



HIGHLIGHTS OF LEGISLATIVE ACTION FOR CHILDREN 1994 – 2010

Since 1994, VOICES for Alabama's Children has been actively involved in pursuing legislation that impacts the children of our state. Virtually every group imaginable has a presence at the Alabama State House -- nursing homes, insurance companies, cattlemen, hospitals, road builders, senior citizens, and the list goes on. It is imperative that VOICES along with other advocates throughout the state, work to maintain that same presence for Alabama's children and ensure that they are not left out of the legislative process.

The following list provides a snapshot of over a decade of legislation that has significantly impacted the children of our state:

YEAR 2011

Legislative Successes

- Funding for Alabama's pre-k program will remain at approximately the same level, roughly \$18 million, similar to that in the previous fiscal year. In the current economic climate and with so many budget cuts, level funding was considered a win.
- SB 310 establishes the Students First Act of 2011 will give local school boards authority to change the process for a teacher or school employee to contest a dismissal. This bill is a first step in tenure reform.
- HB 261 will provide that defendants convicted of certain sex offenses, for example a criminal sex offense involving a child, be sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.
- HB 108 will provide for the adoption of policies for the management of concussion and head injury in youth sports, and mandate athletic head injury safety training.
- SB 427 establishes the Alabama Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation Team which will coordinate county officials, law enforcement and medical or emergency personnel in investigating suspected cases of SUID.
- SB 295 establishes the Individual Development Account Program in the Department of Human Resources. This bill authorizes certain persons with low incomes to enter into agreements forming matching savings accounts in order to help save toward the purchase of a lifelong asset, such as a home.

Missed Opportunities

- Alabama Smoke-free Act of 2011 would prohibit smoking in places of employment, public places, and private clubs. More and more research shows that second hand smoke is linked to up to 2 million ear infections in children, nearly 530,000 doctor visits for asthma, up to 436,000 episodes of bronchitis in children under five years of age, and up to 190,000 cases of pneumonia in children under five years of age. HB 149 was carried over to the call of the Chair in the House Health Committee while the Senate

version, SB 372, was voted out of committee with amendments but never received floor time in the Senate.

- Ban Texting While Driving – distracted driving remains a growing safety concern, both nationally and statewide. In 2011 session, Alabama lawmakers were afforded yet another opportunity to pass a ban on texting while operating a motor vehicle and again failed to give final passes. While the bill did pass the House it was denied a vote in the Senate.
- Mandatory School Attendance Age – Lawmakers took up a bill to lower the mandatory age for attending school in Alabama from age 7 to age 6. Opposition to the bill offered amendments allowing parents to seek waivers from their local school boards if they opted to keep their children out of school until age 7. The measure passed the House but failed to get a vote in the Senate.

YEAR 2010

Legislative Successes

- Funding for vital programs such as Alabama's First Class pre-k program and the state's child health insurance program, known as ALL Kids was protected in the budget. Allocations for the Alabama Network of Children's Advocacy Centers were also restored.
- VOICES for Alabama's Children played a key role in restoring funding for the Alabama Network of Children's Advocacy Centers and passing legislation positioning the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers to distribute state and federal dollars to members if and when those monies become available during future budget cycles.
- Legislation to strengthen Alabama's current Graduated Drivers License law passed the Alabama Legislature. Young drivers will now face tougher restrictions while gaining experience behind the wheel of a motor vehicle, i.e. occupancy limited to one non-family member under the age of 21 and operating handheld communications devices is completely prohibited under the new law.
- Legislators were successful in creating the state's first kinship guardianship subsidy program to provide much needed financial support for relatives who are willing to provide care to foster children. The new program will help provide permanency options for over 100 Alabama children.
- Over 4,000 child care subsidy slots were saved as a result of added language in the budget granting the Alabama Department of Human Resources greater flexibility in utilizing excess federal monies.

