

Maine Children's Alliance 2013 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The Maine Children's Alliance (MCA) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization whose mission is to advocate for sound public policies that improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine. While MCA is involved in various policy areas, our focus for the First Session of the 126th Maine Legislature is on early childhood, health care, poverty reduction, and child safety.

MCA's voice for children is amplified by the extensive work we accomplish in coalition with allied organizations. MCA is proud to work with the Start ME Right Coalition, a group of early childhood advocates and providers; Health Care for ME, a coalition dedicated to improving and expanding health care in Maine; and, an anti-poverty consortium that includes Maine Equal Justice, the Maine Women's Lobby, the Maine Center for Economic Policy, and the Maine People's Alliance. We also are a member of the Dental Access for ME Coalition, and the Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Maine--a group of individuals, businesses and organizations working to reduce toxic exposure for children and pregnant mothers. Together, we can achieve more positive results for children than by raising our voice alone.

Early Childhood

Scientific evidence and economic analysis have demonstrated that ensuring each child a safe, healthy and nurturing early childhood experience results in significant positive outcomes later in that child's life, and significantly reduces future costs to state and federal programs. Three essential early childhood services help provide Maine's youngest children access to the opportunities that build healthy brain structure: Head Start, the Child Care Subsidy Program, and the Home Visiting Program. The Governor and the previous Maine Legislature reduced funding for these programs drastically.

2013 Action:

- MCA joins with partner organizations to advocate for restoration of state funding for these three programs in order to best help children and families who rely on these services (LR 636, sponsored by Rep. Seth Berry).
- MCA supports legislation to restore Head Start funding (L.D. 517, sponsored by Sen. John Tuttle and co-sponsored by Rep. Ken Fredette).

Access to Health Care

All children should be able to obtain health insurance and affordable preventative health care including dental care. State budget cuts in 2012 decreased the income thresholds at which a family can qualify for MaineCare. As a result, 14,500 working parents will no longer receive MaineCare health coverage; parents without health care coverage are less likely to make sure their children get medical care. Additionally, a recent study shows that two-thirds of Maine's population live in rural areas, but only 13.5 percent of dentists practice in these areas. Nearly one in four dentists will retire in the next five years, and already 15 of 16 counties have been designated as shortage areas. Currently more money is spent on fixing oral health problems than preventing them.

2013 Action:

- MCA advocates that the state should accept the federal Medicare dollars already allocated to Maine under the Affordable Care Act of 2010 in order to ensure health insurance for the highest number of low-income Mainers (L.D. 1066, sponsored by Rep. Linda Sanborn).

- MCA supports legislative efforts to create a mid-level dental practitioner position that could provide services in Maine in order address state dental shortages. A new bill establishes a licensure process and scope of practice for this new position (L.D. 1230 sponsored by Speaker Eves).

Poverty Reduction in the Maine State Budget

Poverty is the life circumstance that most determines child well-being. MCA advocates for restoration of full funding for family benefit programs established to support low-income children so that they have a web of support and some measure of security. Programs like General Assistance and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families are the last line of defense for children and families in distress.

2013 Action:

- MCA opposes proposed new cuts in the levels of **General Assistance** provided by the State, as well as the proposed elimination of municipal revenue sharing, which would severely limit the ability of our cities and towns to support General Assistance and reduce homelessness for kids and families.
- MCA opposes recent assaults on various family benefit programs, among them **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families** (TANF)—a federal program which receives state support. MCA will analyze a state report on TANF due to be submitted to the Appropriations Committee and work to improve support for those in desperate need.

Children's Safety

Gun Safety: Some children daily experience gun violence in their homes and on the streets of their communities. The deaths of 20 Sandy Hook children represent less than 1 percent of those who die by gunshot every year in the United States. MCA believes the difficult work of healing our violent culture must include strengthening our gun laws.

2013 Action:

- The MCA supports elements of pending legislation to close loopholes on background checks for the purchase of firearms, limit the sale of military-style weapons and/or ammunition, improve school safety plans, and improve mental health services in the state.

Kid-Safe Products: Even though Maine has made significant progress in creating a system to eliminate harmful chemicals in household products, children's health is still threatened by unsafe chemicals everywhere. Maine has already named 49 Chemicals of High Concern proven through scientific evidence to cause cancer, reproductive problems, and hormone disruption, yet the state is not required or expected to take any further action to prevent harm from these chemicals.

2013 Action:

- MCA has endorsed and joins with the Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Maine to support L.D. 1181, "An Act to Further Protect Pregnant Women and Children from Toxic Chemicals" (sponsored by Sen. Goodall) which will identify which products contain the 49 most dangerous chemicals. This will inform parents and businesses about what chemicals are in which products; prioritize the worst chemicals for removal from household products; close a loophole blocking protection from BPA; and, ensure progress toward safer products by phasing out unnecessary uses of priority chemicals when safe and affordable alternatives are available.