



MAKING CHILDREN A NATIONAL PRIORITY

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Children are a priority in the 2020 presidential debates. Currently, 21 Democratic presidential candidates and President **Donald Trump** have unveiled their platforms on issues impacting children and families.

Foster Care

Many presidential candidates are known for championing the rights of children. Senator **Kamala Harris** proposes to continue bipartisan, bicameral efforts under the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth, which works to protect and promote the welfare of all children in foster care, while **Julian Castro's** [*Children First Plan for Foster Families*](#) includes investing in foster care by keeping families together and out of the system.

Castro's *Children First Plan* prioritizes child welfare reform and connects the dots between primary prevention, programs, and post-services. Under Castro's plan, federal investment in child welfare programs would "more than double with an additional \$10 billion a year," and increase funding in Titles I and II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) by \$1 billion each year. Additionally, Castro's platform seeks to address prevention of child abuse and preventative programs. His plan addresses many issues that are contributing factors to the removal of children from their homes and into the foster care system, like deprivation, substance abuse, and limited social services and programs for children and families. It also provides for additional support for kinship care, such as provisions included in Senator Bob Casey's *Grandfamilies Act*, which requires reducing barriers to accessing governmental programs like Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Castro also fully supports Senator Sherrod Brown's bill, *The Family First Transition and Support Act*, which provides additional support for states to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act and eliminates the Title IV-E lookback provision.

Castro's plan focuses on "advancing the welfare of children" through primary prevention, or, if removal is necessary, through the placement of a loving foster family and less reliance on group home placements. The plan sets a goal of reducing the number of children in congregate care by half by 2025 and ensuring that children and youth are in loving homes, not in group homes or institutions. Castro proposes to address the national issue of lack of foster homes by focusing on recruiting foster families, especially for older youth, siblings, and other minority groups. The child welfare workforce is essential to addressing the ongoing crisis in the foster care system, and Castro wants to invest in this, as well, continuing the education of these professionals

through additional training. In addition, he addresses older youth issues by focusing on the 22 states that have extended foster care to expanding the Family Unification Program (FUP), and by working to improve graduation and college completion rates.

Child Care and Early Childhood Education

Senator **Elizabeth Warren**'s campaign has focused on aspects of child care in America—including access, affordability, quality, and the workforce. Senator Warren's proposals align with the prioritizes of modernizing child care for every child, every district, and every community. Several candidates focus on expanding and extending early childhood education access, including **Andrew Yang**, Senator **Cory Booker**, **Joe Sestak**, and former candidate **Beto O'Rourke**. Sestak calls for expanding early childhood education to age four. O'Rourke proposes to increase funding for the Child Care Development Block Grant and invest in home visiting programs. **Michael Bennet** plans to expand home visiting as well.

Tom Steyer believes that public education is a fundamental right of every American and proposes a continuum of educational reform, from universal pre-kindergarten to high school and post-secondary education. His plan is to reinvigorate public education and improve the workforce through resources and teacher development and compensation. Former Vice President **Joe Biden**'s strategy focuses on promoting diversity, specifically for black students, with recruitment and access to more teachers of color. Former candidate **Tim Ryan**'s platform details his intention to focus on trauma-based care in every school. He believes that social and emotional learning should be in every school to address the trauma that children face and to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Mayor **Pete Buttigieg**'s promise to increase the federal Pell Grant to \$10,000 and allowing it to be used on living expenses is a proposal that would benefit many young people, especially those transitioning from foster care that enroll in post-secondary education. The ability to use federal aid to pay for living costs like transportation, books, housing, and necessities that young people need is a worthy investment in providing for the stability of former foster youth. **John Delaney**'s plan would increase funding for Pell Grant, as well. Senator **Kamala Harris** introduced a proposal for higher education that intends to offer debt-free college and allow current debt holders to refinance high-interest loans, expand Income-Based Repayment (IBR) plans, and other measures to protect college students from predatory lenders. **Wayne Messam**'s plan proposes to eliminate the \$1.5 trillion in student loan debt.

Inequality and Groups that are Marginalized

Issues pertaining to disparity and inequality have become the focus of several presidential candidates. Senator **Bernie Sanders** states that “Our kids and our students are too important to cut back on education, especially when those cuts reduce educational opportunities for underserved students, students of color, low-income students, LGBTQ students and students with disabilities.” He promises to ensure equitable funding for public schools. Congresswoman **Tulsi Gabbard** also mentioned the need to “invest in the future of all our children,” and emphasized the need to protect people who are LGBTQ+. She believes in an American that is equal, just, and fair across race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, disability, or national origin. Former

candidate O'Rourke has stated that he would implement Obama era civil protections for people who are LGBTQ+.

