

May 29, 2020

The Honorable Connie Leyva
Chair, California Legislative Women's Caucus
State Capitol, Room 4061
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Response to Governor Newsom's FY 2020-2021 Revised Budget

Dear Senator Leyva:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Governor Newsom's May Revision budget proposal for FY 2020-21. The Children's Partnership (TCP) is a California-based children's advocacy organization committed to improving the lives of marginalized children with breakthrough solutions at the intersection of policy, research, and community engagement. TCP recognizes the incredible challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. We thank the California Legislative Women's Caucus and their consultants for engaging in thought partnership with organizations and considering the proposals in this letter that focus on the health of marginalized children and their families.

The Governor's May Budget Revision proposes devastating cuts to many programs that support the wellbeing of children and families in California. In particular, low-income children and children of color are bearing a disproportionate burden of this crisis – these populations are more likely to be directly impacted by the virus itself as well as feel its catastrophic economic impacts. Cutting social safety net programs that serve them and their caregivers will further exacerbate inequities across the state.

Together, we must work to address the complex issues confronting families right now and advance priorities that value our children. We urge the Legislature to support and adopt the Senate Budget Committee May Revise Response, specifically reversing the federal funding and trigger mechanism from the May Revise proposal. We offer the following proposals to strengthen our collective commitment to protect and support the health and wellbeing of immigrant families, families of color, and low or no-income families who we know were struggling before the pandemic began, and who now are struggling even more deeply.

Medi-Cal Enrollment

Studies show that increasing coverage for parents also increases the number of children with health coverage, creating what's known as a "welcome mat" effect for children. California has made great progress to improve enrollment and renewal strategies for children and families. However, in response to COVID-19 and in preparation for the rebuilding of our communities, more must be done to ensure families seamlessly enroll in coverage in real time; receive the application assistance they need; and retain coverage easily, even when circumstances change.

Accelerated Enrollment

Californians losing their jobs in the current pandemic crisis are losing their employer-based health insurance; as a result, a projected 2 million Californians will qualify for Medi-Cal. In

preparation for this surge in enrollment, DHCS should identify why current applications are not reflecting the expected surge and the possible barriers or delays in enrollment occurring during this pandemic period. To streamline families into coverage, we also recommend that DHCS adopt Accelerated Enrollment for all Medi-Cal applications during this budget year, whereby applications that are screened as eligible will be immediately enrolled while a final determination is processed.

Navigator/Outreach Funding

We appreciate the Senate-proposed inclusion of possible private funding to leverage federal funds for the Health Outreach and Enrollment Navigator Program (DHCS). Navigator programs are critical to connecting families to health care, and will continue to be critical in pandemic recovery efforts. As such, we recommend that this funding source not be in lieu of General Fund allocation for this important program. With the projected surge in children and families newly qualifying for Medi-Cal, applicants may be hesitant to enroll at the traditional in person sites like county offices or at clinics. Trusted certified application assisters living in communities who can assist families with enrolling remotely are needed more than ever.

Health Care Coverage

Grandparents in the U.S. care for 1 out of 4 children under the age of five. They are a major influence on children, particularly children of color, who are more likely to live in households with their grandparents. Careful consideration must be taken around the following proposals and potential unintended consequences that cuts or delayed expansions would have, not just on seniors, but on the children that depend on them as well.

Medi-Cal Aged, Blind and Disabled Expansion

TCP urges the legislature to adopt the Senate's budget proposal to not cut expanded Medi-Cal Coverage for Low-Income Aged, Blind, and Disabled Adults and Seniors. We oppose the repeal of AB 1088, as proposed in the Governor's May Revision, passed by the Legislature last year to stop seniors and adults with disabilities from "yo-yoing" or flipping between free and share of cost Medi-Cal. This is a time to stabilize health care coverage, instead of making it more complicated by adding eligibility rules that create chaos for enrollees and additional work for already burdened county workers.

