

Don't kiss me if
you're going to vote
for policies that hurt
me when you're
in office!

Vote for Kids!



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VOICES
FOR CHILDREN

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It's baby kissing season.

During every election cycle candidates go out and meet constituents, talk about their policy priorities, and kiss a lot of babies. Candidates tend to talk about issues that are important to their voters—like jobs and the economy. But kids don't vote (or make campaign contributions), so talking about children's issues is not usually a top priority for candidates. It's up to us to ensure that these issues make it to the forefront of our political debate.

The federal government provides about one third of all public spending on programs that benefit children—programs such as education, health care, nutrition assistance, and more. States and localities provide the other two thirds. But investments in children have been declining as an overall share of federal spending. Children's programs now receive less than 8 percent of all federal funding.¹ By 2014, we'll be spending more in interest on the national debt than on investments in children.²

States must step up to ensure that their children have the support systems they need to succeed. New Mexicans value families and children. We



know that when all families have the opportunity to thrive, the whole state thrives. We want to live in a place where parents earn enough for their full-time work so they can support their families with dignity. We want every child to be able to see a doctor and have access to the early childhood care and education programs that prepare them for school. These wishes for a bright future are attainable—but only if we make children and families a top priority with candidates and elected leaders.

Here's What We Need

Health Care

Every child deserves basic health care.

The Affordable Care Act—commonly known as “ObamaCare”—contains many provisions that are already benefiting children and youth. The expansion of Medicaid (starting in 2014) will also benefit children, even though the expansion will cover low-income adults (kids from low-income families are already covered by Medicaid). When parents have health care, they are more likely to seek routine care for their children as well. Also, many children who are eligible for Medicaid are not enrolled, often because their parents do not know about the program or that their kids qualify.

In New Mexico, some 50,000 children who are eligible for Medicaid are not enrolled. Despite the fact that New Mexico has the second highest percentage of children without insurance, the state has halted most outreach efforts to enroll children in Medicaid. When low-income adults begin to receive Medicaid under the expansion, their eligible children will be enrolled as well. Governor Martinez has not yet announced whether New Mexico will take advantage of

this important and life-saving opportunity—even though the federal government will pick up most of the tab. *New Mexico should:*

- Reinstate outreach efforts to enroll all eligible children in Medicaid.
- Expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act to cover 150,000 low-income adults, many of whom have children who will then also become enrolled.
- Ensure that our mandated health insurance exchange is consumer-friendly so as many families as possible can take advantage of the federal tax credits that will help them purchase health insurance.

Education

We must start early.

Scientists know that 80 percent of our brain's development happens before our third birthday. Think of this brain development as the building of a computer's hardware—the creation of actual circuits and pathways that will allow a computer to process information. Now think of our K–12 educational system as the software. We all know that even excellent soft-

ware will not run without the proper hardware. When kids haven't had the nurturing that promotes good early brain development, they are less ready to begin school. Their chances for success are much lower.

Quality child care and early education programs for children aged zero to five prepare children for success in school. Children who are not ready to



start school are at a serious disadvantage—one that will likely follow them throughout the rest of their school years. Many of the world's richest countries are way ahead of us in making early care and education a public priority, and they make funding these programs as important as funding elementary school. *New Mexico should:*

- Fully fund proven early care and education programs so they reach all of the children whose parents want to participate in them.
- Pass a constitutional amendment that allows us to use a tiny portion of the state's \$11 billion Land Grant Permanent Fund as a sustainable funding stream for early childhood care and education programs.

Spotlight on Childcare

High-quality, full-time child care costs more than college tuition but it gets just a fraction of the state and federal funding. The recession has made things much worse. Recently, the state cut the eligibility level for child care assistance in half. Now, a single parent working full-time at the minimum wage earns too much money to qualify for help. *New Mexico should:*

- Reinstate eligibility levels for child care assistance to what they were prior to the recession.
- Continue to make the investments in teacher training that improve the quality of care.

Economic Security

Child poverty affects everyone.

Poverty is the single most important factor in a child's future well-being and success. Children who grow up in poverty are less likely to receive routine health care and the nutrition needed for healthy development, and are more likely to get an inferior education, have a parent in jail, and be exposed to illegal drug use, gang activity, and the violence that goes with it. Thirteen million American children live in poverty and at least 2 million have parents in prison.³ It is estimated that, nationally, child poverty results in \$500 billion a year in lost worker productivity, and in spending on health care and the criminal justice system.⁴

New Mexico can alleviate child poverty by helping parents to further their education and improve their skills so they can find better employment. We also need to maintain the support systems that help



working families when they fall on tough times. *New Mexico should:*

- Reinstating the child benefits that out-of-work parents used to receive from unemployment insurance.
- Increasing the state's minimum wage and index to rise with inflation.
- Increasing the Working Families Tax Credit to better support low-income working families with kids.
- Establishing wage equity so women and minorities make as much money as their white male counterparts.