Castro believes that all children, specifically groups within the foster care system that are marginalized, should be protected from discrimination. He assures that he will defend the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Additionally, through executive action, Castro proposes to eliminate discriminatory rules that prevent LGBTQ families from adopting or fostering, citing the Miracle Hill decision in South Carolina. Congressman John Lewis and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's bill, *Every Child Deserves A Family Act*, would prohibit discrimination in the child welfare system and Castro supports passage of this legislation. Mayor Buttigieg's plan also addresses non-discrimination in the child welfare system, proposing to activate the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Partnerships authority to work with leaders who support LGBTQ+ people and communities.

Juvenile Justice Reform

Juvenile justice reform and is another area that presidential candidates have begun to focus on. Youth who are not in school or working are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system or experience homelessness. Castro intends to protect foster youth through the provision of housing and through investments in life coaches. Buttigieg plans to focus on ending youth homelessness, particularly for youth who identify as LGBTQ. Former candidate O'Rourke proposed to implement restorative justice in schools and address racial bias and cultural competency. Senator Harris's professional career as a prosecutor has provided her with a foundation rooted in the impacts of the criminal justice system and its effects on children and families. As such, she promises to dismantle the school to prison pipeline.

Buttigieg promises to reduce youth incarceration through investments in additional community-based programs, separation of children from adults in courts, jails, and prisons, enacting the Eliminating Debtors' Prisons for Kids Act — currently sponsored by Congressman Tony Cardenas—and other efforts related to addressing inequalities in disciplinary and juvenile justice actions. Buttigieg's plan is aligned with the National Campaign for Juvenile Justice platform *The Future of Youth Justice 2020: A Policy Platform for the 2020 Election*, as it addresses several of the new changes to the federal legislation—the Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act. Castro's *The First Chance Plan* incorporates juvenile justice priorities to end the criminalization of youth, expand the juvenile justice system to age 21, and keep the records of minors confidential. He notes that “80 percent of inmates incarcerated in prisons have foster care experience and that a quarter of foster youth finds themselves in prison within two years of emancipation.”. As such, he believes that criminal justice reform must include addressing the foster care system.

Health Care

Adequate health care is vital to the development of children and youth, particularly those impacted by systems. In 2018, President Donald Trump achieved funding health for millions of children when he signed a six-year extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Many presidential candidate's platforms either support the Affordable Care Act (ACA),

want to repeal the ACA, or reference a version of “Medicare for All.” Senator Harris’ plan wants to ensure students have access to school-based health services. Governor **Steve Bullock**’s platform encourages states to expand Medicaid, which has the potential to ensure health coverage for more children in America.

Senators **Amy Klobuchar** and **Cory Booker**, as well as **Marianne Williamson**, include in their platforms plans to end child poverty in America. Senator Klobuchar emphasizes that in her first 100 days, she will enact a plan to cut childhood poverty in half in ten years. Senator Booker proposes several existing strategies that have been proven to reduce child poverty in America, including expanding the child allowance and reforming TANF. Each proposal seeking to address reductions in child poverty in the U.S. is proven effective in the latest National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report, *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*. Fines and fees associated with the detention or incarceration of youth have been proven to create financial problems for many children and families, especially low-income families, and Mayor Buttigieg proposes to eliminate fines and fees on children. Additionally, Sestak promises to expand free lunch programs to all students in low-income communities as current proposals seek to eliminate free lunch for millions of children and cut the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). During Trump’s three years in office, the administration has proposed three rule changes to SNAP that would impact children and their families, resulting in long-term detrimental effects on the most vulnerable, particularly children.

Immigration

Immigration also has been a hot topic during the presidential candidate discussions, with Tom Steyer promising to reinstate Deferred Actions for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) if elected president. Mayor Pete Buttigieg’s juvenile justice platform incorporates a cross-over for children who are immigrants who, on their eighteenth birthday, are subject to deportation. He calls for an “end to the automatic transfer to ICE,” for children who are in HHS custody and promises to leverage more public-private partnerships to address services for youth. Steve Bullock’s immigration plan is to reform the U.S. immigration system by focusing on the legal status of current undocumented residents and the humanitarian crisis at the border.

In Summary

In closing, making children a national priority ensures that all children in America receive the protection, nurturing, and support they need. There is so much more that we can do to support the healthy development of our nation’s children, youth, and families. CWLA is committed to every child growing up safely, in loving families and supportive communities, with everything they need to flourish. We call on all our political leaders—presidential candidates, President Trump, and Members of Congress—to chart a new course for America’s children and families and develop and implement proposals that makes children and their families a national priority.