Missed Opportunities for Children

- Numerous important highly debated bills made an appearance during the session, but did not receive final passage, including measures to remove the state portion of sales tax on groceries and over-the-counter medicines; ban texting while operating a motor vehicle; allow voters to decide if they want to hold a convention to rewrite Alabama's



1901 Constitution; protect the public from secondhand smoke; and allow charter schools to operate in Alabama.

YEAR 2009

Legislative Successes

- Funding for the state's child health insurance program, known as ALL Kids in Alabama, was increased by \$4 million which will expand the program to cover children in families between 200 and 300 percent of the federal poverty level. An estimated 14,000 additional uninsured children will be reached.
- Child care subsidy program slots protected during the 2009 session.
- State funding for voluntary, high-quality pre-k increased by nearly \$3.2 million. The Office of School Readiness projected the increase will help fund an additional 20 to 40 pre-k sites across the state.
- Lawmakers continued to crack down on child predators. Individuals who solicit children for sex via internet will now be criminally charged, even if the person being solicited is an undercover operative.
- The Alabama Commission to Reduce Poverty was created, naming VOICES for Alabama's Children among the collection of partners appointed to serve on the commission.
- Mandatory school attendance age was increased from 16 to 17, which state leaders hope when combined with other dropout initiatives, will ultimately increase Alabama's graduation rate.

Missed Opportunities for Children

- Legislation to strengthen Alabama's current Graduated Drivers Licensing Law, provide for ATV safety regulations, ban smoking in public indoor places, and remove the state portion of sales tax on groceries, each died in the 2009 Legislative Session.

YEAR 2008

Legislative Successes

- The Juvenile Justice Act of 2008 passed the Alabama Legislature and was signed into law on May 8, 2008. Passage of this legislation, demonstrates our state's commitment to providing more appropriate treatment of children who enter the juvenile justice system.
- State funding expanded for voluntary, high-quality pre-k. The \$7.3 million increase will help ensure more children have access to high-quality early learning experiences through Alabama's nationally ranked preschool program.
- Office of School Readiness (OSR) received a budget increase of roughly \$10 million.
- Head Start and HIPPY, protected through increased funding to OSR.
- Appropriations for the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI), the Alabama Reading Initiative, and ACCESS each increased by \$5 million.



- \$1.27 million line item for Child Care Subsidy Program was protected.

Missed Opportunities for Children

- Legislation to strengthen Alabama's current Graduated Teen Driver's License Law, ban smoking in most public indoor places, and remove the state portion of sales tax on groceries, each died in the 2008 Legislative Session.

YEAR 2007

Legislative Successes

- The state's \$6.7 billion Education Trust Fund budget invested more funding in education than ever before in Alabama's history.
- The education budget included \$11.7 million for early education. It more than doubled state funding for high-quality pre-kindergarten programs, which are administered by the Office of School Readiness (OSR). The total budget for the office increased to \$10 million.
- The education budget, for the first time, included a line item for HIPPIY, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, which assists parents with school readiness. The \$1.7 million appropriation is administered through the Alabama Department of Education.
- Twelve percent increase in funding for K-12 schools and two-year colleges and 15 percent for universities.
- Funding doubled for ACCESS, a distance learning program.
- Appropriations increased for the state's Math, Science and Technology Initiative by \$13.8 and for the Alabama Reading Initiative by \$8.4 million.
- Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) received its full request, which included \$7.5 million for ALL Kids. ADPH also received new funds for vaccinations of uninsured youth, which will include the cervical cancer-prevention vaccine, as well as funds for the establishment of the fetal infant mortality review board.
- Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) received a line item of \$1.27 million for the Alabama Child Care Subsidy program. DHR also received \$1 million to raise payments for foster parents.

Missed Opportunities for Children

- Shaken Baby Syndrome Education Bill, Alabama Juvenile Justice Act and a bill to strengthen Alabama's Graduated Drivers License Law.

YEAR 2006

Legislative Successes

- Strengthened Alabama's Child Passenger Safety Law, which became effective July 1st. The new law will provide better protection for children up to age 15 and it calls for child

restraint requirements to be based not only on the child's age, but also on the child's size. The goal of the bill is to protect children from preventable injury or death in auto crashes.

