

Putting Children First



This newsletter edition is the first under our new name, **Children First**.

For 40 years, Public Citizens for Children and Youth put children first. By packaging the organization's success and strength under the new name, we are issuing a directive,

setting a tone, and igniting a rallying cry for the next 40 years: Policy makers, politicians, and presidents – put children first!

But it's more than a name change; it's a fitting and timely recognition that the needs and new challenges of today require a stronger, focused effort.

Born in a city of so many firsts, **Children First** is leading the charge for children by considering all their needs and the many substantial risks and challenges they are forced to face in order to succeed. We know that generational poverty, structural racism, and lack of resources have created enormous barriers. When we put our children first, we tear down those barriers.

Children's issues are complex, especially in today's world, so it is fitting to adopt a name that cuts right to the point. In addition to COVID upending their lives, children and teens



Hundreds of children, including some from local early learning centers, joined in the fun at Game Day when Children First announced our name change.

are dealing with racism, violence, lack of access to quality education and health care, poverty, and immigration barriers. **Children First** is here to advance solutions to these problems.

Former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell was among the community leaders who enthusiastically endorsed the name change. "**Children First** is the right name for this storied organization as the region's most vocal and strategic advocate for kids. People want to give kids the best possible opportunities, but it takes an organization like **Children First** to make that happen."

Our new name succinctly describes our 40-year past and future of putting children first. Same strength and same commitment combined with new opportunities and a new name. **Children First**.

Four Decades of Success

Check out The History Project, an interactive website that reviews our 40 years of far-reaching accomplishments.

This interactive site documents the unmatched impact of PCCY/Children First with dynamic audio and visual elements highlighting our leading role in the movement. Check it out at pccyhistory.com.

Success For Our Future

Pennsylvania public schools got the largest state funding increase in state history this year. (See Policy Victories on page 2.) More children will now receive the resources they need to succeed in school and thrive in life. This victory did not happen by accident.

It happened because you joined **Children First** in pushing our lawmakers to put early childhood and K-12 education at the top of the state agenda. Your support gave us the resources to send a powerful and persuasive message to legislative leaders. We must build on this momentum and continue the progress!

This year, as you chose where to make your year-end donation, please support **Children First**. Help us build on a remarkable foundation of achievement so we can collectively be the architects of a full and promising future for Pennsylvania's children. Support **Children First** by making your year-end donation online childrenfirstpa.org/donate.



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Policy Victories



Big wins for kids in Harrisburg! PA public schools will get an infusion of \$350 million more, the **largest school funding increase in state history**. This breaks down to \$200 million spread across all 500 school districts, \$50 million more for Special Education, and \$100 million through Level Up.

The Level Up supplement allocates \$100 million through the Fair Education Formula to the 100 districts that have the fewest resources and **educate the children with the greatest needs**. This is the first year of Level Up, a proposal that garnered bipartisan support within weeks of being introduced.

Our youngest children also won big. For the 13th straight year, we secured **more funding for high quality pre-K**. The new budget

includes \$30 million in new funding to expand Pre-K (\$25 million) and Head Start (\$5 million) to thousands more children bringing state total for these important programs to \$311.5 million.

On the local level, Philadelphia's children will be getting some help. The creation of the **Philadelphia Youth Services Ombudsperson Office** – the first of its kind in the state – got the green light. This independent office will focus on investigating reports of abuse in residential or detention institutions. When sexually and physically abused youth in care cry out for help, their pleas are too often ignored. The Ombudsperson will give them and their families a trusted place to turn for justice. Council also approved **\$68 million in anti-violence spending** to support job placement, expand trauma and therapeutic services, and provide afterschool programs in areas hardest hit by Philly's disturbing gun violence. Distributing this money has been slow, and Children First continues to advocate for the funds to be put to good use now.

Girls With Options

Philadelphia's teen pregnancy rates are the highest in the state, and Black and Hispanic teen pregnancy rates in Philadelphia are four and six times higher than their White counterparts. For these girls, young motherhood makes it harder to reach future life and career goals.

With such disparity, it was time to examine why popular pregnancy prevention messages seemed to not be registering with Black and Hispanic girls. In partnership with Black female educators to design and lead the program, Children First launched a sex ed program in Philadelphia schools, Girls With Options.

The instructive findings from the program are laid out in *Informed and Empowered: Girls With Options Program on Family Planning for Black and Hispanic Female Teens*, available at childrenfirstpa.org/research.

One of the most shocking discoveries that came out of the program is that neither boys nor girls take responsibility for birth control. Girls expect boys to have condoms since condoms are easy to get and are thought to be a boy's responsibility; boys expect girls to be on birth control. But girls don't have a lot of information on the "what" or "where" of female contraceptives.

A powerful component of the Girls With Options program was helping girls think through their reproductive plan. Nearly every teen girl said they didn't want to become a mother until turning at least 21 but were stumped when asked how they intended to be sexually active but not become pregnant. And they knew less about long-acting reversible contraceptives like IUDs that could safely delay pregnancy for years. Fortunately, close to 600 girls and over 100 boys now have that life-changing information.

When we fail to give girls options, we rob them of opportunity. But with the information learned through the Girls With Options program, more teens will be able to make the right choices for themselves and their futures.

Sight Day

Another successful Sight Day! Nearly 300 children received free eye exams and glasses, and now have a brighter outlook on life.

Many of the Sight Day patients did have health insurance but their plans don't cover vision care; other kids didn't have any health insurance because of their immigration status. Vision care and glasses can be very expensive so thanks to this program – and the volunteers that make it possible – these children won't have to go through life struggling to read, see the board in class, or catch the ball on the field.



