

Children First

2022 STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Funding

In 2022, CF will actively work to:

- Protect the Children Trust Fund. The General Fund budget is in good shape this year. We will continue to remind our legislators of the importance of Children First Trust Fund and the agencies that we support. It is a highly accountable fund that has to report exactly how many children and families are served by its dollars each year. No other budget in Alabama upholds those strict standards.
- Advocate for sufficient funding for agencies that serve children. The twelve state agencies that benefit from the Children First Trust Fund are also funded by either the General Fund or the Education Trust Fund. We will continue to educate lawmakers on what proposed cuts could do to the well-being of Alabama's children.

In 2022, CF will support efforts to:

- Advocate for funding for \$16 million for Foster Children in need of mental health services
- Advocate for funding to support the Quality Rating Implementation System QRIS Stars system to encourage high quality childcare program across Alabama.

Education

In 2022, CF will support efforts to:

- Advocate that adequate and equitable funding for effective public education in kindergarten through 12th grade are essential if the system is to effectively prepare Alabama's children and young adults to meet the challenges of an

increasingly complex economy and competitive work force. CF supports policies that promote access to quality education at all levels and that provide a safe and equitable environment for learning.

- Advocate for expansion of broadband and statewide access to digital technology so that all of Alabama's children have access to the same resources, technology, and virtual educational opportunities.

Health

In 2022, CF will actively work to

- Enact legislation that prohibits retail establishments licensed by the ABC board from selling, distributing, marketing, delivering or displaying drug paraphernalia or non-conforming pharmaceuticals.
- Enact legislation to address the toxicity of lead and enforce the safe removal of lead to protect the health of Alabama's children.

In 2022, CF will support efforts to:

- Enact legislation that provides full, sustained funding for school mental health coordinator at the actual salary levels shown on the State salary schedule and at a ratio of one coordinator per 500 students.
- Enact legislation that provides access to mental health services to children in need in Alabama.
- Advocate for policies that limit access by Alabama's youth to tobacco products, vaping and chewable drugs.
- Advocate for adequate nutritional needs of Alabama's children.
- Advocate for access to adequate medical care for all of Alabama's children.

In 2022, CF will oppose efforts to:

- Enact legislation that threaten the medical and mental health needs of a child .

Judiciary

In 2022, CF will support efforts to:

- Advocate for every county in Alabama to have a diversion program for juvenile offenders. Research has shown that community-based diversion programs aimed at non-violent juvenile offenders is both cost effective and

successful at setting youths back on track towards a productive adulthood. Currently, each Alabama county does not have a diversion program; as a result, CF is working with the Department of Youth Services to ensure that these crucial services are available.

- Enact Youthful Offender Legislation that allows young people that are technically too old to be a part of the juvenile justice system (e.g. 17-24 year olds) to receive alternative sentences other than jail or prison time that would bring them in contact with more seasoned / older criminal offenders. This usually involves youth being subject to other career, academic, counseling and rehabilitative programs that they are required to participate in in lieu of a harsher alternative.
- Enact legislation to determine the role of the School Resource Officer. Currently, school resource officers are contracted police officers working in schools without teachers, students, administrators, or even SROs themselves having a clear understanding of what their role is, when they should or should not be called to handle a disciplinary incident, and what they should do (besides arrest) when interacting with students.

In 2022, CF will monitor efforts to:

- Enact reform measures for due process in schools. This bill would require schools to conduct a hearing in which the student is allowed to hear and present evidence and defend themselves before being suspended. The evidentiary piece of this is somewhat informal (e.g., no discovery, witnesses, etc.) but essentially it will do away with the current practice of a child being suspended simply because a teacher or administrator says they did something wrong without the child ever having an opportunity to refute the accusations or tell their side of the story.
- Enact legislation to establish a minimum age for delinquency hearing. The Minimum Age Bill would set the minimum age for delinquency hearings to either 12 or 14. That would mean that a child under that age would not be subject to delinquency / criminal proceedings based on the logic that young children have diminished culpability and many are not competent to stand trial or to have any real sense of the legal system.