

Changing the Odds for America's Children

CFC # 11812



America's neediest children—those living with the extraordinary challenges of poverty and inequity—often have the least 'say' in shaping the decisions that determine whether they go hungry, have a place to sleep, enjoy good health or are given the educational opportunities to thrive in our country. In order to ensure every child has a healthy, fair and safe start to their life, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) seeks to act as these children's voice, working tirelessly on their behalf, from conducting and promoting grassroots community organizing to launching national advocacy campaigns.

CDF's advocacy and education efforts particularly focus on that set of issues that have the most profound impact on children: poverty; unequal education; inadequate health care; lack of early childhood development opportunities; and child welfare reform. CDF has been



at the vanguard of rigorous, non-partisan research and reporting on the range of factors that impact children's wellbeing since it conducted the seminal work on schooling opportunities for children with disabilities, *Children out of School in America*, in 1974. CDF's

national reports, such as *The State of America's Children* (2014, 2017) and *Ending Child Poverty Now* (2015), are often accompanied by companion, region-specific publications produced by our six state and regional offices. These offices also publish research-based publications that address local topics, such as child poverty in Appalachia; early childhood program access in Minnesota and New York; dismantling the cradle to prison pipeline in Texas; and healing children who have suffered chronic stress and trauma in San Francisco, California.

Activism & Public Education

For over 40 years, the Children's Defense Fund has worked to educate the public and policy makers on the comprehensive, integrated supports and services that children need from birth through adulthood in order to



thrive. Believing that children don't 'come in pieces,' CDF's national and six state/regional offices have worked at the national, state and local levels to improve the many intersecting policies and programs that help children and their families to thrive. CDF has diagnosed obstacles to progress, promoted key policy recommendations for child and families, and published impactful, substantive reports targeted at local, state and national audiences and distributed through all media. CDF also participates in and supports non-lobbying activism activities in concert with vast networks of partners, building the public will that is needed to improve outcomes and level the playing field for all of our nation's children.



MICHAEL TUBBS was born into poverty to a teenaged mother and an incarcerated father, but he beat the odds to earn a Master's Degree from Stanford University and hold public office in his hometown of Stockton, and has made long-term improvements in the lives of its children. Michael credits the encouragement and high expectations of his mother, grandmother, aunt and members of his church for his academic achievement, but believes CDF's campaign to dismantle the 'Cradle to Prison Pipeline' shaped his purpose and developed his leadership skills. As a college student, he attended CDF conferences and leadership trainings he calls "eye-opening and inspiring." He knew life outcomes were different for poor kids but wasn't sure why more guys he grew up with went to prison than to college. Moving steadily up the ladder of CDF youth leadership programs, he learned organizing strategies to stop policies that push children into the pipeline and connected with social change-minded young people from across the nation. He says his experiences "put a language and structure around my passion for children in poverty. It clarified my goals and sharpened my educational focus." The tragic murder of his cousin sparked Michael's decision to return home after completing his Master's program in policy, organization, and leadership studies and to run for office—he became the youngest ever City Councilman in Stockton! As a council member he has established a Freedom School and a mentoring program for public school students, as well as spearheading a re-entry project to employ 50 formerly incarcerated felons. In 2016, at age 26, he became the youngest mayor in Stockton's history. Michael is committed to changing the odds for all young African Americans, especially in his hometown, so that they go on to college and not to prison, the graveyard, or a life on the margins.

Through its direct policy advocacy efforts CDF aims to change the odds for children in America. To end child poverty, we work in collaboration with other national, state and local advocates and organizations to ensure all parents and caregivers have the resources to support and nurture their children, such as jobs with livable wages; supports for working families like the Earned Income Tax Credit; and safety nets for basic needs. We work to promote policies and promising programmatic approaches to prevent crises from occurring that often lead children and families to the child welfare system; help ensure quality care for children in foster care; and promote appropriate timely permanent placements for children in foster care with birth, kin or adoptive families.

Furthermore, we advocate for policies that provide fair education funding and support positive school climates. With the goal of ensuring all children have access to child-specific health coverage that is affordable for families, CDF works to expand health coverage for uninsured children and keep all children enrolled in coverage. Finally, we support policies that guarantee that all poor and vulnerable children have access to a high quality continuum of early childhood programs from birth through age five. We believe that by addressing these priorities our nation would give all our young children the strong start to life needed to propel them to a productive life in school and beyond.

In addition to engaging with current public servants directly, CDF also aims to train the next generation of advocates and leaders to continue the work of defending America's children. Nationwide and community-based initiatives were established to equip youth from high school- through graduate school-age with the tools to serve their communities and educate the public on policies and programs that impact our most vulnerable children. Recently, CDF launched the 'Child Defender Fellowship Program', whose graduates will form a network young adults trained in non-violent action who will mobilize communities to advocate on behalf of children's needs.

CDF's charge is to be vigilant and to give the full diversity of our nation's children a voice in the decisions that impact them. In the words of our founder and president, Marian Wright Edelman, "if we don't stand for children we don't stand for much."

We must always refill and ensure there is a critical mass of leaders and activists committed to nonviolence and racial and economic justice who will keep seeding and building transforming movements. When one leader passes many more must be ready to step up to the plate and keep working to ensure a more just America and world.

Marian Wright Edelman;
Child Watch® Column; 11/22/2013