



Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy 2016 Legislative Agenda for Children, Youth and Families

The work of the Oklahoma Kids Count Network is part of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy's (OICA) ongoing advocacy efforts to improve child outcomes by serving as the leading voice of Oklahoma's children. The Oklahoma Kids Count program provides our state with a wealth of information that is data driven to help support fact-based advocacy. We are committed to gathering the facts, educating government officials and the public on policies, services and practices that best meet the needs of children, youth and their families. By collaboratively working with local organizations, local communities, and state agencies, OICA will help build a framework for positive results for the most vulnerable children and youth by addressing key issues raised at the **2015 Kids Count Conference**. These include:

1. Maintain funding for early childhood and home visitation programs
2. Governor to appoint Child Czar to the Health and Human Services Cabinet
3. Raise the minimum wage
4. Increase funding to the Oklahoma Health Care Authority to increase access to health care through Medicaid
5. Ensure that Medicaid has access to high-quality healthcare providers through incentive programs
6. Economic incentives for property managers to lease to children, youth, and families
7. Raise the age for aging out of foster care from 18 to 21
8. Rescind the license of any vendor selling beer 3 times to minors for at least 6 months
9. Sustain excellent programs that improve health, parent and child relationships, early intervention, and health care.

Last year OICA offered daily legislative updates to help you stay on top of quick moving developments at the state capitol and to make your voice heard. Be sure to regularly check OICA's legislative tracking webpage (<http://oica.org/legislation/>) for daily updates on proposed children's legislation

We have also summarized the issues and recommendations that were generated in each of the work groups. Our goal is to advocate for Oklahoma's children to have a secure place to live, be healthy, educated, and safe.





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Foster Care

Problems/Issues:

- Look for ways to leverage community support including faith-based communities
- Personal advocacy
- More training and resources are needed for bio parents
- Providers and foster parents need to have one voice/message for lawmakers

Recommendations:

- Convene key stakeholders to create a primary focus and message
- Require wraparound support services for foster families
- Require mental health awareness training for foster children and bio parents
- Create more preventative services for bio families (drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, parenting skills, legal representation)
- Strengthen emergency care services for foster children
- Strengthen the enforcement of kinship placements
- Give adoptive parents the same identity rights of adopted children
- Open adoptions being legal

Early Childhood

Problems/Issues:

- Budget Shortfall
- Need for wraparound services with collaboration
- Need for bold advocacy for early childhood services/education
- Collect and utilize data
- Workforce needs

Recommendations:

- Governor to appoint **Child Czar** to the Health and Human Services Cabinet
- Work with Smart Start to develop a strategic plan and goals for Oklahoma's early childhood services
- Develop advocacy and information plan on early childhood and childcare
- Partner with early childhood national organizations and engage in political process





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Poverty

Problems/Issues:

- Low wages
- Cliff effect
- Unhealthy Oklahomans

Recommendations:

- Repeal the ban on municipalities raising the minimum wage, or raise the State's minimum wage
- As wages increase, OKDHS benefits should gradually decrease (sliding scale)
- Increase access to healthcare through Medicaid expansion
- Improve recruitment/retention of healthcare providers through incentive programs

Homelessness Among Children and Youth

Problems/issues:

- Children and youth in a family who are currently living below the poverty line
- Economically vulnerable (one or two paychecks away from losing everything)
- Cyclical – always living on the edge of homelessness
- Numbers of homeless children that the schools count. Schools ask kids enrolled where you live – children living in shelters or doubled up
- 1 in 4 youth who come out as LGBT are homeless. Oklahoma doesn't have laws to protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation
- The term "shelter" needs to be looked at again. Transitional shelters, youth shelters, etc.
- Adoption Disruption
- Kids coming out of institutions – how can child serving systems do a better job transitioning kids into adulthood
- Problems with housing & property owners because of Section 8

Recommendations:

- Economic incentives for property managers to lease to children, youth and families
- Extension of foster care to 21 instead of 18
- "Living Wage" minimum wage



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Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Recommendations:

- Require evidence-based/evidence-informed behavioral health interventions for children receiving highest levels of care
- Require Oklahoma college/university social science programs(i.e., psychology, counseling, social work) to require at least 3 credit hours on the impact of trauma and what qualifies as evidence-based/evidence-informed treatment
- Require standard transition plans for children/adolescents discharging from acute levels and residential treatment that require 6 contacts with family
- Oklahoma Tax Commission will rescind the license of any vendor selling beer 3 times to minors for at least 6 months

High Risk Families

Problems/Issues:

- State budget shortfalls threaten the continuation of programs for high risk families

Recommendations:

- Advocate for a strong system of services for young children and their families
- Sustain excellent programs instead of cutting them, i.e., domestic violence, mental health & substance abuse services, home visitation programs, etc.
- Advocate for improving healthy parent and child relationships, early intervention, health care education, and, strengthening families and connecting them with community resources, to meet the needs of children and their families
- Advocate for the necessary supports to at-risk children and their families by funding programs that focus around early childhood initiatives and continue with evidence-based home visiting programs
- Organize a voting registration drive for high-risk families that receive services, followed by an empowerment campaign.