

Groups Urge for Election Year Focus on Children

An “invisible” issue is the 28,000 U.S. children who died due to abuse, homicide or suicide; 1.1 million more kids in poverty; and another 4.4 million families uninsured.

Millions of American children are in serious jeopardy today and that shameful fact should be a front-burner issue for candidates and the news media during the final two months of the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, according to an urgent wake-up call issued by Every Child Matters and 30 of the nation’s leading child-related organizations—including the American Academy of Pediatrics, Prevent Child Abuse America, and the National Association of Social Workers—along with noted pediatrician T. Berry Brazleton. The national news event took place on the same day that similar Step Up for Kids Day events were being held in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

»Audio of press conference (Windows Media Player in Explorer)

»More on Step Up for Kids Day

How serious is the situation for millions of American children?

A recent UNICEF survey placed the U.S. 20th among 21 economically advanced nations in terms of overall child-well being. Yet the national tragedy suffered by millions of America’s most vulnerable children is so far largely “invisible” in the 2008 election, while other issues dominate the headlines. ECM’s Homeland Insecurity report points out that 13 million American children live in poverty, more than eight million are without health insurance, and three million are reported abused or neglected. Nearly two out of five (39 percent) of America’s 73 million children now live in low-income families, with almost one in five children (18 percent) living below the official poverty line. White children account for 39 percent of low-income children, while 61 percent of black children and Hispanic children live in low-income families. The U.S. has the second-worst child poverty rate (after Mexico) among 26 of the

world's most affluent nations.

To underscore the serious and worsening circumstances facing millions of U.S. children, ECM calculates that, in the seven years since the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001, roughly 28,000 U.S. children have died as a result of child abuse, suicide or homicide; 20 million American children were reported as abused; 1,135,000 more American children are in poverty; 4,450,000 additional Americans and their families have no health insurance; and 300,000 people, many of them with young children, were added to the U.S. prison population.

Michael R. Petit, author of *Homeland Insecurity* and founder/president of Every Child Matters, said: "The plight of millions of American children living on the knife's edge today may be the single biggest issue that is not getting the attention it deserves in the 2008 election and related coverage. Research is clear that the negative factors now weighing down on these at-risk kids will require billions of taxpayer dollars to address. If we instead had a comprehensive national policy to protect our children, those wasted federal tax dollars could be used in a constructive way to promote good health, healthy child development, and stronger communities. That's what we need to be hearing about from candidates and the news media covering them."

"The time is right to make the health and well-being of America's Children a national priority," said Renee Jenkins, MD, FAAP, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics. "The Academy is pleased to be partnering with Every Child Matters to make this a reality."

Elizabeth Clark, PhD, ACSW, MPH, executive director, National Association of Social Workers, said: "Social workers tirelessly advocate in federal and state legislature for individuals, families and communities to receive the supports they need to thrive. As a representative of the 600,000 social workers across the country, I call on our federal government to make the investments needed so that children do not have to wonder when they will eat again, where they will sleep, when they will go to school and if they will be able to go to the doctor if they are sick."

"We believe that there is no issue more important to the future of our nation than how we raise our youth," said Jim Hmurovich, president & CEO of Prevent Child Abuse America. "That's why we're partnering with Every Child Matters to urge the presidential candidates to address issues that impact children, including poverty, health care, early childhood development, and child abuse prevention."

T. Berry Brazelton, MD and founder, Brazelton Touchpoints Center at Children's Hospital Boston, and honorary chair, Step Up for Kids Day, said: "In over 60 years of pediatric practice, I have witnessed important strides in how we as a nation care for young children and their families. But we have a long way to go. That's why I am urging every candidate running for office, to set new priorities for our country, to make new investments in the health, education, safety and well being of children and families. Only then, will we truly regain control of our nation's destiny, and only then, can we truly talk about hope for our country's future."

The full list of national organizations calling for more attention to child issues consists of (in alphabetical order): Afterschool Alliance; American Academy of Pediatrics; America's Promise Alliance; Big Brothers Big Sisters; Brazelton Touchpoints Center; Children's Health Fund; Children's Rights Council; Child Welfare League of America; Common Sense Media; Communities in Schools; Docs for Tots; Early Care and Education Consortium; Every Child Matters; First Focus; First Star; Generations United; National Alliance of Children's Trust & Prevention Funds; National Association for the Education of Young Children; National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies; National Association of Social Workers; National Child Care Association; National Council of La Raza; National Head Start Association; National Women's Law Center; National Youth Leadership Forum; Pre-K Now; Prevent Child Abuse America; Reach Out and Read; and Voices for America's Children.

Child issues for candidates and the news media

Every Child Matters is urging that the candidates address—and that the news media cover—the following key issues and questions:

- More than 8 million children have no health insurance in the U.S. How do you propose to ensure that children grow up healthy and have access to comprehensive health care?
- More than 3 million children nationwide were reported abused and neglected in 2006. What are your plans to keep all children safe from violence in their homes, schools, and communities?
- Millions of children are left alone every day after school. What is your position on how to keep children safe and supervised in the late afternoon and early evenings?
- Millions of children lack access to early education opportunities. What is your position on early care and education, including preparing children for kindergarten?
- More than 13 million of America's children live in poverty. What would you do to help families with children become economically self-sufficient and able to provide for their families needs?
- Millions of children have a parent in prison. How would you address the special needs of the children?