11 Things States Should Do to Keep Children & Families Secure in ’11

New York City – One thing most people seem to agree on, especially in difficult economic times, is that investing in our children makes the most compassionate as well as economic sense for our future as a country. With that in mind, the National Center for Children in Poverty, a think-tank at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, strongly recommends that states prioritize those efforts aimed at keeping children healthy and secure. States should:

1. **Sustain** their child care subsidy programs for low-income working families, meeting—and if possible exceeding—the matches necessary to receive their full federal allocations from the Child Care and Development Fund. This two-pronged program supports children’s healthy development while it also enables their parents’ to secure and maintain employment.

2. **Keep** co-payments for child care subsidies below 10 percent of family income, making child care not only more affordable, but also allowing parents more money for other necessities – and further stimulating the economy.

3. **Continue** to fund pre-kindergarten programs. Studies have shown that pre-kindergarten is an effective way to set a child on an early course for future success in school and throughout life.

4. **Support** school-based health centers and recognize them as participating providers of health care services for Medicaid and CHIP. School-based health centers improve access to much-needed health and mental health services, particularly among hard-to-reach populations.

5. **Create** incentives to support public and private volunteering partnerships for mentoring and after-school programs to keep kids in healthy environments for social and emotional development.

6. **Keep** remedial and bridge programs from high schools to community colleges to help more young adults continue their education.

7. **Sustain** unemployment benefits for families in need. With the national unemployment rate hovering near 10% for more than 18 months and long-term unemployment at the highest level on record, UI benefits (funded by a state-set employer tax) provide a crucial lifeline to unemployed workers and their families.
Research shows that unemployment benefits are quickly spent and provide a strong boost to the economy. For each dollar invested in the program $1.60 or more is added to Gross Domestic Product over the course of a year through multiple rounds of spending.

8. **Ensure** that their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (food stamps) reach families in need by running effective outreach programs, simplifying administrative procedures, and liberalizing program eligibility requirements. Because the federal government funds food stamp benefits, states can accomplish a lot for the poor at a modest cost to state coffers.

9. **Ensure** that immigrant families are protected by the social safety net. Children with immigrant parents are the fastest-growing segment of the child population in the United States, but comparatively few of these families participate in important public benefit programs, such as State Child Health Insurance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and housing assistance. States must strengthen their outreach to immigrant communities to inform them of these programs and help potentially eligible families apply for them.

10. **Maintain** and expand access to health care for low-income children and families through publically financed health insurance programs including Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, and health insurance premium subsidy programs for low wage workers and small businesses. Health insurance enables timely access to preventive and other care necessary for healthy development and health maintenance. Good health is fundamental for school readiness, school achievement and participation in the labor force.

11. **Maintain** support for programs that work to prevent child abuse and neglect and strengthen families’ ability to nurture children. At a time when families may be especially fragile, it is even more important to make sure they have the supports they need to keep children safe.

*The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation’s leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America’s low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.*

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