Winning Strategy



Children First has an ambitious five-year strategic plan to create significant change for children and teens, and we've already started putting it into action. Check out the full plan at childrenfirstpa.org/strategicplan2021.

Children and teens have been rocked by mental and emotional instability over the past 18 months, and schools and communities need help to give kids the support they need. A new Children First team member, Kathy Miller, Associate Director of Health Policy, is **EXPANDING ACCESS TO SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES** in Philadelphia. Kathy is collaborating with Philadelphia school districts to develop tools to help students struggling with anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems.

Affordable, quality child care is a burning issue everywhere. New and diverse voices must be at the decision-making table to effectively address the quality of care and staffing challenges. Our new Early Childhood Racial Equity Coordinator, Stephanie Blake, Ed.D., is heading up the creation of the **RACIAL EQUITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDER COUNCIL** to give diverse providers a platform to develop and give voice to policy solutions to problems like equity, affordability, and sufficient employee pay.

Youth leadership has flexed remarkable muscle in recent fights for racial equity and problems in our schools. Building on past Children First youth town halls, we are spearheading two exciting programs to empower youth voices.

JUSTICE IN EDUCATION is a hands-on leadership experience for emerging young leaders in 10th, 11th, and 12th grades in public schools. Justice in Education will teach students how to design and engage strategies to boost state funding for schools and use those skills to plan events, speak in public forums, and communicate with lawmakers.



Students at the William Penn School District – one of the plaintiffs in the fair funding lawsuit (see story on back page) – are launching **PENNDING FUNDS**, a 12-episode podcast covering disparities in education. Students are interviewing fellow students, teachers, and leaders to enlighten listeners on the pervasive problems caused by the state failing to meet its constitutional obligation of providing a “thorough and efficient” public education.

Children First is also building an **EQUITY COLLABORATIVE** among 14 suburban school districts, helping school district leaders assess racial equity in their schools and make improvements so all children have a quality education.

Parent voices are another important element of the strategic plan, which is why Inella Ray, our newly hired Director of Parent Advocacy & Engagement, is launching a **PARENT ADVOCACY INSTITUTE** that will train parents to be effective agents for change for their children, especially in the suburbs.

We are also actively working to build a powerful **FORCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD VOTERS**. Kyle McMillen, the new Early Childhood Education Civic Engagement Coordinator, will be working to deliver election engagement advocacy tools to parents of young children. As standalone programs, these are powerful programs. Together they will be a gamechanger for kids for years to come.

Donor Salute

Carleton Lee has been a steadfast advocate for children throughout his lifetime, and Children First and our region's children are better as a result. As a long-term Board member, he helped build Children First into the robust organization we are today. Now through a generous legacy gift, he will be ensuring our success far into the future.

"Children First came to mind when I was thinking about my legacy in Philadelphia," he said. "You have always been a favorite organization of mine and continue to be to this day because you are the premier child advocacy group in our region and God knows we need it!"

Mr. Lee has let us know that Children First is included in his will and we are honored. Legacy gifts are so important to the health and longevity of non-profit organizations like ours and by documenting his intentions, he is ensuring his wishes will be carried out. We are doubly pleased that he told us about this gift so we can celebrate him and his generosity now.

Mr. Lee's leadership and generosity are making a difference for today's children. His legacy gift will benefit children for years to come. For more info on legacy gifts contact Caroline King at carolinek@childrenfirstpa.org.



Court Is In Session



After seven years of fighting for fair education funding, Pennsylvania's students will finally have their day in court. That day is **November 12, 2021**. For decades, Pennsylvania has been neglecting its constitutional obligation to provide every child a "thorough and efficient" education. Pennsylvania ranks 45th in state share for education, putting the heavy tax burden on local districts to fill the \$4.6 billion void, leaving poorer district insufficiently funded. Black, Hispanic, and low-income students suffer disproportionately.

The plaintiffs in the case are specifically asking the court to declare that the current funding system doesn't comply with the state constitution, order the state to stop funding schools through the Hold Harmless system, and order the state to create and maintain an equitable school funding.

The trial will last for at least two months. Because of COVID safety protocols we can't be in the courtroom, but we can still come together to watch this extraordinary trial. Register for one of the Watch Party at <https://bit.ly/FFLWatchParty> dates and witness history in the making. You can also harness the enthusiasm around the court case and register here to bring a small group or organization to Harrisburg for rallies or legislative visits: <https://bit.ly/FFLMobilization>.

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Get The Lead Out

Thousands of PA children are poisoned by lead every year, facing a lifetime of challenges because lead poisoning is medically untreatable. The only proven approach is prevention – getting the lead out of homes.

Children First is spearheading The Lead-Free Promise Project, a broad statewide coalition to prevent lead poisoning. In addition to fighting for millions more in state funding to remediate the danger of lead paint, the coalition is distributing A Resource Guide: Care Management of a Child with Elevated Blood Lead Levels that provides ten specific steps to address lead hazards and valuable contact information so families and professionals know where to turn for help.

Closer to home, we continue to schedule lead remediation trainings for neighborhood associations, landlords, child care providers, etc. Free 30-minute sessions review tenant rights and landlord responsibilities under Philly's Rental Property Lead Certification Law, the toughest lead law in the country. Contact Colleen McCauley at colleenm@childrenfirstpa.org to learn more.

In Delaware County, Children First is actively getting the word out about programs for low-income families to test homes and address lead hazards for free. About 80% of rental properties in Delco likely have lead paint so it's critical to educate tenants that help is available to keep children safe. For information on this project, contact Beth Dougherty at bethd@childrenfirstpa.org.