A state's tax and spending policies can also help or hinder working families that are struggling. In New Mexico, workers with the lowest incomes pay a higher percent of their income in state and local taxes than those in with the highest incomes.⁵ *New Mexico should:*

- Ensuring that the state has sufficient resources to invest in education, and sustain the critical programs and services relied upon by working families.
- Making the rich and out-of-state corporations pay their fair share.

Racial Equity

Every child should have the same opportunities for success.

Children of color continue to struggle in New Mexico. It's time for leaders to make a public commitment to set goals to reduce disparities across all systems, such as health care, education, and criminal justice. *New Mexico should:*

- Require that state agencies gather and analyze data related to these disparities to identify potential opportunities for change.

Immigration

Children should not be caught in the middle.

Immigration has been a hot button political issue lately, but what is less often in the spotlight is how punitive policies affect children.



On average, for every two immigrant adults detained in a workplace raid, one child is left behind.⁶ Two-thirds of these kids are either U.S. citizens or legal residents.⁷ Not only do these kids suffer, but so do the community groups that assist them. We need to value the contributions that immigrants make to our state and remove barriers to success for their children. *New Mexico should:*

- Continue to issue driver's licenses regardless of a person's immigration status. The Legislature passed a bill to allow this with the support of the law enforcement community. Having a driver's license allows parents to drive their children safely to and from school, and themselves to work so they can provide for their families. While the law needs to be tightened up a bit to assure public safety, it should not be repealed.
- Not pass laws like Arizona's SB 1070 that requires state and local police officers to enforce federal immigration laws.

What You Can Do

This is democracy in action! Getting involved is your right and responsibility.

Before the Election

1. Find out who the candidates on the ballot in your area are and what offices they are running for. Contact your local County Clerk's office for this information.
2. Visit candidates' websites to see if they have taken positions on the issues you care about.
3. Attend candidate forums and ask questions about your priority issues. (See 'Questions to ask candidates,' below)
4. When you find a candidate who supports your issues, consider volunteering for their campaign.
5. Register to vote. The deadline to register is October 9, 2012.
6. VOTE! Let your voice be heard. Remember, children can't vote so they depend on us to vote for their interests.



Questions to ask candidates

- What will you do to make sure that children who are eligible for health insurance through the Medicaid program get enrolled?
- Early Childhood programs are critical to the future success of students and our workforce. What will you do to fully fund these programs and what measures would you support to improve the quality of care for young children?
- What will you do to ensure a living wage for all workers? Will you support increasing the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation?
- As New Mexico's budget continues to recover, will you support using all new funds to reinvest in our infrastructure and restore funding levels for critical programs and services utilized by working families?
- Do you support moving more nonviolent offenders into treatment instead of incarceration?
- How do you plan to address the challenges being faced by immigrant children in this state?

After the Election

- Sign up for our eVoices action alerts. You can do so by logging on to our website (www.nmvoices.org) and clicking on the Take Action button.
- Contact your elected officials and urge them to support these children's issues. Remember, they are elected to represent you and your family. They need to hear from you.
- For information on federal elections, visit www.usa.gov
- Get involved in the budget- and law-making process. Talk to friends, write letters to the editor in your local newspaper, and attend community forums.

Resources

- Go to the Secretary of State's website for a list of candidates for state offices (NM Legislature, Public Regulation Commission, justices and district judges, etc.): www.sos.state.nm.us; or call 505-827-3600 or 800-477-3632
- Go to the state Legislature's website to find out who your legislators are and how to contact them: www.nmlegis.gov/lcs/

Endnotes

- 1 *Children's Budget 2012*, First Focus, Washington, DC, 2012. www.firstfocus.net
- 2 *Kids' Share 2011*, Brookings Institution and Urban Institute, www.firstfocus.net
- 3 *Homeland Insecurity*, Every Child Matters Education Fund, Washington, DC, 2008. www.everychildmatters.org
- 4 *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*, The Pew Center on the States, Washington, DC, 2008. www.pewcenteronthestates.org
- 5 *Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in all 50 States*, Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, Washington, DC, 2009. www.itepnet.org
- 6 *Paying the Price: The Impact of Immigration Raids on America's Children*, the Urban Institute, Washington, DC, Oct. 2007. <http://www.urban.org>
- 7 Ibid.

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