



## CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

*A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families*

### **For Immediate Release**

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## **State budget moves towards better future for children**

### *Wise investments for health, nutrition, early learning and child welfare*

**March 7, 2006 (Seattle)** – The supplemental budget agreement announced today takes significant steps towards making up for years of funding stagnation and budget cuts. Investments in health care, early learning and school breakfast are among the gains for the well-being of children across Washington State.

“The budget released today moves us in the direction of ensuring that children have the health care, nutrition and early learning experiences they need to thrive,” said Paola Maranan, executive director of the Children’s Alliance. “We are pleased that lawmakers took the opportunity presented by this year’s budget surplus to invest in a brighter future for all of our children.”

The Children’s Alliance is pleased that the final budget includes \$10 million more for the Children’s Health Program, which serves immigrant children who do not qualify for Medicaid. The additional funds will come close to covering all children on a waiting list for the program—an issue that the Children’s Alliance will monitor and revisit next session.

“We are thrilled that legislators agreed that investing in children’s health is smart policy,” Maranan said. “We know that getting health care to children creates a better health environment in our schools and our communities.”

The Children’s Alliance also commends lawmakers for recognizing the foundational role school food programs play in supporting learning and achieving education reform. The final budget includes \$2 million to support schools that provide school breakfast and eliminate the reduced price “co-pay” low-income families currently pay for school breakfast. These investments are expected to expand the school breakfast program to more than 15,000 additional schoolchildren statewide.

“Along with the greater focus on early learning, the boost in the school breakfast program tells us that the state is heading in the right direction of supporting academic success for all children,” Maranan said.

Other positive budget items for children include:

- Funding to extend foster care services to youth beyond age 18 for those youth who have earned their high school diploma/GED and enroll in college,
- Funding for the new Department of Early Learning, along with funding for the Child Care Career and Wage Ladder to increase wages of early childhood educators.

The Children’s Alliance remains concerned about the fate of thousands of foster children who are waiting for legally mandated reforms to the state’s foster care system. The agreed-upon budget includes some important investments for children in foster care, but it remains insufficient to effect the kind of reform called for in the Braam v. State of Washington lawsuit settlement.

The budget agreement includes funds for visits by state workers every 30 days to families in the child welfare system, funds for supervised visits between siblings separated by foster care and money to provide additional placement evaluations. Unfunded requirements of the Braam settlement, however, include respite care and foster parent training resources.

“The state must report its progress in reforming the foster care system every six months,” Maranan said. “The Children’s Alliance will be monitoring the state’s progress to ensure that foster children are getting what they’ve been promised. The foster-care lawsuit settlement clearly states that lack of funding can not be an excuse.”

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*For more than twenty years, the Children’s Alliance has advocated for children, youth and families in Washington. The Alliance has 128 organizational members, and more than 6,500 individual members statewide. For a [list of member organizations](#) and to learn more about the Children’s Alliance, go to: [www.childrensalliance.org](http://www.childrensalliance.org)*