Health4AllSeniors: Expand Access to Healthcare coverage for Older Adults, Regardless of Immigration Status (DHCS)

We appreciate the Senate's rejecting the withdrawal of the proposal to expand Medi-Cal to undocumented seniors, but we urge the Legislature to ensure this expansion happens immediately, as our seniors cannot wait. As the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear, the health of each of us is deeply interconnected with that of every Californian. Public programs should not exclude any group of people from these safety-net services, especially in a public health emergency that is disproportionately impacting our communities of color and seniors. California is stronger when *everyone* is covered. Removing the eligibility restriction for undocumented seniors will bring California one step closer to universal health coverage.

Access to Health Services

According to surveys, families are missing health care appointments for their children during this time. Unmet health, dental, and mental health needs can result in developmental delays in children that affect their health, social, and academic outcomes. Low-income children and

children of color, in particular, face greater barriers to getting needed care and exhibit critical health inequities, which may cause them to lag behind their wealthier and healthier white peers. Ensuring access to health services will strengthen California's ability to meet the impacts of the pandemic on the health of marginalized children and families.

Proposition 56 Adjustments

In addition to missed or delayed pediatric appointments for children, many pediatricians are facing uncertain financial futures due to the reduced volume of appointments during the COVID-19 public health emergency. We support the Senate Budget Committee's response to continue to direct the Proposition 56 revenue to the supplemental payments to Medi-Cal providers for primary care such as well child visits, developmental screenings, trauma screenings, and to continue to support the Prop 56 Loan Repayment Program for physicians and dentists who agree to serve at least 30% Medi-Cal patients for five years. Eliminating these payments threatens the very existence of our state pediatric provider system who are further destabilized during this pandemic. We must ensure that children have a pediatrician to return to when this crisis is over, and cutting these supplemental payments would worsen the access crisis in our Medi-Cal program.

Funds for Home Visiting and Black Infant Health Program (DPH)

We support the Senate Budget Committee's rejection of the withdrawal of a proposal for \$4.5 million in funds for the Home Visiting and Black Infant Health Program (BIH) ongoing beginning in 2020-21. In our state, Black infants are three times more likely to die compared to White infants, and Black mothers in California are four times more likely to die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. The state has a moral duty to address these inequities that are a result of historical oppression and systemic racism. Withdrawing funds for this program could exacerbate inequities, harm Black communities, and ultimately move our state in the wrong direction.

Postpartum Mental Health Expansion (DHCS)

We support the Senate Budget Committee's continued commitment to the 2019 Budget Act expansion of Medi-Cal to post-partum individuals who are receiving health care coverage and who are diagnosed with a maternal mental health condition. Maternal mental health is vital to the health and wellbeing of children and families. When mothers experience mental health conditions during pregnancy or after giving birth and do not receive treatment, their health and that of their children is negatively impacted. Additionally, maternal mental health disorders disproportionately impact marginalized communities: women who are Black or Latinx and women with low incomes are more likely to have depressive symptoms before and after giving birth. Withdrawing funds to this program during a time when mental health risks are increased due to COVID-19 is wrong. It is during difficult and trying times like these that these supports are desperately needed.

Economic Supports

Families who struggle financially have an increased chance of poor health. Poor health, in turn, traps children and their caregivers in poverty. The scale of this economic crisis requires courageous, unprecedented action from state leaders. Also a priority of the California Latino Caucus, we strongly support the Senate Budget Committee's addition of tax filers with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers with young children to the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Young Child tax Credit. Putting cash directly into the pockets of the people who drive our

economy and who have been most impacted by COVID-19 is an investment that truly reflects our values for a “California for All.”

Conclusion

As the legislature moves forward with this year’s budget process, The Children’s Partnership remains committed to working closely with you to support the health and wellbeing of all children. We would like to continue supporting the California Legislative Women’s Caucus in elevating the health needs of children, women, and families of our state in future opportunities, including the creation of the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care, which has the potential to transform how we support the health and development of our state’s children.

As has been stated many times, our state budget is the reflection of our values. There is nothing of greater value than our children, and we must work towards a budget that does not inflict disproportionate harm on the children and families most devastated by the pandemic. If you have additional questions, please contact Jessica Moran, Policy & Legislative Associate, at jmoran@childrenspartnership.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mayra Alvarez".

Mayra E. Alvarez, MHA
President

Cc: Members & Staff, California Legislative Women’s Caucus