



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friend of Children,

CWLA believes that together we can make children and families a national priority. The new Administration and Congress have the opportunity to realize this dream and ensure every child is nurtured, protected, provided the chance to develop to his or her full potential, and given opportunities to contribute to the common good.

In 2009, we challenge the President and Congress to affirm this responsibility and take actions to strengthen our commitment to permanency and protection of America's children. CWLA's top legislative priorities for 2009 are a call to reestablish the White House Conference on Children and Youth, and providing that a significant share of the economic recovery plan be for the benefit of vulnerable children and their families.

Five hundred thousand children are in foster care on any given day and three million cases of abuse and neglect are reported every year in this country. As the economy weakens, history and experience tell us the caseloads will increase. We can and must do better to protect and provide a safe and promising future for these children. Our legislative priorities appeal to the Administration and Congress to boldly affirm our national commitment to children and families. Calling a White House Conference in 2010 will set in motion a set of activities to engage communities throughout the nation to focus on and make recommendations regarding the concerns and needs of the most vulnerable children and youth.

The economic recovery must include new reliable, flexible, guaranteed resources needed to prevent child abuse and neglect; provide better supports for families in crisis; provide care and treatment for children in foster care; provide support to foster parents, grandparents, and other relatives caring for children; and strengthen adoptive families and the workforce that supports this system of care.

CWLA's 2009 Children's Legislative Agenda outlines what Congress can do this year to better the lives of children and families. By working together, we can live in an America where no child is abused and neglected and every child achieves his or her full potential.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christine James Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christine James-Brown
President and CEO, CWLA



INTRODUCTION

CWLA's model embraces the principle that families must be at the center of services that prevent and remedy situations that lead to child abuse and neglect. The full spectrum of services for children and families must be involved, from the first awareness a family is at risk, to early intervention, to foster care for those children whose safety and well-being is threatened, through permanency and the services necessary to sustain permanency. Ensuring quality casework practice, according to national child welfare standards, requires a professional workforce. Recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining qualified, culturally diverse and competent, effective, and dedicated professionals is essential to this effort.

In this transition paper, we offer short- and long-term recommendations across five key areas. The short-term recommendations address matters to be addressed quickly by changes in federal policy, guidance, or regulation. Many of these short-term proposals relate to the new Fostering Connections Act and how it is implemented and regulated. The long-term recommendations may require greater effort and, in all likelihood, legislation to be worked out cooperatively between the new Administration and the 111th Congress.

We address five key areas of child welfare:

- preventing child abuse and neglect;
- achieving permanency for children and families through reunification, adoption, and kinship care;
- increasing access to health care, including mental health and substance abuse services for children and families in care;
- helping vulnerable young people in both foster care and juvenile justice; and
- strengthening the building blocks of the system, which includes such issues such as workforce, data collection, immigration, and cultural competence.

We continue to strongly urge that all recognize the re-institution of the decennial White House Conference on Children and Youth as an essential tool to carry out all of these reforms, as well as a way to engage communities and key local stakeholders, which, ultimately, is the only way we can address any of these challenges.