- Sherer Amendment changed the age cap for requiring a booster seat from 8 years of age to 6 years of age.
- Legislature enacted a first incremental step toward tax fairness for working families, raising the income tax threshold to \$12,600 for a family of four beginning in 2007. Prior to the change, Alabama families owed state income tax once they earned \$4,600 a year. Under the new statute, low-income working families will keep more of what they earn so they can better support their families.
- Strengthened Alabama's law which punishes those who expose children to drug paraphernalia and drug making environments. If a child is exposed to such products, the violator will be charged with a Class C felony. If the child suffers serious injury due to exposure the, violator faces a Class B felony. If the child dies as a result of the exposure, the violator will be charged with a Class A felony. The tougher penalties allow law enforcement agencies to tighten the reins on drug related criminal activities that affect children.
- Five additional days added to the school year beginning with the 2006-2007 school year, bringing the state up to the national school day average. Students will now be in school for 180 days a year.
- State sales tax holiday created, in which no state sales tax will be charged for educational related items.
- Under the federal Spending Reconciliation Act, Alabama became eligible for additional funds for subsidized child care, provided the state allocated matching funds. The maximum state match for this additional \$1.2 million for child care was acquired and will draw roughly three times that much in matching federal funds.
- Due to significant growth in revenues, lawmakers were able to pass an education budget of over \$6 billion. The budget met or exceeded budget requests for K-12, postsecondary and higher education.

YEAR 2005

Legislative Successes

- A fund established in 1997 from the receipt of the tobacco settlement money is charged with funding services and programs for children. The legislature appropriated \$59 million from the Children First Trust Fund (CFTF) to the various agencies receiving money as required by law. The legislature also voted to divert the carry-over funds of the CFTF to the General Fund for other uses. This carry-over money was initially designated as a safeguard for the programs funded by the CFTF during years when revenues are lower.
- The Children's Advocacy Centers, a network of centers across the state that provides a safe environment for abused children, became a line item in the state General Fund Budget and received \$840,600.



Missed Opportunities for Children

- Legislation to strengthen Alabama's Child Passenger Safety Law, failed. The bill would have required children up to the age of 12 years old or 80 pounds to ride in a "booster seat".
- Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board received no funding from the General Fund. The Children's Trust Fund did, however, receive an additional \$100,000 from the Children First Trust Fund.

YEAR 2004

Legislative Successes

- A bill, affectionately known as the "Baby Douglas Bill", passed the Alabama Legislature. The law, named for Douglas Hernandez who died in August 2000 after reportedly being given cold medicine at a daycare center in Mobile County, intends to prevent day care center workers from administering medicine with the intent to drug the child or alter the child's behavior beyond what is medically prescribed or with reckless disregard for the health, safety and welfare of the child.
- The Foster Parents Bill of Rights passed the legislature and was signed into law. The bill will provide rights to foster parents across the state in order to help them more effectively care for the children they bring into their homes.
- Children First Trust Fund appropriated \$62,814,896 for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2005. Additional appropriation of \$43,712,309 from other tobacco settlement funds for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2005.
- Appropriation of \$840,600 allocated to the Children's Advocacy Programs in Alabama for the support and operations of the Children's Advocacy Centers and the Alabama Network of Children's Advocacy Centers, Inc.
- Lawmakers voted to raise cigarette taxes by 26 cents per pack. The cigarette tax and a nursing home bed tax helped fill the \$182 million shortfall and continue the 3 to 1 federal match. The legislature found a total of \$164 million in additional funding for Medicaid.
- The 2005 General Fund budget will enable CHIP to greatly reduce or even eliminate their current waiting list.

Missed Opportunities for Children

- State lawmakers failed to pass the Child Auto Passenger Safety bill, which would have required youngsters too old for baby car seats and too young for adult safety belts, to be buckled into a booster seat.



YEAR 2003

Legislative Successes

- State lawmakers passed a supplemental appropriation bill which included \$4.7 million for the Department of Human Resources (DHR) to draw down \$11 million in federal Child Care Development Fund dollars.
- Another regular session success was HB 603. The state will save money thanks to a Medicaid legislation that seeks discounts from the big prescription drug companies. The state will save approximately \$15 million dollars by requiring authorized prescription drug providers to offer rebates to the state.

