



Child advocate to push agenda

By James Q. Lynch

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In more than 30 years of working on children and family issues, Michael Petit has found that "everybody's for kids ... in the abstract."

However, the founding president of Every Child Matters said Wednesday, that support is "always tempered by the lack of political clout (children) bring to this."

"They are less likely to be represented at the ballot box," Petit said during a stop in Cedar Rapids.

He and the 3-year-old organization hope to change that with a \$1 million campaign in Iowa and New Hampshire to make children's issues a priority for presidential candidates.

"We want to create a discussion," said Petit, the former commissioner of Maine's Human Services Department and deputy director of the Child Welfare League of America. "We're really pushing this issue to the public, to get the public to talk to the candidates about these issues and create support for them."

Every Child Matters is pushing a four-point agenda: prevent child abuse; universal health care for children similar to Medicare for the elderly; universal access to high-quality preschool education; and universal access to after-school programs.

Polling in Iowa, which found that children's issues ranked second to the economy among Iowa voters' concerns, offers him some encouragement that those principles will get attention.

"We found a high voters' concern with the status of kids," Petit said. "They have a concern that they are being elbowed away from the table by stronger lobbies."

Every Child Matters also found that Iowans don't know where candidates stand on children's issues "because (candidates) don't talk about them much," he said.

The organization hopes to get adults to speak up for children by asking candidates for specifics on their plans to provide for children's health, education and safety.

More information on the campaign can be found at www.everychildmatters.com