

New Laws Promote Child Well-Being

CDF-MN 2012 Legislative Session Summary

Legislation to improve the well-being of Minnesota's youngest children garnered strong bi-partisan support during the 2012 legislative session. The Legislature passed and Governor Mark Dayton signed into law policies to enhance the healthy development of infants and toddlers at risk of developmental delay and, if left unaddressed, poor lifetime outcomes. These new laws will help strengthen the foundation children need to enjoy lifelong physical, emotional, cognitive and developmental health.

NEW CHILD CENTERED LAWS

****Denotes legislation developed and advocated for by CDF-MN***

***1. Postpartum Depression and Early Childhood: Outreach at WIC Clinics**

Nearly one in ten new mothers in Minnesota experience postpartum depression in the year of their child's birth, and low-income mothers experience depression at two to five times that rate. Both mothers and children suffer when depression is unaddressed. Each year approximately 7,000 mothers and 7,000 infants are at risk of experiencing the harmful effects of maternal depression. If identified and addressed early, postpartum depression can be treated or prevented, and its impact on children lessened or averted. **A new law requires the Department of Health to make available information about depression, its potential impact on children and treatment resources at WIC sites.** It is estimated that WIC clinics serve half of all new mothers and their infants for at least some period of time.

***2. Infants and Toddlers in Child Protection: Early Intervention Referral and Monitoring**

Each year, Minnesota child protection agencies determine that approximately 1,000 infants and toddlers have been abused or neglected. More than half of children under the age of three who have been maltreated are at substantial risk of physical, developmental and emotional delays. **A new law codifies in state statute county child protection staff must refer maltreated infants and toddlers for an early intervention screening to determine if they are meeting developmental milestones. The law also requires the Department of Human Services to monitor county referral rates and report the information to the Legislature beginning in March 2014. The Legislature specifically appropriated funds for this purpose.** Early intervention can have a tremendous positive impact on a child's development.



CDF-MN's Alexandra Fitzsimmons and her 20 month old son, Francesco, watched Governor Mark Dayton sign the Health & Human Services Omnibus bill into law. The Chairs of the House and Senate HHS Committees - Rep. Jim Abeler, Rep. Steve Gottwalt and Sen. David Hann – look on smiling.

***3. Child Homelessness: Visible Child Work Group**

Homelessness and its resulting trauma can inhibit the healthy development of children, and impact a child throughout his or her lifespan. During the course of a year, nearly 20,000 Minnesota children are homeless; and half are age five or younger. Research indicates that approximately half of homeless preschoolers have a major developmental delay. **A new law creates the Minnesota Visible Child Work Group to identify and recommend issues that should be addressed in a statewide,**

comprehensive plan to improve the well-being of children who are homeless or have experienced homelessness. The law requires legislative leadership to appoint two senators and two representatives, and non-legislative Work Group members to be appointed by Governor Dayton and include family shelter, transitional housing and supportive housing providers, people who have experienced homelessness, housing and child advocates, and representatives from the business and philanthropic community. Members of Governor Dayton's Children's Cabinet, or their designees, will also serve on the Work Group. CDF-MN and the Family Housing Fund will organize, schedule and facilitate the Work Group. The Work Group will meet from September through December and will submit its final recommendations to the Legislature and Children's Cabinet by December 15, 2012.

4. Child Care Assistance for Children of Teen Parents: Restore Absent Days

In addition to helping low-income parents work and teen parents finish school, Minnesota's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is often the only early learning opportunity many children experience. CCAP is frequently one of the first programs cut to balance the budget. During the 2011 session, legislation was enacted to cut the number of reimbursable absent days from 25 days to 10 days beginning on January 1, 2013. During a year, the average family using child care assistance misses far more than ten days of child care. **Under a new law, the permissible number of reimbursable absent days for children of teen parents enrolled in school-based programs is restored to 25.**