Missed Opportunities for Children

- State lawmakers failed to pass a number of important pieces of legislation which could have made children safer and better cared for. The Child Auto Passenger Safety Bill would have required youngsters too old for baby car seats and too young for adult shoulder straps, to be buckled into a booster seat.
- The Foster Care Bill of Rights passed the Alabama House of Representatives, but never made it to the calendar in the Senate. The bill would have provided rights to foster parents across the state in order to help them more effectively care for the children they bring into their homes.
- A bill requiring mandatory reporting of child abuse by clergy was not considered by either chamber.

YEAR 2002

Legislative Successes

- Graduated Driver's License Bill, a multi-step driver's licensing procedure for 16 year olds to lower Alabama's teen death rate, passed the Alabama Legislature.
- Children First appropriation passed. The measure included an absolute \$55 million for the Children First Trust Fund.
- A bill which would have amended the original tobacco settlement and allocated funds for seniors, failed during the legislative session. Funding for Children First, a program aimed at improving the lives of children living in high risk environments, was protected.
- Teacher Background Check, legislation requiring all employees of public and non-public educational facilities to go through a criminal background information check, passed the legislature.

Missed Opportunities for Children

- State policymakers failed to pass the Child Auto Passenger Safety bill. The legislation requires booster seats for children who have outgrown the baby car seats but weigh less than 80 pounds or measure less than 29 inches seated height.



YEAR 2001

Legislative Successes

- Lawmakers passed a measure requiring criminal background checks for employees of child and adult care facilities.
- A bill permitting unwanted newborn infants to be left at hospitals within 72 hours of birth, passed.

Missed Opportunities for Children

- A measure to enact a multi-step driver's licensing procedure for 16-year-olds; require bike and scooter riders under the age of 16 to wear protective bicycle helmets, and a Graduated Driver's License bill for new teen drivers, each failed during the 2001 Legislative Session.

YEAR 2000

Legislative Successes

- Mental Health Parity bill passed.

YEAR 1999

Legislative Successes

- Office of School Readiness created as a department of the executive branch to administer the operation of voluntary pre-kindergarten program.
- Legislature passed a measure allowing primary enforcement of the seat belt law.
- A bill to dedicate funds from the national tobacco settlement to Children First passed the legislature. It allows up to \$60 million for Children First in the fiscal year 2000 and \$65 million in 2001 and up to \$470 million in 2002-2025. Money from the tobacco settlement will also go to economic development and Medicaid under the terms of this legislation. For economic development the state will see \$7 million in 2000, \$9 million in 2001, \$11 million in 2002, \$13 million in 2003-2017 and \$16 million in 2018-2026. Medicaid will earn up to \$40 million in 2001 and up to \$45 million in 2002-2025.

Missed Opportunities for Children

- The legislature failed to pass the following pieces of legislation: a bill to allow money derived from fees and taxes relating to use of motor vehicles and fuel, to go toward public transportation; and a bill to enact a multi-step process for teens to gain full driving privileges;



YEAR 1998

Legislative Successes

- Children First Programs created.
- School Nurse Program.
- Teacher Background Checks.

Missed Opportunities for Children

- A welfare reform measure, allowing gas taxes to pay public transportation costs, failed the legislature.
- Legislation toughening seat belt laws failed.
- A+ Education Foundation Legislative Platform failed.

YEAR 1997

Legislative Successes

- Creation of ALL Kids, a low-cost, comprehensive healthcare coverage program for children under age 19.
- Child Death Review Legislation passed. This legislation proposed the creation of the multidisciplinary, multi-agency state child death review team, or the present Alabama Child Death Review Systems. It also called for the creation of local agencies and changes to the regulations of investigations for the death of children under the age of 18.
- Youth Access to Tobacco Bill passed.

YEAR 1995

Missed Opportunities for Children

- Children's First Legislation failed.