Access to healthy and nutritious food is vital for the development of children. Studies have shown that children with access to nutritious food exhibit fewer behavioral problems, can better participate in school, have better overall academic outcomes, and is fundamental for growth and development, particularly during early childhood years. While paid sick days protect children and families. For a typical family without paid sick days, just 3.5 sick days without pay is equivalent to losing an entire month’s grocery budget. Extensive research has been developed that shows how critical the first three months are for the development of a baby’s brain. Balancing work and parenthood, especially in those first few months, causes stress and anxiety for parent and child alike, and interrupts the critical bonding period. For this reason, having paid leave is vital and necessary.

What the legislation will do: Advocates for Children and Youth will defend Maryland’s assistance programs, including Sick and Safe Leave, and work to expand the safety net through adequate and equitable funding and expanding key programs.

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