5. Family Financial Insecurity: Asset Development and Financial Literacy Task Force

In 2009, the bipartisan Legislative Commission to End Poverty published a comprehensive set of recommendations on ending poverty in Minnesota by 2020. One of the six broad recommendations addressed the importance of helping Minnesotans build and maintain financial assets. In 2010, the Ladder Out of Poverty Task Force was created to identify opportunities for families with low-incomes to acquire assets and build wealth. After completing its work and submitting recommendations, the Ladder Out of Poverty Task Force sunset in June 2012. **A new law establishes the Asset Development and Financial Literacy Task Force to identify ways to increase household financial security and reduce asset poverty through programs such as Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).** This new task force will expire in 2014 after providing recommendations to the Legislature.

6. Removing Barriers to Self-Sufficiency: Uniform Asset Limit Analysis

Public work support programs use income and asset tests to determine eligibility and benefit amounts for families. Asset limits inadvertently discourage savings by forcing families to spend down their resources. **A new law requires the Commissioner of Human Services to analyze the differences in asset limit requirements across public work support programs and make recommendations to establish a consistent asset limit.** The Commissioner's recommendations and draft legislation must be reported to the Legislature at the beginning of the 2013 legislative session.

OTHER CHILD FOCUSED LEGISLATION

***1. Improving Well-Being of Children in the Minnesota Family Investment Program**

Minnesota's cash assistance program for families, the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), pays little attention to children, even though seven out of ten MFIP recipients are children; and nearly half (36,000 children) are age five or younger. As a result of experiencing significant environmental challenges, children receiving MFIP assistance are highly vulnerable to developmental delays. Though not included in the final HHS law, the House HHS Omnibus bill included several policies focused on improving the well-being of young children:

- requiring the orientation session provided to new MFIP recipients to include information about the availability and benefits of early childhood screening, resources and programs;

- allowing parents' attendance at their child's early childhood activities (including screening, referral and follow-up services) to be counted as work activity
- requiring MFIP employment and training providers and county agencies to post information about child development;
- requiring job counselors to provide information about early childhood development and resources to parents during employment plan reviews;
- adding a definition of "child well-being" to the MFIP Chapter; and
- changing the program name to the Minnesota *Children* and Family Investment Program.

***2. Family Economic Security Act**

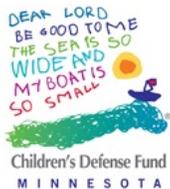
Research shows that financial insecurity can impede a child's healthy development. The Family Economic Security Act seeks to increase family income and improve child well-being by:

- increasing the state minimum wage to \$9.50 per hour for large employers, \$8.25 for small employers, and \$7.50 for the training wage;
- creating a state version of the Child Tax Credit;
- expanding the Working Family Credit; and
- fully funding and increasing eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program.

CDF-MN, in partnership with Child Care WORKS, the JOBS NOW Coalition and the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC), drafted the Family Economic Security Act. The bill was introduced in the House.

Summary of 2012 Child Focused Policy Proposals

Policies Positively Impacting Children	Enacted¹	Included in House HHS Omnibus bill²	Included in Senate HHS Omnibus bill³
Postpartum depression outreach at WIC clinics	YES	YES	YES
Early intervention referral, monitoring and reporting	YES	NO	YES
Visible Child Work Group	YES	YES	NO
Restore absent days for children of teen parents in school-based programs	YES	YES	YES
Asset Development and Financial Literacy Task Force	YES	YES	NO
Uniform asset limit study	YES	YES	NO
Prioritize children in efforts to end homelessness and improve outcomes	NO	YES	NO
Restore absent days for all families receiving child care assistance	NO	YES	NO
Child focused MFIP proposals	NO	YES	NO
MFIP Mentoring Pilot Project	NO	YES	NO



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¹ See 2012 Minnesota Session Laws, Chapter 247

² See House File 2294 (Abeler)

³ See Senate File 2093 (Hann)